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Racialized Morality: The Logic of Anti-Trafficking Advocacy

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Racialized Morality: The Logic of Anti-Trafficking Advocacy

by

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ABSTRACT

How race shapes the lenses that anti-trafficking advocates use to promote client interests is critical to the successful reintegration of survivors and their access to the right resources. Any threat to rapport building can have adverse effects to the recovery of survivors. Cultural oppression (or the denial of racism) when considering micro-level interactions of anti-trafficking advocates and survivors, not only compounds victims' trauma but creates the reality where black and brown bodies continue to be violated and victimized. Due to these nuanced tensions at the intersection of race and gender, my thesis research examines whether and to what extent anti-trafficking advocates view race and racism as shaping human trafficking trends and how they perceive and treat victims of color by asking: 1.) How, and to what extent, do human trafficking advocates acknowledge and dismiss that race and racism are important factors that shape human trafficking? Depending on their profession and their direct access to trafficking survivors or general awareness, all respondents dismissed race as a central or even a tangential factor perpetuating trends in exploitation. Pursuing this qualitative study with a critical perspective is vital and critical race theory provides the framework where race is centered as the creation, justification, and promotion of inequalities within the human trafficking context. Human trafficking advocates are not immune to advancing stereotypes and decentering race within their well-intentioned the fight against human trafficking. Investigating how advocates negotiate race and racism within their work and how that, in turn, is actualized via semantic strategies, highlights why this research is indispensable.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2018, I interviewed a prominent leader in Tampa Bay's fight against human trafficking for a Qualitative Research Methods course. I was particularly interested in exploring how activists understood the intersection of race and human trafficking. When I reached the point in my questioning that focused on diversity and how systemic racism could be understood as a factor that creates vulnerability to exploitation, I was met with the response of, "I don't have enough information to give you a good answer on that…" The respondent's eyes went wide as she provided the answer and I sensed her immediate discomfort, then the unexpected happened. To 'save face', the respondent quickly mentioned an unrelated book written by a black woman that she suggested might "shed a little bit of light to that dynamic." While I reassured her that there is no right or wrong answer, I was admittedly confused about why she mentioned a book with little relation to the topic of human trafficking. Her discomfort about engaging over the topic of race, led her to unwittingly and hastily offer tokenized work of a black author to mask her inability to adequately respond to a question about a polemic issue.

This encounter sparked my interest to delve deeper into these issues through my thesis research examining whether and to what extent anti-trafficking advocates view race and racism as shaping human trafficking trends and how they perceive and treat victims of color. Black and Brown women and girls are not only more vulnerable to being trafficked, given the communities or countries they come from, but are disproportionately arrested as criminals (prostitution) and

deported over their white counterparts (Chong, 2014; Butler, 2015). Research shows that 40% of HT victims, 52% of all juvenile prostitution arrests, and 62% of HT suspects are African American (Department of State, 2017). Cultural oppression (or the denial of racism) when considering micro-level interactions of anti-human trafficking advocates and survivors, not only compounds victims' trauma but creates the reality where black and brown bodies continue to be violated and victimized (Bryant-Davis and Tummala-Narra, 2017). I broaden my understanding of these main themes by exploring the following key questions 1.) How, and to what extent, do human trafficking advocates acknowledge and dismiss that race and racism are important factors that shape human trafficking? 2.) How does their understanding of race and racism shape a) the policies that they advocate for b) the services they provide c) the training they offer to the community and d) their interactions with survivors and/or survivor-leaders? The most salient aspect of human trafficking has been its narrow focus on sex trafficking and the alienation of all other forms of human trafficking (Muraya and Fry, 2016; Shih, 2016; Soderlund, 2005). Consequently, my thesis examines these research questions within the context of sex trafficking and focuses on the implications of race and racialized inequalities within a domestic context exclusive to the United States.

Literature Review

Socio-political Context of HT and Advocacy

The standard definition of human trafficking in Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines Trafficking in Persons as:

> "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices like slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (2000; 2003).

The Department of State recorded that there were nearly 25 million identified human trafficking victims worldwide (Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2020). Regardless of the figures provided to quantify the scope of the issue and the codified treatise of human trafficking, one main issue plaguing dialogue is the lack of reliable empirical data that substantiates these ubiquitous numbers and the extent of language used to define a complex issue (Doezema, 2010). The amount of research devoted to understanding the gravity of this issue is either limited or nonexistent (Godziak and Collett, 2005; Lerum and Brents, 2016) or vacillates in meaning depending on the discipline studying human trafficking (Musto, 2009).

In her review of the extant literature on human trafficking at the time, Jennifer Musto (2009) states that methodological challenges lead to most researchers studying only the most visible and accessible persons: victims of sexual exploitation. Consequently, the most salient aspect of human trafficking has been its narrow focus on sex trafficking and the alienation of all other forms of human trafficking (Muraya and Fry, 2016; Shih, 2016; Soderlund, 2005). Weitzer (2007) claims that the attention to sex trafficking fits perfectly in the moral crusade of evangelicals and the right-wing feminist agenda. While the "protection" of female purity and dismantling the patriarchy make strange bedfellows, this alliance is strong and shows no sign of separating due to its powerful stake in law and policy. This strategic plan of action promotes the building of the carceral state: the political and economic influence of private prison businesses (Bernstein, 2010) which serves a multitude of beneficiaries. Focusing solely on sex and sexual violence paints a clear

picture of the offender(s), crime, and punishment whereas the abuse may be well-hidden and more difficult to attack (Hoang and Salazar-Parrenas, 2014; Lerum and Brents, 2016) as is the case with labor trafficking.

Bernstein (2010) expounds on this perspective by stating, "These images perpetuate the idea that human trafficking is not a structural problem that could be addressed by reducing poverty or improving labor protection laws, but instead, a crime committed by evil people" (p.4). Therefore, the road to eradicating this issue becomes more difficult since the narratives that stakeholders such as evangelical organizations, carceral feminists, and law enforcement need to thrive relies on a constant flow of bodies: human traffickers, vulnerable populations that become victims, and the prisons that will house the "bad guys". Moreover, political and judicial systems forsake actual victims that fall within the grey area of trafficking, migration, and smuggling by perceiving those cases within anti-immigration discourse and the sensationalized rhetoric of border security (Dewey, 2014; Hoang and Salazar-Parrenas, 2014; Musto, 2009; Weitzer, 2014). Additionally, a dominant theme in anti-trafficking discourse is one that shapes trends in advocacy: the conflation of sex work and sex trafficking (Okech et al., 2018). Susan Dewey (2014) states in her chapter within Human Trafficking Reconsidered that "proponents of this position believe that such bifurcated labels obscure counter-trafficking efforts by effectively ignoring the realities of women's lives, including the increasingly pressing issues surrounding migration and limited opportunities to earn income" (p. 105). By conflating forced prostitution as sex work, critical scholars and human rights activists argue that this narrative infringes on the agentic rights of individuals that choose sex work as a way to obtain income; as a result, lobbying for sex workers' rights and safer work conditions becomes extremely difficult (Doezema, 2000). On one end of the spectrum, human trafficking victims are a means to an end in the global economy and, ironically,

forgotten in discourse, while sex workers are heavily scrutinized by anti-sex work groups and punitive laws (Dewey, 2014). Within the murkiness of this reality in anti-trafficking discourse, the bridge of awareness and solutions only widens since the acknowledgement of structural factors are never critically centered within human rights' campaigns (Szablewska and Kubacki, 2018). Ultimately, hegemonic narratives of the 'frail', 'perfect' or 'undeserving' victim can be seen within the structuring of how human trafficking discourse is shaped and disseminated to the masses to manipulate policies and laws.

Problematic discourse provides a distraction from the systemic exploitation imbued by a global economy that thrives on cheap, forced labor, and exercises no interest in taking ownership or a desire to dismantle the neoliberal practices and trade policies that exacerbate human trafficking patterns (Kempadoo, 2005). Sharma adds to this point by stating "anti-trafficking practices operate as a moral panic that simultaneously obscure the vulnerability of migrant women in the nexus of state and capitalist practices while representing them as victims solely of traffickers" (2005: 89). Therein lies the perspective that guides advocacy patterns. Centering the defiled female body, what is promoted (sex trafficking) and discarded (geopolitics) sets up the ways in which the endemic matter of sex trafficking should be attacked and defeated: militarized, brute force. As a result, the savior-complex embedded in advocacy and the resultant rescue tactics act as a slight of hand to hide the more insidious and counterintuitive trends in anti-trafficking practices.

Anti-trafficking advocacy must also be understood within the broader context of the human rights advocacy model. Augustin (2007) states that the dysfunctional priorities of human rights advocates, rooted in preserving heteronormative family values, originated from patterns formed in eighteenth and nineteenth century bourgeois women's desires of independence and entering the labor force:

"As part of a phenomenon known as the Rise of the Social, a newly empowered bourgeoisie set out to define how [one] ought to be constituted and how citizens should live; in the process, our contemporary understanding of 'prostitution' was fashioned and philanthropy was carved out as a woman's sphere of work." (p. 96)

Philanthropy and social advocacy were created by white men and women and anchored by white women's efforts for autonomy within a time where their rights were nonexistent (Augustin, 2007). This convoluted relationship of advocacy and victim narratives is historically rooted in the lens of inequities and racial hierarchy.

At the center of advocacy and philanthropy are intimate, microsocial interactions where resources are provided and the pathway to healing is negotiated. Any threat to that rapport building can have adverse effects to the recovery of survivors. In their study, examining the reasons behind the disclosure of trauma among sexual assault victims, Ahrens et al (2007) interviewed 102 female rape survivors to identify what went into their decision-making to disclose information and the outcomes following first disclosure experiences. Their findings showed that survivors first disclosed information to informal support groups of "friends (38.2%) and family members (22.5%)" (p.40) while first disclosure to formal support providers such as "police, doctors, therapists, and clergy…account[ed] for only 14.7%" (p.40). Moreover, survivors encountered more negative outcomes from their disclosure to formal service providers than informal ones (2007). The re-traumatization from these negative outcomes were experienced by almost one-third of the participants: 25.5% (p.43). Bride (2004) adds that "the negative effects of secondary exposure to a traumatic event…are nearly identical to those of primary exposure to a traumatizing event" (p.31). Therefore, when a survivor is not properly engaged in the context of receiving help then the risks of being re-traumatized grows. Racial and ethnic biases further compound and

exacerbate the likelihood of re-traumatization. In her study looking at the impact of feminist ideologies, identities, and practice, Andrea Nichols (2013) interviewed 26 domestic violence victim advocates and found that if an advocate held feminist identity and/or ideology, their practice was trauma-informed and intersectional. That proved to be beneficial with rapport building since "survivor-defined practices assume women's agency, consider individual cases and needs, and provide resources and support to empower victims" (p. 187). Therefore, the socio-political views held by advocates play a large role in promoting or hindering the recovery of survivors of HT.

Racialized Narratives

How race shapes the lenses that advocates use to promote client interests is critical to the successful reintegration of survivors and their access to the right resources. Whether the efforts of anti-trafficking advocacy materialize or not, survivors must navigate their environments post-rescue. Zimmerman et al. (2008) claim, "95% of sex-trafficked women have experienced sexual violence and nearly two-thirds report 10 or more physical symptoms that persist after they exit the trafficking situation" (p. 56). Crawford (2017) details the devastating consequences for victims in how they experience "chronic headaches, fatigue, back pain, dizziness, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, mental health issues and diagnoses of anxiety (48%-98%), depression (55%-100%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (19%-77%)" (p. 109). I advance the argument to emphasize that cultural oppression (or the denial of racism) when considering micro-level interactions of anti-human trafficking advocates and survivors, not only compounds victims' trauma but creates the reality where black and brown bodies continue to be violated and victimized (Bryant-Davis and Tummala-Narra, 2017). Research shows that 40% of HT victims, 52% of all juvenile prostitution arrests, and 62% of HT suspects are African American (Department of State, 2012). Those figures are staggering when you consider that Black people make up only 13% of

the entire U.S. population. In a study by Laura Gerassi (2019) where she examines the propensity of racial tensions in practice against minority women seeking commercially sexually-exploited (CSE) related services, it was found that women who identified as Black/African-American generally described experiences of racism and witnessing preferential treatment for White clients when receiving CSE-related services (p. 7). Wholly, the hegemonic discourse on sexual exploitation and sex trafficking functions out of bifurcated, stereotyped victim tropes at the intersection of race and gender (Uy, 2011). Rather than ignoring consequences of oppression and racial disparities, advocates should center their efforts on the implications and factors of disproportionality.

Human trafficking and the 'modern-day slave' narrative co-opts the legacy of chattel slavery while bastardizing the significance of race and racism in the HT field. The reality of human trafficking advocacy is seemingly not one that protects black and brown bodies (Doezema, 2000), but rather, the rhetorical construction of 'modern-day slavery' is one that mimics the outcry of 'white slavery' that plagued abolitionist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Peck, 2004). Black and brown women and girls are not only more vulnerable to being trafficked, given the communities or countries they come from, but are disproportionately arrested as criminals (prostitution) and deported over their white counterparts (Chong, 2014; Butler, 2015). The sentiments of America's anti-black and anti-immigration policies are exercised through these unequal, racialized outcomes (Chong, 2014). The horrific images associated with chattel slavery are used as the context in which to frame human trafficking while the erasure of black bodies within this discourse is practiced. When slavery is used within the present context to procure a guttural, visceral reaction for shock value, it is meant to solicit urgent responses from a plethora of stakeholders. Yet, with the lexical appropriation of the word 'slavery', it is imperative that the

racialized and gendered elements of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade play a more central role in understanding the emergence of contemporary human trafficking especially in how it was legal for almost four hundred years to practice in the original and legal form of human trafficking of African captors which refutes the notion that present-day factors happen in a vacuum

Jo Doezema provides an explanation for the racialized nuances of gender and sex trafficking discourse. In Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking (2010), she argues that the 'white slavery' epidemic was a narrative based in myth and was the interplay of "[white] power and knowledge" (p. 10) at work. Moreover, Doezema examines how the myth of white slavery influences policy, discourses in advocacy, and films documenting the sex trafficking crisis:

Trafficking Cinderella (2000) features gut wrenching testimonies of broken dreams, withered illusions, rape and humiliation from six Eastern European girls sold as prostitutes throughout the world. This film was made on behalf of all these lost girls; confused by the crumbling post-communist reality they became an easy prey for pimps, procurers, and sex traffickers (Transnational Training Seminar on Trafficking in Women, 2000).

In this conception, Doezema argues, "myth is seen as more than a simple distortion or misrepresentation of facts" (p. 32) but connected to ideologies of geopolitics, gender, race, sexuality, and more dominant themes of anti-trafficking discourse that shapes advocacy (2010). The myth of white slavery is the foundation in which modern-day advocacy draws inspiration and my research unpacks the levels to which that is an intentional or unconscious truth. Anti-trafficking advocacy is not exempt from promoting racism and ethnic bias within their practices and efforts. Woods (2013) analyzes contemporary anti-trafficking and anti-slavery movements and concludes that "configuring black-captivity through these hegemonic discourses extends, rather than

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ameliorate, the global antagonism of anti-blackness" (p.121). When contemporary abolitionism co-opts the legacy of slavery, there is neither an acknowledgment of the Black bodies central to bondage nor is there a distinction made between chattel slavery and the differing positionalities of black people as compared to non-black bodies (Woods, 2013). My research reveals how this is created, maintained, and justified within human trafficking advocacy via semantic strategies.

Eileen Boris and Heather Berg (2014) explain that the concept of 'white slavery' was "racially motivated to dismiss the plight of blacks in chattel slavery but also exacerbate the white woman's virtue [threatened by] wage exploitation and forced sexual labor [amplified by the Industrial Revolution]…white slavery depended on its counter position to chattel slavery" (p. 20). In using 'slavery' to garner attention to this cause, one can denounce how racialized sexual exploitation of black women came to be and use it to promote an agenda aimed at protecting the "perfect victim" (Srikantiah, 2007; Doezema, 2007). Even more treacherous is the way in which anti-blackness thrives in the anti-trafficking discourse and advocacy trends within this logic. The socio-historical tropes that propagated the narrative of hypersexualized black bodies (Butler, 2015) does not fit the inherently pious model victim awaiting rescue (Woods, 2013).

Hegemonic narratives are not simply ideas, but rather instrumental in the maintenance of power and aide in the ability of a story to be far-reaching and widely circulated. Concretely, the narratives perpetuated through discourse and legitimized through advocacy are not only *about* something but *do* something by influencing social policy, organizing micro-social interactions, and furthering the institutionalization of unequal power dynamics. Within this framework of racialized and gendered hegemonic narratives, the bodies of white women have not only dominated the conversation, but it is exactly through bringing in the feminine body that the "legitimacy" of the moral crusade and right-wing feminists anchor their dogmatic missions. My

research examines how the racial and gender bias that advocates bring to interactions with survivors, shapes interpersonal communication and their desire to affect anti-trafficking advocacy. The subsequent chapters fully explore the nuance, tensions, and implications of those topics. In chapter 2, I present the theoretical frameworks guiding my thesis and the qualitative methodology framing my research in addition to my positionality and ethical boundaries maintained in the field. Chapter 3 is the full analysis of the major thematic concepts, and Chapter 4 ends with a discussion and implications for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & METHODS

Politically, no deed can take flight without an ideology to justify action and in the case of human rights advocacy that ingredient is the concept of morality-whether secular or spiritual. The idea of dignity working as the spine of humanity is essential to human rights as it relates to reacting and responding to an assault on one's soul. According to Michael Ignatieff (1998), human rights are the embodiment of the language of dignity and the sentiment that we treat others the way we want to be treated while embracing (cultural/ethnic) differences. This notion, he argues, is "pragmatic and historic" (p. 4); human rights is politics. Morality creates the urgency to act and the politicized, structural factors determines action, more specifically, the modes of justice. Anchoring morality within the legal sphere, allows clarity on how to understand and act when harm is done to human subjects. This begs the question, does the law apply to all humans? Ignatieff seeks to understand this when he states, "the rights and responsibilities implied in the discourse of human rights are universal, yet resources—of time and money—are finite: (p.18). Therein lies the catch. We are all entitled to the notion of human rights but there is no equity in its protections.

B.S. Chimni (2009) would not be too surprised by this revelation. The creation of morality and politics (in this case, the discourse to absorb such information) is manipulated by those in power steering what is understood as knowledge. When one controls the narrative, one also controls how to manage action (2009). Discourse shapes narratives that then shape trends in humanitarianism and Chimni succinctly adds that imperialistic scholarship and post-colonial

legacies control how morality is assessed and politics is disseminated; put more plainly, the facts of social issues are as sound as their relation to the power and goals of the dominant society absorbing it. The parallels of Chimni's argument to the narratives dominating anti-trafficking discourse are evident, hence, the need for critical perspectives that aim to dismantle the machinations of racism and white supremacy.

The critical examination of human trafficking and anti-trafficking advocacy is an area wrought with gaps. It is imperative that one frames this issue through a critical race and intersectional lens due to the richness each framework provides in studying the various consequences of racism and structural inequalities. Critical race theory and intersectionality frame the macro-social implications of human trafficking discourse and advocacy. Moreover, to examine the micro-social factors of the advocate and survivor relationship, I use the concepts of "racial projects" and "colorblind racism" to critically examine institutionalized advocacy rhetoric respectively. The interplay of macro- and micro-level dynamics are key to this research in how they provide a holistic view of all possible factors contributing to the implications of race, gender, and produced narratives in human trafficking advocacy.

Critical Race Theory & Intersectionality

Pursuing this topic with a critical perspective is vital and critical race theory (CRT) provides the framework where race is centered as the creation, justification, and promotion of inequalities within the human trafficking context. CRT focuses on:

"how the law constructs whiteness as a normative baseline…and rejects the view that race precedes law, ideology, and social relations; [CRT] conceptualize race as a *product* of law,

ideology, and social relations: the law does not simply reflect ideas about race but constructs race" (Carbado, 2011:1610-1611; emphasis mine).

The first tenet of critical race theory is that of counter-storytelling which casts doubt on hegemonic myths promulgated by dominant legal scholars. Counter-storytelling demands that the narratives and conflicts of people of color be told by them and not the dominant group promoting injustices. The second tenet of CRT is the permanence of racism which claims that the law created the racial categories that "set forth criteria or rules (e.g., phenotype and ancestry) by which we map people into… [the] law has employed those meanings to codify hierarchical arrangements, i.e.: legalized slavery for inferior Blacks, supremacy of whites" (Carbado, 2011: 1601). Finally, interest convergence uncovers how the law is used to control the pace of change. For example, the liberties won in the civil rights movement may not have happened if it were not for the Cold War and America's need to brand itself as distinctively more advanced than its enemy.

As instrumental as CRT was in reshaping the legal discourse and its dealing with race, intersectionality came as a necessary intervention to address the lack of attention towards gender and race in terms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). What CRT scholars ironically ended up creating was a discourse where gender meant white female and race meant black male. Therefore, persons with multiple identifiers (i.e. the black female) could not claim equality within the law. Black women sought to fight workplace discrimination and gendered violence post-Civil Rights era, but the grounds for adjudication were deemed inadmissible because the case could not be both a race and gender issue. Thus, Crenshaw's creation of intersectionality helped to shorten the bridge of inclusivity within legal discourse further than CRT originally accomplished. Contemporary discourses of intersectionality stretch its meaning to "the belief that our social justice movements must consider all of the intersections of identity, privilege, and oppression that

people face in order to be just and effective…" (Oluo, 2018:74). Moreover, the lens with which we navigate our diverse and complex environments must center and grapple with the multiple identities individuals may use to magnify who they are- beyond that it should inform our micro-social interactions. The crux of CRT and intersectionality provides fertile ground to unpack the inequities that anti-sex trafficking advocacy may promote and the degrees of abuses and oppression folks with intersecting identities may face navigating resources.

Institutionalized Advocacy

At the micro-level, the manifestations of hegemonic narratives take shape through interpersonal interactions, hence the need to examine advocates' perceptions of the population they serve. Critical historians Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986; 2014) assert that "race is a master category" (p. 106) that operates in a space of intersections and permeates both identities and institutions. Through racial projects, representations of race in language, thought, imagery, and popular discourse, citizens espouse their racism and biases through micro-level interactions (2014). The authors add that "a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (p.56). Racial projects connect what race means in a discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized based upon that meaning. We see racial projects at work in our lives every day in their proficiency to reproduce or challenge the status quo. Thus, anti-trafficking advocates participate in the promotion of racial projects, implicit biases, and micro-aggressions in the ways they negotiate race and racism within their organizations and efforts to advocate for victims.

Colorblind Racism

The contemporary approaches to racism are characterized by the prevalence of what Bonilla-Silva (2013) refers to as colorblind racism. It is this approach that shapes how anti-trafficking advocates, non-profit organizations, law enforcement, and legislators may discuss and/or render race invisible. The hackneyed lines from this perspective of a "post-race society" are that one does not "see color" or that "I can't be racist-one of my best friends is black". The logical positioning that race and discrimination, or life-chances being determined by the color of one's skin, is non-existent and does not need to be referenced ad nauseum, is crucial to the maintenance of this ignorance. As this approach lays out so well, the reason white Americans claim to not make decisions based on race is because their denial is anchored by colorblind racism. By dismissing that race plays a central role in every aspect of American life, whites attribute racial inequalities to situational acts and individual behaviors while engaging in polite racism.

Bonilla-Silva (2013) constructed the four frames of colorblind racism, which include abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism refers to the use of ideas of political and economic liberalism to explain racial issues and to reject specific approaches to reduce inequalities. Naturalization argues that racial issues are natural and not exclusive of a specific racial group and not evident of structural factors. Cultural racism relies on culturally based arguments about specific racial groups, based on common stereotypes associated to them. Lastly, minimization of racism discredits the existence of racial structures and diminished the impacts of racism in the inequalities that affect racial minorities. By examining testimonies from white respondents, Bonilla-Silva sought to unravel the narratives associated with colorblindness. He posits that the use of rhetorical strategies (semantic moves) are necessary to cover and justify the subtle racist points of view held by respondents to appear politically correct.

Interestingly, the aim is to distance themselves from the overt racism and symbols of segregation i.e.: the KKK, burning crosses, whites only spaces etc. therefore, the rhetorical strategies eliminates any culpability but ironically siphons their behavior to the other end of the racist spectrum into subtle, covert machinations. Similarly, this project seeks to examine the extent to which human trafficking advocates rely on these similar frames in their articulation of the importance of race and racism to the lives of survivors and to the policies and practices they support.

Sample and Research Techniques

My research is a qualitative study that examines the perspectives of human trafficking advocates in the southwest and southern region of Florida. The primary method used to examine my research questions was qualitative interviewing with n=10 participants. My epistemological framework is best echoed by Emerson et al (2011), "the task of the ethnographer is not to determine 'the truth' but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives" (p. 4). A constructivist approach via critical discourse analysis is key to unpacking the themes of my study due to the highly polemic issues discussed. Critical discourse analysis unpacks the underlying ideologies that play a role in the reproduction of or resistance against dominance or equality.

The intentional use of language is key to this study. For that reason, I understand and define race to mean the social construct of categorization based on certain physical attributes but with sociopolitical consequences and an effect on lived experiences. Ethnicity was defined as shared culture and language, but most respondents attributed nationality as an important identifier as well. I did not inform the respondents of my definitions or provide any elaboration (not that any asked), beyond asking follow-up questions about ethnicity, during interviews because I wanted their interpretation and understanding of the word(s) to frame their answers and guide how they

identified themselves. It was imperative that the data reveal itself in semi-structured conversation so as not to control how the respondents showed up. Controlling for the differing perspectives and definitions of race was not the main goal of my research especially when one factors in global, international perspectives in comparison to how race is understood in the U.S. Moreover, analyzing semantic and rhetorical strategies proved to be a daunting task but my informal approach and open-interview format reared interesting data highlighting the negotiations and meanings prescribed by anti-sex trafficking advocates without producing performative rhetoric.

This study used convenience and snowball sampling techniques to recruit N=15 participants building on existing contacts and networks that I formed through my job as a research assistant that worked on several evaluative projects for high-level service providers in the southwest and southern region of Florida. Through these connections, established by sponsors (colleagues) and my personable, working relationship with many, I met additional respondents from this network where I could foster an independent rapport to set up interviews and add respondents to my study. I conducted ten interviews with individuals that self-identify as anti-human trafficking advocates and worked in public and private sectors. I did not explicitly seek out a certain type of advocate to distinguish whether they were service providers or holding specific professions (i.e.: lawyer, doctor, etc.) commonly associated to anti-trafficking advocacy. The key factor was their proximity to engaging with survivors. I intentionally sought out participants from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds and gender identities so as to not create a dichotomous perception of race and ethnic relations, however, I realized quickly how flexible I needed to be and conceded to factors outside of my control to interact with respondents that were accessible in the field and willing to participate in my study. The resultant sample size (n=10), while small, nonetheless proved to be informative and unique (Small, 2009) and provided crucial data in how

race and identity is understood among human advocacy practices; even though the number of participants are not representative of the entire anti-human trafficking advocacy population there was overlap in discourse to indicate widely held views. Moreover, there is potential in future research to compare similarities and differences across sites where local nuances in how human trafficking is understood, combatted, and in turn, how advocacy is shaped.

Much of my data collection occurred during the Fall of 2019. I underestimated the recruitment process and its unforeseen costs since I initially planned to travel out of state because I previously scouted for participants in Seattle, Boston, and Washington D.C. I reassessed the scope of what I could accomplish and reset the targeted geographical area to Florida. Since this research was not externally funded, I conducted most of the interviews on the phone with the seven respondents that did not live in the same city as me; there was a curiosity to see how non-verbal cues would show up as data similar to the pilot interview that inspired the entirety of my thesis but I had to acknowledge the limitations of having no funding and was satisfied with the dynamics of three in-person interviews. Respondents were very accommodating and appreciated the flexibility and informality of phone interviews. I was able to complete seven interviews in the fall of 2019 and after the holidays and new year celebrations were over, I conducted three more interviews at the start of 2020 in person. Then rumblings of the coronavirus started to make its way through the news but with Florida being largely unfazed, I planned to conduct the remaining five interviews in the springtime as planned. Obviously, the global pandemic halted those plans and I had to honor the emotional bandwidth and capacity of my prospective interviewees, including myself, so I put a stop to my data collection and landed on ten total respondents (N=10). I also gathered demographic information from participants (age, gender, race/ethnicity, occupation). The

demographics are as follows: 80% female and 20% male; age range from 22-54; 30% Latino, 30% White, 20% Black, 10% Asian, and 10% Biracial (See Table 2 on p. 22).

Qualitative interviewing was the best method to examine the key themes of my research due to its organic nature. I designed a protocol for questioning in which race was not the first subject discussed in the interviews to ameliorate participants feeling uncomfortable outright. Rather I built up to that at a sequential pace as follows. Initially, I explored the advocates' educational and professional background, daily duties, their reliance on local or federal laws etc. to provide an understanding of the discourse that shaped their lens. Then, I moved on to questions asking about the level of interaction with victims, the racial demographics of the population they serve, their perceptions on race and its importance in understanding human trafficking and victim experiences to tease out how negotiations are actualized. I analyzed the respondents' answers in two phases. First, I used open-coding strategies to identify themes that emerged from the data. Then, those themes were further examined in relation to one another to develop categories of themes that were connected around a common concept. Three thematic categories emerged and are defined in Table 1 (p. 21). The code outputs reflect the various way the thematic concepts manifested through the respondents' answers. The thematic concepts exposed distinctive yet intersecting trends of how respondents dismissed or navigated ideas about race, racism, and racialized trends in the anti-trafficking field.

Table 1. Thematic Categories and Code Outputs

Legitimacy	Colorblind Semantic Strategies	Contradictions of Equity
How respondents framed and leveraged their expertise and practices in the field.	How respondents utilized one or more of Dr. Bonilla- Silva's semantic moves.	How respondents decentered race from HT altogether but also *accessed* race, racism, or racialized implications to highlight tangents of their lived experience or their logical positioning of human trafficking.
- Educational Achievements - Professional Success - Maternal/Paternal Sentiments	- Abstract Liberalism - Cultural Racism - Naturalization - Minimization - Rhetorical Incoherence	- Coded language - Racial Projects - Co-opting oppressive language

Positionality and Reflexivity

Self-awareness and reflexivity were crucial in how I navigated the space created for the ethnographic interviews. I am a Black, Haitian woman, first generation immigrant, naturalized citizen, USF grad student, research assistant, aspiring critical, HT scholar, and human trafficking survivor. As a researcher genuinely curious about the contents of this study, but juxtaposed against the multiple, marginalized identities I hold made for an interesting time. Not only have I experienced racism, I actually *lived* out the geopolitical ramifications that leaves one ripe for exploitation; however, being a student in higher education and aspiring critical scholar, I need to acknowledge the privilege I accessed that doubled as a boundary during my interactions with respondents. The undertone of respect and admiration for the work I did was lauded by most respondents while gendered themes undercut certain conversations as well-more of which I cover in chapter 4. Consequently, I struggled with my own multidimensionality as it related to possibly

bringing my own set of biases or triggers to the field. However, my field notes held me accountable and provided a safe space to vent what I could not show or process during the interviews.

Ethics

I received USF IRB approval, Pro # 00038343, before I began the interview process. I created consent forms for the participants stating the full scope of the study and highlighting that any data shared will be in the presence of an academic setting during my final defense. I informed the participants of the lengths I went to conceal their identity: data was stored and locked away, file codes were created to hide their true identity, and no sensitive information shared within the interview that fell outside of the scope of the study or pertaining to any identifiable information of victims' identity would be shared. Even though the interviews took place via phone call, I not only asked for verbal consent for audio recording but emailed the full Informed Consent Form to each respondent and instructed them to fully read, sign, and date the document. All respondents adhered to my instructions and there were no breaches of confidentiality throughout the entire process.

Table 2. Respondent Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Occupation
Jennifer	46	Hispanic (Colombian)	Female	Executive Director of regional NGO
Marissa	48	Black	Female	Executive Director of local NGO
Maria	31	Hispanic (Venezuelan)	Female	Attorney
Hannah	22	White	Female	Graduate TA & Volunteer at local HT NGO
Sriya	22	Asian (South Asian)	Female	Medical Student
Tyrone	44	Black (West Indian)	Male	Chairperson for local anti-HT Commission
Ben	54	White	Male	President of (local) Economic Council
Pamela	40	Hispanic (Puerto Rican)	Female	Licensed Behavioral Therapist
Lisa	30	White	Female	Registered Nurse
Ashley	24	Biracial (Afro-Caribbean & Chinese)	Female	Social Worker: Case Manager

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS

Legitimacy

The ways in which respondents negotiated their authority within the anti-trafficking field varied yet intersected. This field of anti-trafficking advocacy, fraught with inflated statistics, fragmented definitions across academic disciplines, and a lack of empirical data informing "best practices", operates out of antiquated and sensationalized narratives of victimology and the non-profit industrial complex. Not surprising, due to the politicized landscape of Florida's anti-trafficking sector. 40% of respondents attributed their religious beliefs and practices as the origin of their interest in anti-trafficking work that cemented their "calling" as Marissa, a Black, 48-year-old woman and executive director of a local non-profit, emphasized in her responses:

> "And when I finally was like, "okay God, if this really what you intend, if this really what you sayin', then you gon' have to make this happen because I don't…" I kept looking at what I don't have and God was like, "It's not about what you don't have, use what you got!"

The only two men interviewed expressed similar sentiments of being "called" into this work. Tyrone, a Black, 46 year-old with a career in sales and insurance exclaimed that his chairperson appointment on the local anti-trafficking commission was created so that he may act as a "bridge in the faith-based community to bring awareness to the secular world of the spiritual components [of HT]"; while Ben, a White, 54 year-old president of a local Economic Council, began his interview by sharing how "God used [his son] to bring the entire family to Christ and [his] crusade

to eradicate the sin of human trafficking had begun". Most respondents attributed educational, professional achievements and career choices as their access into anti-trafficking advocacy and work. Maria, a 31-year-old, Hispanic attorney, Hannah, a 22-year-old White graduate student, and Sriya, a 22-year-old South Asian medical student attributed their career paths, coupled with the attendance to various HT workshops, as what heightened their awareness and involvement.

Jennifer, a 46-year-old, Hispanic director of a regional NGO, spoke in detail of her journey to leading the top organization in Florida providing anti-trafficking resources throughout the state. With a bachelor and master's degree in Economics, she emphasized her fluency in Spanish and Portuguese and work experience in the private sector, "…I got recruited by the CIA [because] the CIA was looking for um, people who had graduate degrees in International Relations or Economics and who spoke multiple languages…and so I fit that profile." She transitioned from working for the C.I.A to working for the DOD for ten years at U.S. Southern Command in Miami, which is the military command that focuses on relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, "…that was kinda my first view of human trafficking…and it's such a small piece because you know human trafficking is so huge, in all kinds of respects…you know: sex trafficking, labor, organs, there's-it's huge you know? And so, the child soldiers [are] just one aspect of it. And that's how I started getting involved in the issue…and understanding it a little bit more." She later shared that it wasn't until she moved from Miami to Tampa that she happened onto a Facebook post sharing information about a meeting of the local task force to combat human trafficking, where she networked her way into leading that organization. Her professional and educational accomplishments gave her the capital to navigate the field of anti-trafficking advocacy and promote solutions specific to academic disciplines and knowledge gained from the CIA and DOD, irrespective of her limited knowledge of human trafficking and trends of exploitation.

Another form of legitimacy exercised by the respondents was an appeal to motherhood and maternal instincts. As I noted earlier, Ben mentioned his son as the person that set him on this "crusade" but didn't center it around authoritative tropes of parenthood. Both Jennifer and Marissa talked about how their roles as mothers deepened the call and urgency to do this work because "what if it was my child going through this? How would I want someone to treat them?" (Marissa). However, Lisa, a White, 30-year-old registered nurse further propagated antiquated, heteronormative tropes of parenting and drawing connections to the degree of vulnerability to exploitation:

> "Well…yeah…I kinda feel like a lot of it has to do with the way that we raise our children. And, you know, and if you're raising a little girl, I like to think- (*laughs to herself*) I like to say, '[I'm] raising a consciously global citizen.' because you know that's what we are doing as parents…raising a little girl you know, I think one of the important things is the father figure. The father who loves them and respects them and they just know how a man should treat them…allowing them to make decisions to feel empowered by decisions, to feel like they can do anything you know? And so, I think that gives them confidence and the ability to…I don't know…the ability to be…uh…strong women and strong leaders. Don't get me wrong, I know there are situations you just can't…some people get kidnapped…some kids get kidnapped…stuff like that…um, but a lot of it has to do with educating our children, making them strong, and education them to being careful, like social media…these are all things that human traffickers use to get victims. And little boys too, I think little boys should be brought up on how to respect girls. And parents should be watching what they're watching on TV or what they are looking on in their computers and stuff like that. Because, I mean, that's how it all starts-they start looking at porn and they grow up becoming perverts (*nervously laughs*) so I think that we as parents should um…need to watch our children more and educate them and teach them to respect each other…both boys and girls."

The gendered narratives expressed here are etched in the larger framing of paternalism, misogyny and controlling feminine sexuality. The idea that girls with low self-esteem, and stereotypically from "broken homes", are somehow more vulnerable to trafficking by a male struggling with porn addiction, magnifies the warped narratives disseminated across the anti-trafficking advocacy field. Propagated mainly by faith-based organizations, this perpetuates the "perfect victim" trope of the

infantilized virgin, battered, and broken female body awaiting rescue, but in fact bears no truth to the varying identities exploited by human trafficking. Moreover, the marginalized people forced into the commercial sex industry because of poverty, substance abuse, survival sex (commonly used by runaway teens) etc. are dismissed as truants, prostitutes, and criminals. Lisa's framing exposes a complete dismissal of the structural factors that produces a vulnerability but an affixed narrative in discourse.

Each respondent leveraged their educational and professional achievements, faith-based lens, and/or paternal sentiments as the basis in which they doled out care; what that care looked like in their respective communities was not fleshed out. Jennifer provided insight into there being no foresight to mapping targeted solutions for the communities she served, as she went on tell me that client and community demographics were never factored in during board meetings and outreach events. As was the case with most respondents, educational and professional backgrounds provided an authoritative lens on how to view human trafficking and its targeted population not the other way around. The rigidity of such a limited scope is fertile ground to provide ineffective solutions and perpetuate bias. Consequently, what guides their work is not data-driven and critically analyzed, as the literature purports is a necessary component.

 Colorblind Semantic Strategies

When the buildup of my questioning in the interviews peaked at the topic on race, the acknowledgement and dismissal looked different amongst the respondents. Depending on their profession, direct access to trafficking survivors, or general awareness, all respondents dismissed race as a central or even a tangential factor perpetuating trends in exploitation. Most respondents, 60%, centered gender as the biggest factor for exploitation and promulgated gendered themes of

the "perfect victim" and problematic idea of "choice" placing the fault of exploitation on the victim, a consequence of the conflation of trafficked victim and prostitute/sex worker. Tyrone and Ben, the only male respondents were fixed on the idea that trends in economics largely created vulnerabilities to exploitation; they insinuated that human trafficking can be solved with a formulaic analysis of supply and demand. Others simply didn't see an issue since "trafficking can happen to anyone at any time" as exclaimed by Ashley, a Biracial, 24-year-old social worker. Operating out of specific frameworks for understanding and combatting human trafficking, when the time came to process the implications race could bear on trends of exploitation, respondents gave interesting answers. As highlighted earlier, Bonilla-Silva explained there are four semantic strategies that people use to colorblind rhetoric: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization. All respondents utilized one or more semantic strategies to dismiss that race and racism influenced trends of exploitation in sex trafficking.

The two most used semantic moves were abstract liberalism and minimization. By proffering sociopolitical factors, real or perceived, respondents not only upheld distorted narratives about victims, they used gender as a prop to detract from the idea of racialized implications within the field. Marissa initiated both abstract liberalism and minimization in her answers while exploiting gender at the expense of race. Ben did the same thing but in a more sterile fashion:

> **Marissa:** "Honestly, I know that people have their opinions…I have seen both black, white…I haven't seen like there's more black than more whites. If I look at our numbers we actually have more white females than we have black females involved in trafficking…a lot of times people think just the demographics or oh, the poverty…I will say that you'd be surprised especially when the white girls that I see you would never in a million years woulda thought…and most people think 'oh she must be come from this, or they come from low-income families who don't got money, and they got tricked into this because of money,' No! I've seen girls that we've had, white girls who live in upstanding communities who's got tricked into this by their friends…"

> **Ben:** "umm…the places that has means tend to be the places that buy and the places who don't have means are places that tend to sell…you look at…uh…supply and

demand…have you seen the world map? [I shake my head no] There's a world map that shows you who the buyers and sellers are [on the global stage]"

Maria seemingly provides anecdotal data (at best) to highlight general equity and representation of victim demographics:

> **Maria: "**As far as race, honestly, it's been a pretty even mixture from what I've seen but I don't necessarily keep track of it…I think gender definitely, but race, at least in our county where it's very diverse, I don't think, I mean from what I've seen it's pretty similar across…"

What's important to note here is that I was part of a research and program evaluation team contracted by the lead child welfare agency in southern Florida that aids clients represented by Maria (attorney). In the two and a half years of data collection and conducting interviews with staff, stakeholders, and CSEC youth, out of 230 kids, the organization only served two white kids, and that was long before I joined the team. Therefore, during Maria's tenure and representing CCES youth in juvenile court, my data knows for a fact she only interacted with Black and Brown girls.

The semantic move naturalization argues that racial issues are natural and not exclusive of a specific racial group and not evident of structural factors as Hannah tried to explain in her piecemeal answer linking trends in exploitation to gender and region:

> **Hannah:** "I mean I feel like…yesss…um…I mean I feel like just necessarily like becoming a victim, those things are definitely like gender *obviously* is a huge issue because like women just in general are used more but even like women of color and stuff obviously like unfortunately but it seems like no matter what you do they kind of get screwed over it seems…it's just super unfortunate. I also feel like it's about *area*…like in Ohio…um…you don't see as many like people of color doing that. Like a lot of prostitutes and stuff are from Asia and Russia so it's not necessarily as many people of color but then like down here because there's so many like Hispanic people and stuff you see a lot more people of color…it's an area issue."

Cultural racism relies on culturally based arguments about specific racial groups, based on common stereotypes associated to them. Interestingly, Sriya, a South Asian medical student, operationalized a tangential aspect of racism and centered colorism as a factor for exploitation only as it pertains to India. When controlling for the U.S., she indirectly utilizes cultural racism to frame an international issue and simultaneously minimize the racialized implications of the field:

> **Sriya:** "I think there is more colorism in India and economic vulnerability but [in the U.S.] I feel like in victims of trafficking it's more across the board…so like anyone can get trafficked at any time."

Her answer left me wondering how does interpret colorism and racism?

Out of all the respondents, there was only one that had direct contact with HT victims. Pamela, a 40-year-old, Hispanic therapist, treats CSEC youth in the child welfare system that live in specialized therapeutic foster care (STFC) homes. As part of a federally funded pilot program, an organization in south Florida is examining the outcomes of CSEC youth that live in STFC homes instead of regular foster care home where the foster parents are not exclusively trained to care for trafficked and at-risk youth. Her proximity to survivors provided the closest thing I could get to an acknowledgement that race influences exploitation when she simply answered, "I could see why you would ask that…" she would go on to explain she has only provided therapeutic services to mainly Hispanic, Latino, and Black children and because she was bilingual received all the immigrant children and heard their horrific stories. Beyond talking about her experiences in this position, the respondent made no connections as to what the demographics meant to her job and the larger role of structural factors creating trends in exploitation. I did not ask her any organic follow-up questions so as not to goad her into providing favorable or coached answers but the disconnect tied to the larger framing and ignorance of race and racialized implications in the field.

Contradictions of Equity

      This thematic category highlighted interesting results by all respondents since semantic strategies were anchored in contradictions but there needed to be a separate analysis in how respondents decentered race from HT altogether but also *accessed* race and/or racism to highlight tangents of their lived experience or their logical positioning of human trafficking. The overlap across themes is astounding, especially with the semantic strategies used, but Marissa and Tyrone modeled surprising contradictions of equity with their polarizing takes on contributing factors of exploitation and servicing clients.

> **Marissa:** "I do, I do think that they still need a lot of the same things but when I'm talking to um a white girl versus a black girl I use the same tactics, but sometimes when you talking to an African-American girl you can't sugar coat stuff or beat around the bush because they like they ain't trying to hear that, *(loud, snappy voice)* "Don't come at me with all that foo-foo la-la crap, I don't wanna hear that!" You have to be straight up and get to the point or else…"

> **Marissa:** "…versus you might be able to pull this off with this young lady [gestures to picture of white girl on the white board] it's a different sense of trust…Um…especially when there's a difference of race of the person who is talking to them, and you're like, *(in a sweet, hushed tone)* "Oh, I just want to do this for you,"…most of the black girls are like "Girl please! I don't know you, you don't know nothing about me or how-what I been through!" Just that conversation, you need to find another way to connect, it don't necessarily have to be race. I try to mirror the person that I'm talking to see how she's responding and if think she's gonna...you know I start off with the soft..."

> **Me:** "Like a welcoming, inviting, friendly tone?"

> **Marissa**: "Exactly! And she may snap at me that's fine I'm okay with that but I'm like "Hold on! I'm not trying to hurt you, I'm here to help you...you know I understand that you been through a difficult time but hey, don't-let's-don't start off like this...what is it that you need from me to try to make you feel comfortable?" You do have to sometimes take a different approach, but I don't base it on color-I base it really on the response, but I will say that race definitely does..."

> **Me:** "So, to you-in your experiences, race plays a role in how you *communicate* once you get in contact with them and that process of after rescue and caring for their trauma..."

> **Marissa:** "Right!"

Here she explains the reasons she provides different levels of care to white and black girls in her organization based on gendered, racist stereotypes and perpetuating the "adultification" of black girls via racial projects hence the need for a more strict approach as opposed to the infantilization ascribed to the white client. The contradiction lies in how she dismisses the notion of race but seemingly postures race for the comfort of the white client, ironically, because of racialized undertones created by a white supremacist society! She spells out there is a difference in how to provide care after rescue to a black and white victim: tough love vs. careful, sweet approach by espousing the semantic strategy of cultural racism that in turn informs how she treats her clients. Marissa then attempts to smooth over her statement by minimizing the notion and impact of race while engaging in contradictions of equity: "You do have to sometimes take a different approach, but I don't base it on color- I base it really on the response but I will say that race definitely does not matter…" (trails off and stops talking). Much later in her interview, Marissa spends 20 minutes explaining how she received blatant and aggressive racism when putting in an offer on a farmhouse sitting on acres of land but the owner refused to accept the bid because she did not want to "sell it to people like them." She expressed deep hurt and outrage of how that situation left her embarrassed which she felt compelled to inform the seller of her educational achievements, socioeconomic status, and high positioning within her community. The feeling of vindication came when she and her organization finally closed on the house meant to be an expansion effort to create a safe house and mitigate Florida's bed shortage during the patient intake process. Much like Pamela earlier, it was interesting to see the dismissal of race, racism and its impacts from their understanding of trends in exploitation but having an acute awareness of this interplay in their personal lives.

Tyrone: [in response to question 4] "So…that's a great question…it's like um it's like God. God doesn't care what race or nationality you are because He understands that's your Spirit…He's a Spirit right? [I don't answer] And human trafficking is not about your age, it's not about your race, it's about your beliefs…it's about fear and control. It's about being able to identify someone whose homeless, down on their luck, low self-esteem, the outcast, who's looking for an opportunity because they're down on their luck and they don't know where it's gonna come from and that's what the trafficker is looking for…now what we have found is unfortunately a lot of it…uh…comes from family members. A lot of family members are trafficking family members for various reasons sooo…I haven't really seen race…I think if you connect it to anything it would be more uh financial. It'll be more in that…financial…because people who are impoverished, people who don't have income- don't have choices. So when they don't have choices and looking for ways to pull out of the situation they're in, people are paying attention to that…they're going to certain areas, certain neighborhoods, lower economic communities and they're pulling people out with these promises that they're gonna take care of them, promises that they're going to help their families, they' re gonna give them a great job…it's financial…"

His answers, fraught with coded language, also used semantic strategies to provide an iteration of abstract liberalism while wholly minimizing the factors contributing to this issue. Additionally, there is a hyper-focus on "choice" regarding poverty as someone "down on their luck" got into their situation and could easily get out of it *if* they are not taken as prey by the looming trafficker hiding in the shadows; this also perpetuates the popular and warped idea of trafficking's clandestine nature that happens in the vacuum of bad choices and economics. What happens next is taken straight from my field notes:

"[Tyone's] contradictory statements are cemented as the conversation goes on when I provide the counterargument that since he has brought up economics and coded language for structural inequalities, '…how can we not talk about race?' He is visibly taken aback, I'm not sure if it's because I had the audacity to counter or he's realizing whatever assumptions he had about me are unraveling and there's no need for him to 'school me' with every answer. He then spirals into mansplaining economics via social welfare: 'did you know there are more Caucasian Americans on public assistance than there are African Americans-' I quickly retort, 'Yes because they make up the largest population so while the numbers are higher, they stay on it less than Black and Brown people who are overrepresented since they make up less of the U.S. population…the issue is disproportionality.' He stares at me blankly for what seems like forever and ends with 'It's just not advertised that way.'" 1/13/2020

Besides my first pilot interview that spearheaded this research, I had not dealt with a respondent stammering through answers and showcasing rhetorical incoherence. Even though respondents Marissa and Tyrone had explicit examples for this category, most respondents presented statements fraught with contradictions of equity. The idea that human trafficking is inclusive and "everyone can get trafficked" and "white and black girls" are taken at equal rates, dismisses the structural, environmental, and racist factors that all but guarantees disproportionate representation by Black and Brown bodies and promotes the status quo of generalized, blanketed solutions that go nowhere…especially not to communities in need. However, what lingered from these two interactions was that the respondents that stressed beyond superficial answers, ideas and assumptions seeping in oppressive language came from the only two Black respondents in the study. I noticed my own physical reactions to this truth because I was visibly shaken after both interviews and I did not have the same visceral reaction with the other respondents. I assumed that my positionality would afford some shorthand and commonality where, finally, issues that plague the field could be discussed. It was a sobering thing to realize in the field and in writing my analysis so as not to minimize the breadth of their answers or paint this clean, bifurcated presentation of race. Navigating white supremacy and all the way folks negotiate survival whether they're a trafficked victim or lay person, the manifestation of colorblind rhetoric and the promotion of racial projects are more nuanced and insidious as one would think.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Outside of the posturing for legitimacy in their respective fields with educational achievements, titles, and the weighted language of "spiritual calling", most respondents brought a sense of genuine concern and care for the subject of human trafficking and exploitation. Well intentions aside, this data exposes what the gaps in literature and empirical research already tell us: the erasure of racialized trends does indeed exist in human trafficking discourse and anti-trafficking advocacy. Largely held themes around its clandestine nature and bastardized into academic disciplines offering different perspectives, it is no surprise that most respondents did not acknowledge that race, racism, and its consequences bore any influence on human trafficking. The distinctive features of this decentering are anchored in the way in which each respondent legitimates their authority to operate within this field and negotiated via sematic strategies irrespective of in-depth anti-trafficking knowledge and training. Hence, contradictions in equity compounded the interplay of overt and covert ways racial projects informed or sanitized the harsh reality of structural inequities.

Respondents mostly harped on the minimization of racism by stating trafficking happens "across the board" or shifting the focus to gender. Maria, Hannah, Sriya, Pamela, Lisa, and Ashley all spoke on the "equitable" nature of exploitation by shifting the focus on clients and patients where they have direct contact. As a result, neither could provide concrete data that mimicked the scope of the issue or substantiated their experiences leaving much of what they provided to be

anecdotal data. Moreover, given that Sriya and Lisa work in the medical field and data shows that people of color, especially Black patients, are less likely to be believed of the severity of their symptoms or flat out ignored, there is a disconnect between what they consider as exploitation being equitable and the reality of inequity.

However, those rhetorical strategies are eclipsed by the ideology of "supply and demand" and the economic factors of exploitation widely disseminated as fact throughout the anti-trafficking advocacy field. I will not contextualize the larger umbrella of organized crime but focus on how Tyrone and Ben denounced race as a contributing factor as its solely "financial" which makes sense due to the fact that most NGO models utilize public policies, laws, and data visualizations (think vague infographics) informed by the economic model and framing of human trafficking. What always strikes me when I hear this argument is the coded language used to frame the problem that seemingly fall on deaf ears because the language is inherently racialized. "Lower economic communities, impoverished people…" there is a face that people see when terms like that are thrown around especially in the highly urbanized areas where each respondent lives and/or works. For context the southwest region where Jennifer, Marissa, Hannah, Sriya, Tyrone, Ben, Lisa, and Ashley reside, its citizens are 25% Hispanic or Latino, 17% Black, and 10% Other (U.S. Census Bureau). In the southern region where Maria and Pamela reside, its citizens are 65% Hispanic or Latino, 19% Black, and 7% Other (U.S. Census Bureau). The total demographic of trafficked bodies in Florida (3rd in the nation) shows that 40% of HT victims, 52% of all juvenile prostitution arrests are Black (Department of State, 2017) and the data for Hispanics is unknown due to the majority falling into labor trafficking and sustained by Fortune 500 companies; the figures point to an alarming disproportionality that is neither known nor centered in the respective organizations of these respondents. Therefore, my analysis is not necessarily about the dismissal

of race per se, but the implications of dismissing the disproportionate representation of racial minorities and the ways in which racial inequality creates vulnerability to trafficking among people of color.

Finally, regarding the extremely unique conversations with Marissa and Tyrone , the only Black participants, my skewed assumption manipulated me to think that they would see race as a factor that not only contributes to human trafficking discourse but plays out real consequences within the lives of the victims of color they serve. Not only did they respond that race does not get brought up in board meetings or daily discussions within the organization, but they did not adhere to "race talk" (Tyrone clarified that's making everything about race). To not see color [race] as a contributing factor to human trafficking and victim outcomes…but merely "circumstantial" perpetuates the bifurcated tropes of stereotypes and oppression that further affects the experiences of victims of color.

How BIPOC, especially Black people use colorblind rhetoric, not in the unilateral way prescribed by Bonilla-Silva (as counterpoints to racism), the biggest discovery of all in my research is in the contentious reproduction of oppressive language by Black respondents. Regarding the resistance to acknowledging racial disparities: many advocates receive (at least some) of their funding from the federal government or state, so there is an incentive *not* to acknowledge structural inequalities and systemic racism. You don't bite the had that feeds you, as Marissa learned when she listed her agency as an all-Black run organization and saw a reduction of a seven-figure grant to $100,000. If you're getting funding from a government agency, it is not wise to turn around and point out the structural machinations of white supremacy, as critical race theory exposes to be the foundation of country's institutions. Seemingly, decentering race, propagating gender as the "face"

of the movement, and producing racial projects may very well just be a form of survival for BIPOC advocates.

Conclusion

There may be a relationship between discourse, advocacy, and survivor narratives. The dominant discourse of human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking, is racialized, gendered, and upholds systemic, structural inequalities that continues to create vulnerable persons. That in turn informs advocacy and practices that are not trauma-informed or culturally competent. The ways in which human trafficking discourse shapes anti-trafficking advocacy (and vice versa) points to an insidious affinity for reifying bias. Therefore, the anti-trafficking, non-profit industrial complex, is seemingly set up to fail its self-identified advocates. Tangentially, there is a misleading and dishonest undertone to the self-identification of "expert" in the field being largely subjective or legitimated solely by profession, as this perpetuates the cycle of dysfunction and stagnation.

Regarding the racialized implications in the field, it is not enough to acknowledge race and racialized implications but center *disproportionality*. Therefore, one cannot examine human trafficking without a macro-level understanding of how power and knowledge controls the focus and depth of anti-trafficking advocacy. Human trafficking advocates are not immune to advancing stereotypes within their well-intentioned and sincere devotion in the fight against human trafficking due to the macro-level factors informing their work. Investigating how advocates negotiate race and racism within their work and how that, in turn, is actualized via semantic strategies, highlights why this research is indispensable.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questionnaire:

Demographic information

Name:

Age:

Race:

Gender:

Occupation:

Open-ended Interview Questions:

1. Can you provide, in detail, your educational background and professional achievements to date?

    a. How did those accomplishments prepare you to navigate the position you hold today?

2. Please tell me, in your opinion, how do legislative policies advance the goals of the anti-human trafficking movement?

3. Can you name and describe two state policies aimed at providing resources and protecting victims?

    a. What made you choose those two?

    b. What type of resource from the state either aids or hinders your progress in advocacy?

4. What do you think is a crucial factor that is missing when it comes to understanding and discussing human trafficking to bringing awareness?

5. How often do you engage and interact with victims and/or victim/survivors?

6. What are the demographics of the victims you serve within your organization?

7. Do you believe that race and/or gender shapes a victim's experiences of sexual exploitation? If so, how?

    a. Treatment and intervention process?

8. When it comes to board meetings and/or brainstorming sessions to better serve the population you help, in what capacity, if any, are the racial or ethnic backgrounds of survivors discussed?

9. Does having racial awareness create a differentiated approach in structuring the resources survivors receive?

    a. How do you take these factors into account when working with this population?

    b. When trying to build rapport with the community?

10. Please describe a memorable time, past or present, where you witnessed the law not work in its full capacity towards helping a human trafficking victim?

    a. Did you implement some change within your organization as a result?