“The Game” as Sex Trafficking: Exploring Gender in Modern Day Slavery
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INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking, or trafficking in persons (TIP), is a crime in which people profit from the exploitation of others through some form of labor (Polaris, 2015). This study specifically focuses on the system of domestic sex trafficking and uses gender theory to explain in perpetuation.

Purpose of the Study:
- To explore the role of gender in sex trafficking, particularly at the micro-
level.
- To provide a qualitative and quantitative analysis of identities, relationships and structures that affect both men and women in the perpetuation of sex trafficking.

A Brief Overview of Sex Trafficking:
- The difference between TIP and sex work is that TIP involves, as policy outlines, “force, fraud or coercion” (Human Rights, 2007).
- Traffickers make all profits of trafficking individual’s work.
- Traffickers subject TIP individuals to:
  - Physical and mental abuse
  - Social isolation
  - Confiscation or identification documents
  - Threats against trafficked individuals’ loved ones

LITERATURE REVIEW

Race, class, and gender are social constructions that are factors in the perpetuation of TIP. According to Clausson, Dutch and Solomon (2009), race and class play a prominent role in the continuation of TIP because:
- Many trafficked individuals are from different countries of origin and are illegally transported for labor work in the U.S.
- Traffickers tend to use their race and class status to exploit individual’s work and make money.

Gender has also been studied with regard to TIP; however, its extent in certain forms of trafficking is largely unknown. How gender roles affect identities and relationships in sex trafficking is yet to be studied.

Race:
- Social stigma placed on minorities create a higher likelihood of minorities becoming susceptible to becoming trafficked (Fadotile-Fumudom, 2003; Green, 2013).

Class:
- Children: Class and age have been found to be factors that determine the likelihood of an individual becoming trafficked. The younger the individual, and the lower the income of the family, the more likely a person is to be susceptible to becoming trafficked (Javadi, 2011).
- Adults: Low socioeconomic status can prompt people to become involved in trafficking in order to make a better life for themselves (this often happens in developing countries; Danilova-Trainor & Laxco [2010]).
- In the US, although poverty may be a factor in some peoples’ experiences with trafficking, this is not necessarily an indicator of this for all. Many people from middle to upper-class families have also become involved in trafficking (International, 2008).

Gender:
- Micro-Level Approach: Several studies have found that micro-level approaches focusing on specific individuals’ experiences have yielded more results as to how gender inequalities in society affect and perpetuate sex trafficking (Snadjr, 2013; Vaidya & Swarthout [2011]; Weitzer, 2013).
- Males in Sex Trafficking: Males as consumers of sex have been mainly been studied through economic theory (Teilfeurbr, 2002; Yun, 2008). Some research addresses economic reasons behind individuals in sex trafficking, but, again, most of it uses supply and demand economic theory and does not address how masculinity, race or class affect participation in sex trafficking (Trosbyinski & Blanck, 2008).
- Therefore, exploratory studies are needed to discover how gender affects not only the victim’s role in sex trafficking, but the trafficker’s as well.

THEORY

Hegemonic Masculinity: The concept of hegemony – a powerful, all-encompassing force that overshadows its societal counterparts – allows me to identify gendered inequalities in sex trafficking.

Qualitative data from Cavendish [1997], Connell & Mooneyorsch (2005), Kimmel, 2008; Level (2001), Snadjr & Snadjr, 2009, Disorb, and Troshynski & Troshynski, 2009
- Discourse involves men empowering themselves by putting down other gendered identities (i.e. “gay” and “like a girl”).
- Men use empowerment to prove their masculinity.
- Masculinity is defined by success in the workplace.
- Socialization and masculinity is defined by success with women and sex.
- Maintaining masculinity involves a strong sense of self-control, and maintaining control of women.
- Hegemonic masculinity may be related to the construction of “emphasized femininity,” or the feminine reaction to hegemonic masculinity through the construction of a hypersexualized, idealized woman that fits within the hegemonic masculinity ideologies.

Gender as a Multi-Level Structure: I suggest that women and men involved in sex trafficking reinforce gender structures through their individual behavior, relationships and as people in the industry. In other words, we will explore how gender exists on three interrelated levels, as Rismann (1998) claims:

METHODS

Participants:
- Four survivor participants, or women who were previously trafficked: Shelly, Caroline, Vivian, and Judy.

Interviews:
- Two to three-hour in-depth interviews – focused on their narratives.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

All three levels of gender that Lorber (1994) and Rismann (1998) highlight were evident in these narratives, and at the levels, hegemonic masculinity was most evident as well. Participant narratives elucidated important aspects of how gendered identities (Level One), interactions (Level Two), and the overall macrostructures in sex trafficking (Level Three) are connected, constructed and maintained. They also shed light on how the industry is affected by hegemonic masculinity.

Level One: Gendered Identities
- Identities within sex trafficking were affected by: socialization, internalization of powerlessness, and hegemonic masculinity within traffickers’ and consumers’ identities.
- The importance of social control in sex trafficking: All informants reported to have had difficult childhoods for the following reasons:
  - Sexual assault and/or dysfunctional home lives (physical/verbal abuse, incest, chaotic, alcoholic environment).
  - Trafficked individuals’ identities/subsequent internalizations:
    - Needing a male figure’s approval, and females internalizing a hyper-sexualized, powerless identity.
  - Hegemonic ideologies (created by traffickers) affect this.
  - Traffickers’ identities:
    - Status based on financial success, control over women and self control. All three of these aspects are indicative of hegemonic masculinity at work in sex trafficking.
  - Consumers’ identities:
    - Because consumers are males, they are able to dissociate themselves from perpetuating sex trafficking, thus creating an excuse for their behavior.

Level Two: Gendered Interactions
- To provide a qualitative analysis of how men and women interact as they interact with women, thus perpetuating sex trafficking at the interpersonal level.

Level Three: Hegemonic Masculinity and “The Game”
- Participants called sex trafficking “The Game.”

CONCLUSION

Rismann’s (1998) theory of gender as structure is evident in sex trafficking, and it can explain how sex trafficking is perpetuated under social constructions of gender at the identity, interactional and macro-structure levels.
- Females’ internalization of powerless, hyper-sexualized identities keeps them working in this highly masculinized industry due to the challenge of their identities.
- Traffickers’ perceptions of what it means to “be a man” in sex trafficking is indicative of how hegemonic masculinity manifests itself in this industry.
- There is also a creation of multi-status masculinities when comparing consumers and traffickers through hegemonic masculinity.
- Traffickers’ use of mechanisms of social control are the media through which the implementation of Level 3 identities and Level 1 identities create and perpetuate sex trafficking.
- Hegemonic masculinity ultimately affects the macrostructures of sex trafficking (i.e. how the concept of “The Game” is created).

For Future Research:
- Further exploration into how capitalistic the U.S. economy affects the perpetuation of gendered inequalities in sex trafficking:
  - How do traffickers use mechanisms of social control to create a capitalist system that perpetuates inequalities in sex trafficking?
  - Further exploration into how hegemonic masculinity is manifested in the anti-trafficking movement:
    - How do the social constructions of gender within law enforcement, policy and other anti-trafficking efforts affect (and possibly inhibit) the eradication of sex trafficking?

Final Thoughts:
- This study explored the structures of gender and hegemonic masculinity within sex trafficking. My research sheds light into the inter-workings of gender in sex trafficking, which is a crucial component to understanding how to combat its perpetuation. However, this is a purely foundational study and must continue to explore other ways in which gender manifests itself in sex trafficking, anti-trafficking policies, and the anti-trafficking movement in order to truly contest its existence and achieve eradication.

Acknowledgements:
- I would like to thank the Linfield College Sociology & Anthropology Department for making this research project possible – especially Dr. Amy Do, my thesis advisor, who was extremely patient and gracious towards me throughout my entire project. I would also like to thank my parents, Bud and Cynthia Henson, for their support and encouragement in my ongoing moral compass, and for telling me to become an activist for those who are not able to fight for themselves.
- Lastly, I thank all of my participants for sharing life stories for the sake of research. I owe this project to them.

REFERENCES

