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 domestic and qualitative 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, 2008).
- Traffickers make all profit of trafficked individual’s work.
- Traffickers subject TIP individuals to: Physical and mental abuse Social isolation Confederation of identification documents Threats against trafficked individuals’ loved ones

LITERATURE REVIEW

Race, class and gender are social constructs that are factors in the perpetuation of TIP. According to Clawson, Dutch and Solomon (2009), race and class play a prominent role in the perpetuation of TIP because:

- Many trafficked individuals are from different countries of origin and are illegally transported for labor work in the U.S.
- TIP individuals tend to come from backgrounds of chronic poverty where family class lives who live in communities with high crime activity. Gender has also been studied with regard to TIP, however, its extent in certain areas of trafficking reveals 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 (Elabor-Idemudia, 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 his or her socioeconomic status, the more likely a person is to be susceptible to becoming trafficked (Javidan, 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; Danailova-Trainor & Lucallo (2010)).
- In the US, although poverty may be a factor in some people’s experiences with trafficking, this is not necessarily an indicator of overall susceptibility. Many men and women 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 (Snider, 2013; Vinding & Swahn, 2011; Weitzer, 2015).
- Males in Sex Trafficking: Males as consumers of sex have mainly been studied through economic theory (Teilnenbrua, 2002; Yin, 2008). Some research addresses economic reasons behind involvement in sex trafficking, but, again, most of it uses supply and demand economics and does not address how masculinity, race or class affect participation in sex trafficking (Troyanski & Blank, 2008).
- Therefore, exploratory studies are needed to discover how gender affects not only the victim’s role in sex trafficking, but the trafficker as well.

THEORY

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

  - Discourse involves men empowering themselves by putting down other gendered identities (i.e. “fag” and “like a girl”).
  - Men use competition to prove their masculinity.
  - Masculinity is defined by success in the workplace.
  - 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 hyper-sexualized, ideal woman that fits within the hegemonic, masculine ideologies.

Gender as a Multi-Level Structure: I suggest that women and men involved in sex trafficking reproduce 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 Rismam (1998) claims:

METHODS

Participants:

- Four survivor participants, or women who were previously trafficked: Shelley, Caroline, Vivian, and Judy.
- One law enforcement official from the Portland Police Bureau: Dan (an officer with over 20 years of experience in the prostitution division)

Interviews:

- Two to three-hour in-depth interviews – focused on their narratives.
- For survivor participants, I asked:
  - a) How they became trafficked, and factors that led to trafficking.
  - b) How they treated the activities they were involved in during their time as trafficked individuals.
  - c) Their overall perceptions about themselves, traffickers, and consumers of sex.
  - For the law enforcement official, I asked questions addressing men in trafficking:
  - a) How traffickers become “pimps” and consumers become “johns”
  - b) How both parties treat women, and what kinds of activities both parties do within sex trafficking.
  - c) Traffickers and consumers view the overall trafficking industry with relation to their perceived identities.

I used Snider (2013) and Weitzer’s (2011) approach to studying TIP: avoiding the search for universal laws by taking a micro-level, domestic approach to data analysis.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

All three levels of gender that Lorber (1994) and Rismam (1998) highlight were evident in these narratives, and within the levels, hegemonic masculinity was most evident. Participating 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 reinforced. 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 socialization: “All infomants reported to have had difficult childhoods for the following reasons: Sexual assault and/or dysfunctional home lives (physical/verbal abuse, medical neglect, chaotic family structure).”

- 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 disassociate themselves from prostitution in sex trafficking, thus creating an excuse for their behavior.

Level Two: Gendered Interactions

- Traffickers become “pimps” and consumers become “johns” in sex trafficking 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.”

- Hegemonic Masculinity within sex trafficking:
  - “The Game” is a highly regulated practice that involves wealth, power, and control over women.

- “The Game” is indicative of how hegemonic masculinity manifests itself in the 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 ideologies 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 capitalism/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 gendered inequalities in sex trafficking?
  - Further exploration into how hegemonic masculinity is manifested within 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 only a small foundational study, and future research 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 Dry, my thesis advisor, who was extremely patient and gracious to me throughout my entire project. I would also like to thank my parents, Bud and Cynthia Henson, for being my most 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 love this project to them.

REFERENCES

Risman’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 regulated industry just as challenging it.
- Traffickers’ perceptions of what it means to be a “man” in sex trafficking is indicative of how hegemonic masculinity manifests itself in the industry.
- There is also a creation of multi-status masculinities when comparing consumers and traffickers through hegemonic masculinity.
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