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I, Alyse Zook, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication.

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Museum as site of meaning: Exploring audience responses to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center’s Invisible: Slavery Today Exhibit

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Museum as site of meaning: Exploring audience responses to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center’s Invisible: Slavery Today exhibit

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ABSTRACT

This thesis accounts for how meanings of human trafficking emerge from the audience responses to the Freedom Center’s *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit, which is a site of social construction around the phenomenon, as well as reflexively analyze how visitors utilize the space to understand the issue. Through the visual elements, spatial qualities and overall message, it is inviting museum visitors into a space to learn and create meanings surrounding human trafficking. As visitors walk through the exhibit and experience the different sections of the installation, they interact with human trafficking at both the symbolic and material level. The audience reception is, thus, an integral piece in understanding how the space functions communicatively. By tapping into participants’ construction process, deeper understandings of human trafficking are framed and understood being rooted in the exhibit’s illustrations and definitions of the issue. Through analysis, three overarching themes emerged; the exhibit constructs and critiques human trafficking as an American phenomenon, the different facets of human trafficking, and the physical features of the exhibit. Altogether, *Invisible: Slavery Today* is a extraordinarily powerful exhibit discussing modern day slavery in ways that visitors interact with and learn from, particularly in regards to new understandings of the scope, gravity and proximity of human trafficking.
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Chapter 1 | INTRODUCTION

Today, a major form of human oppression exists that has not been extensively explored in Communication scholarship. The realities of human trafficking are beginning to surface in US public discourse, catching up with the social movements across the globe that have been fighting this particular form of cruelty for generations. Currently, academic interrogation of human trafficking leans heavily on legal calls to action, moral frames of tragedy, and educational prompts about warning signs and vulnerability (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013; Weitzer, 2007; Kotrla, 2010). There is a lack of adequate communication research regarding the audience understanding and perception of the issue of human trafficking, specifically in the United States.

This thesis accounts for how meaning is constructed around human trafficking. In this thesis, my focus of study is a museum exhibit on human trafficking as a site of social construction of meanings around the phenomenon. In particular, I investigate meaning making processes through two separate, and yet interrelated means: a) audience reception of the exhibit space that communicates about human trafficking, and b) my personal, embodied rhetorical reading of the exhibit, which is another form of audience reception. Through on-site interviews with visitors to the exhibit, I will be able to tap into the audience responses to human trafficking. Utilizing grounded theory as a theoretical framework, the data emerges into overarching themes of the exhibit constructs human trafficking as an American phenomenon, the different facets of human trafficking, and the physical features of the exhibit. The exhibit itself is titled Invisible: Slavery Today at Cincinnati’s National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (Freedom Center). The Freedom Center provides an appropriate context within which to investigate the communicative power of museums and to talk about human trafficking, as the center has designated a portion of the museum directly addressing the issue of modern day slavery.
The purpose of this research is two-fold; to engage with a space as a communicative performance, and to engage with visitors’ experience and reception of the exhibit in combination with my personal critique. As a researcher, I understand that my experiences and personal perceptions are relevant lenses for my research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Therefore, taking a reflexive, autobiographical approach, I attempt to embrace both my own ideas and those experiences of visitors in a hybrid analysis of the National Underground Railroad’s Freedom Center \textit{Modern Slavery: Invisible} exhibit. The constant comparison of data, my own history and experience in the space bumping up against those who process the issue of human trafficking while in the space, is a integral through the analysis process. By enlisting the perceptions and attitudes of patrons to the museum, this research is stepping beyond the already established methodology of rhetorical criticism of museums into the more dynamic and well-rounded picture of the researcher and those others who also experience the space.

Human trafficking is a complex phenomenon that implicates social, legal, political and economic processes of a globalized world (Bernadin, 2010). Therefore, exploring dominant attitudes to human trafficking is important, not only for defining the problem but understanding it. Hepburn & Simon (2010) discuss that there have been more than 90 US cities with reports of trafficking cases, while also noting that the United States is one of the top 10 destinations throughout the world. There abound world reports, legislative acts and articles about immigration policy, however, most of the literature focuses on one type of human trafficking, sex trafficking, which is only one form of human trafficking. Because of this, human trafficking is often mistakenly used interchangeable with sex trafficking.

Unbeknownst to most, human trafficking is prevalent in almost every country across the globe. The UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) \textit{Global Report on Trafficking}...
In Persons, which analyzes data from 155 countries in regards to human trafficking, states that, “after much neglect and indifference, the world is waking up the reality of a modern form of slavery. The public and media are becoming aware that humans prey upon humans for money” (UNODC, 2008). Also from the report findings, “the most common form of human trafficking (79%) is sexual exploitation” (2008). It is valuable to realize the assumed breakdown different kinds of trafficking, which include sex trafficking as well as domestic servitude, bonded labor, forced labor and child labor. Unfortunately, just recently did nations begin to recognize forced labor and bonded labor as part of trafficking (Hepburn & Simon, 2010). Therefore, the reporting of such kinds of trafficking is almost non-existent in reports like the UNODC’s that inform policy making. Further, as valuable as the statistics are to understanding the reality of human trafficking globally, in many areas there is a great opposition to truthfully reporting on human trafficking. Antonio Maria Costa, the Executive Director of UNODC explained, “many governments are still in denial. There is even neglect when it comes to either reporting on, or prosecuting cases of human trafficking” (UNODC, 2008). He pointed to the fact that while the number of convictions for human trafficking is increasing, two out of every five countries covered by the UNODC report had not recorded a single conviction (2008). He further explains the implications that, “if we do not overcome this knowledge crisis we will be fighting the problem blindfolded” (2008). For instance, UNODOC reports for the first time that women play a large role in human trafficking (2008). “A disproportionate number of women are involved in human trafficking, not only as victims (which we knew), but also as traffickers (first documented here). Female offenders have a more prominent role in present day slavery than most other forms of crime” (2008).
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RATIONALE

Communication as a discipline is interested in social justice (Dutta, 2011; Frey, 1998; Hartnett, 2010). Examples include postcolonial theory questioning colonial and neocolonial structures and subaltern studies theory that desires to reinvent history from the perspective of those not heard, communication theories are intimately connected to social change (Dutta, 2011; Guha, 1981, 2001; Spivak, 1988; Prakash, 1994; Beverley, 2001). The culture-centered approach (CCA) calls attention to people, structure, and agency (Dutta, 2011). Therefore, the ways in which communication shapes the social world and is involved in social reality means that communication must acknowledge and deal with social issues (Dutta, 2011). For example, poverty, gay rights, structural oppression, and health disparities all fall under the category of social issues in which communication plays an integral role (Frey, 1998; Pollock et al., 1996). Therefore, I propose this study that seeks to add to the corpus of literature on Communication and issues of social justice by tapping into to the meaning construction process of human trafficking through the exploration of a museum space. According to the Freedom Center, human trafficking is now considered to be an equivalent to modern-day slavery, which is reflected in the exhibit’s name *Invisible: Slavery Today*. I intend to explore ways in which museums perform communicative functions as well as the means that visitors construct menacing surrounding particular issues, in regards specifically to uncovering the dominant meanings of domestic human trafficking. Thus, this study is providing a context to understand ways in which this social issue is understood in the United States and framed through the context of the museum setting. More than seeing how to address the issue, first I intend to determine how the exhibit communicates and constructs human trafficking as an embodied researcher and consequently, how visitors interpret these constructions. As literature suggests, there is an abundance of
research in other academic fields addressing very important aspects of sex trafficking (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013; Weitzer, 2007; Kotrla, 2010; Muftic and Finn, 2013; Simoes, 2010). Yet, not much has been written on the holistic issue of human trafficking that goes beyond sex trafficking to include domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor and child labor.

I assert that both the symbolic and material aspects of communication are central to the investigation of how human trafficking is understood and experienced in the *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit. The museum as a space is providing a space that ignites perceptions of the issue at hand. What is absolutely integral to this perception is that it is being communicated through space. As visitors walk through the exhibit and experience the different sections of the installation, they interact with human trafficking at both the symbolic and material level. The vivid imagery, the videos and the interactive displays engage the materiality of the museum. While the explanations, numbers, and frames of human trafficking highlight the symbolic nature of constructing meanings. Thus, the exhibit as a space needs to be acknowledged as a fluid conversation between the material and the symbolic elements, the physical images and the interpretations of images. Taking a social constructionist approach coupled with methodology grounded in both qualitative research and procedural rhetoric (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lindof & Taylor, 2002), I understand the communicative performance of human trafficking in the exhibit is the very grounds for knowing, understanding and making sense of this reality. Communication is what makes the material objects, sidewalks, trees, building, such as museums, knowable and understandable because these objects are a shared set of certain meanings and perspectives. To put it in more simple terms, the social world is a canvas with meanings that people have colored in order to create the picture of reality. The ways of experiencing a space in a particular and unique fashion is not outside this understanding of social reality. Meaning does not flippantly
appear; it is the interwoven experiences, interactions and communication that construct the fabric of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Thus, the importance of investigating meaning cannot be overlooked in the construction of human trafficking.

I used a qualitative research design in order to engage with myself as an embodied researcher as well as with audience perceptions of human trafficking through interviews with visitors to an exhibit dealing with modern-day slavery at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center of Cincinnati. Further, with the recent publicity from the Internet and the government regarding sex trafficking with the Super Bowl, the nation is more aware of the issue (Goldberg, 2013; Kluger, 2014). According to Brooke Hathaway at the Freedom Center (Personal Communication, 2014), Cincinnati, Ohio as a city is beginning to acknowledge human trafficking, more specifically churches, organizations, and word on the street is growing and advocating for victims of sex trafficking (B. Hathaway, Personal Communication, 2013). Further, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center as an iconic museum in the city for its Slave Pen installation and historic account of slavery in the United States is an ideal organization to work alongside due to their active involvement with the issue and their prominent place in the community. Understanding the implications of this research could illuminate further avenues of Communication studies while also having the potential to influence the efforts of the Freedom Center as a site of advocacy and awareness in the anti-trafficking movement in the United States.

SEX TRAFFICKING AS HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE US

Currently, literature highlights the facts such as the statistics about the number of trafficked persons. Contrary to dominant perception, sex trafficking is not limited to the developing world. For instance, 82% of the cases of human trafficking (approximating anywhere between 14,500-
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17,500 annually) in the United States involve sex trafficking (Yee, 2012). Conservative estimates say 18,000 persons are trafficked into the US each year, while more liberal estimates range around 50,000 per year (Shauer & Wheaton, 2006). There is importance in the data; however, the facts fail to engage with all forms of human trafficking. In literature surrounding human trafficking, sex trafficking is overly represented. To be clear, it is not that human trafficking is referred to as synonymous with sex trafficking but that the other types of human trafficking, domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor and child labor, are not discussed. There is higher visibility for sex trafficking, such as when literature uses phrases like human trafficking and sex trafficking together without acknowledging that other forms of human trafficking exist. The discrepancy exists due to the very unbalanced research about all forms of human trafficking.

Scholars need to be careful of the meanings they are constructing through their studies, which are reflected in their definitions (Hepburn & Simon, 2010; Wolken, 2006; Shauer & Wheaton, 2006) of human trafficking which is being coined by the Freedom Center’s Invisible: Slavery Today exhibit as modern day slavery (NUG Freedom Center). Referring to modern slavery Shauer and Wheaton state, “human trafficking and sexual exploitation are ‘part and parcel’ of the larger worldwide, and exponentially increasing, slave trade. Trafficking is slavery because it includes fraud or extortion in recruitment and coercion, restraint, gang rape, threat of physical harm, loss of liberty, and loss of self-determination on arrival in the destination industry” (2006). Although they mention human trafficking, the literature does not touch upon the other ways that human trafficking manifests itself. Sex trafficking is only a portion of the trafficking that happens in the United States (Wolken, 2006). In feminist scholarship, the depiction associated with sex trafficking is a very attractive, young woman who is helpless to the situation (Wolken 2006). It is not to say that this picture is inaccurate but it cannot be all encompassing
for sex trafficking and especially not for human trafficking in its entirety. Unfortunately as Wolken (2006) and Hepburn and Simon (2010) discuss, the media publicizes this image and perpetuates the American understanding of sex trafficking as human trafficking. Thus, human trafficking is only defined as one type of trafficking and there is no knowledge about the reality of domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor and child labor. For instance, there are connections between the labor practices of the third world and the demand of the first world. As those in what are termed the developed nations demand bigger, better, faster and cheaper, the exploitation and labor trafficking that is not discussed in regards to human trafficking thrives around the world.

Further, policy making also reflects the aforementioned discrepancy. Human trafficking as a social phenomenon is defined in two ways by the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (VTVPA) of 2000 (P.L. 106-386) as, “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” and

…the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (p. 8).

The VTVPA follows with the definition of a commercial sex act as “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person” (p.7). Human trafficking’s definitions do not address labor trafficking; instead both are highly focused on commercial sexual exploitation (Wolken, 2006). The VTVPA does not attempt to define domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor or child labor. Thus, the disproportionate attention given to sex trafficking is evident not only in the writing of the bill but the testimonial support, its construction, both leading to its implementation and actual ability to aid victims (Wolken, 2006).
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With this, it is imperative to begin with a short discussion of the current overarching picture of sex trafficking in literature before learning from specific disciplines’ part in human trafficking scholarship.

Yet, with all of the definitions and characteristics, there is a need for more engagement in scholarship with the social influences and experiences that shape and act as more subtle conceptions of human trafficking. The objective definitions tell of the overarching characteristics but miss the stories, the life. The research fails to dig into the laypersons’ attitudes and perceptions of human trafficking, investigating how everyday people make sense of the social issue. Instead, it simply attempts to define domestic human trafficking or more accurately, sex trafficking, stripping social significance from the research. Thus, there is much more to study and why this particular investigation will be helpful in bringing voices from visitors to the exhibit to the construction of human trafficking through the Freedom Center’s Invisible: Slavery Today.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to take a step deeper into how and why laypersons make sense of human trafficking on the home front and interrogate how sex trafficking is not synonymous with human trafficking, it is important to recognize the consequences of what other disciplines are saying about human trafficking. Therefore, I discuss a number of academic disciplines as they inform academia about the issue, the trafficked victims, criminals, authority figures, legal system, families of victims, academic scholars, media and so on. The realm of political research, health studies, and moral and media disciplines have the most prominent voices on the subject and are unpacked in the following section. The intermingled connections and distinct gaps in these voices are monumental in describing how sex trafficking is understood as a form of human trafficking.
Social work is a discipline where sex trafficking scholarship is prevalent, especially as the social work sector is practically concerned with the issue in the United States. Social work has encountered on a number of levels the current problem with human trafficking, although the scholarship reflects society’s emphasis on sex trafficking. Kotrla (2010) explicitly defines sex trafficking according to VTVPA of 2000; however, her discussion illuminates a narrower lens on domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST), which she proposes that any minor who is participating in a commercial sex act is a trafficked victim. By highlighting two key aspects of the trafficking industry, supply and demand of DMST and a culture of tolerance, she is one of many scholars to explain how social workers can understand this issue. First, there is a limitless supply of children who can be trafficking, which is an underappreciated reality in today’s society. However, the true contention is that there exists a demand for sex workers, specifically minor girls, from both the perspective of the trafficker and the consumer (Kotrla, 2010). Either being driven by greed or the need for sexual commodities, the basic economics of the industry are vital to make sense of sex trafficking. Secondly, Kotrla (2010) asserts that with a society that glamorizes pimping, there now exists a culture of tolerance where sex trafficking is thriving. Sensitivities to the gravity of the issue have weakened through music, clothing, television, and so on. These two concepts, supply and demand and a culture of tolerance, showcase how sex trafficking is precisely a problem for social workers, who very well could be working with DMST victims. Above all, literature focuses on the need for advocacy for survivors in order to ensure they recognize their victimization not criminal status (Kotrla, 2010).

Further, health fields interested in the physical, psychological, and societal health risks associated with sex trafficking for both domestic and foreign victims (Muftic & Finn, 2013). At the most minimal level, concerns include poor nutrition, dangerous working conditions, and
increased risk for exposure to infectious diseases (Muftic & Finn, 2013). Further, memory problems and physical injuries due to violence, depression and sadness, inability to feel, difficulty sleeping, self-blame or guilt, and loss of appetite are the other symptoms victims are dealing with because of being trafficked (Muftic & Finn, 2013). Together, these health issues highlight how sex trafficking can be understood as a social phenomenon affecting women and children’s ability to function, live, engage outside the context of sex work, which is often lost in pop culture’s portrayals. Important in the discussion of health is the distinction between street prostitution and sex trafficking, which has legal implications attached like understanding the status of victim and criminal (Butcher, 2003). Although much of the same work is involved, entering sex work through conditions of coercion or deceit face greater levels of maltreatment and sexual risk. It is posited that due to compromised agency, women trafficked into sex work are less likely to refuse sex or to negotiate for use of condoms; their mobility and access to health care is more restricted; their knowledge of STIs or HIV may be limited due to their isolation and limited access to prevention messages (Muftic & Finn, 2013).

The difference is agency, which directly affects the health of victims due to their actual ability to voice health concerns, discuss their needs, advocate for healthcare and their own personhood. Altogether, the health perspective on sex trafficking illuminates the tangible consequences for trafficked victims, whether they be categorized as physical, emotional or mental abuse. These forms of violence are foundational in understanding a piece of the lived experiences of women and children forced to engage in commercial sex acts.

The law is an avenue through which to understand sex trafficking, mostly through the eyes of prosecutors that are seeking justice for trafficked victims through legal punishment of
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traffickers. According to the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), the goal is “to combat trafficking in persons, a contemporary manifestation of slavery whose victims are predominantly women and children, to ensure just and effective punishment of traffickers, and to protect their victims” (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). Because the legal system is in charge of establishing order and ensuring safety for the entire population of the United States, the heart of the crime of sex trafficking is not prostitution in and of itself, but the trafficker’s exploitation of vulnerable victims (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). Understanding how traffickers, synonymous with pimps and madams, function as a subculture is key to a “viable prosecution” because of the subtle strategies and underlying manipulations that are not noticeably evident in much of the trafficking industry (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). Sex trafficking is intimately connected to the trafficker as a person who is in control of victims through the identification, intensification, and exploitation of vulnerabilities. By preying on those who are already in susceptible situations, pimps primarily use the process of “grooming” to create a sense of dependence and trust (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). Through this process, they isolate victims, make big promises of love, and shadow the rest of life with their manipulations of dreams and a bright future (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). In doing so, the entrapment leads to a cycle of rules and customers. The legal perspective is inextricably entrenched in these details, having a first hand witness into a violent and fraudulent subculture, in which human beings are no longer valuable but cruelly exploited for another’s benefit (Parker & Skrmetti, 2013). By working mostly with the offenders of the crime, sex trafficking is completely realized through the protective laws and measures that are trying to correct the wrong and injustice.

Media is a powerful avenue through which discourse exerts its powerful and pervasive reach across the globe. Through engagement with media, worldviews, perceptions and
understandings of people and places, the notion of representation as well as the particular voices allowed to broadcast are formed and disseminated to the masses. Media’s “role in making visible society’s ambivalences, often in dramatic and performative ways, grants them a central position in the creation and transformation of the discourses by which those conflicts become known…and perform a key role in shaping and/or challenge public policies regarding deviant issues” (Simoes, 2010, p. 1). With this position, media’s formation of sex trafficking is particularly important. The headlines can say that “trafficking of human beings is an expressive and worrying mark of the ‘tragic pendulum of history’,,” (cited in Simoes, 2010, p.1) but there are a number of other senses that media stimulates, particularly the visual elements of news today. As specified by Rita Simoes (2010), there are two major sects of women portrayed similarly in the mediated depictions of sex trafficking, the trafficked and the prostitutes. The narratives of these women frame their position as weak and passive, a second class citizen who is not able to make decisions, to have agency, to have a voice (Simoes, 2010). Thus, the cultural understanding of women in the industry is defined mostly by the visual portrayals of the sexual body, reaffirming the claims that there now exists a culture of tolerance through the glamorization of sex and prostitution. Sex trafficking in the news is consequently a polarizing illustration of the industry, perpetuating the stereotypes of the “deviant, the victim and less often, the glamorous woman” (Simoes, 2010, p.11). Those powerful enough to have a voice in the media are shaping sex trafficking, supplying the masses with pictures and tangible images of what sex trafficking is, the people involved, and the issues surrounding it or lack thereof. For instance, Oscar winning documentary *Born into Brothels* (2005) dramatizes human trafficking through the eyes of the children born in one of Calcutta’s red light district. By giving cameras to brothel children, Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman give insight into what sex trafficking “looks likes.” However, this
documentary along with others, *American Courtesans* (2013) and *Half the Sky* (2012), depict sex trafficking with a dramatic flair of American high life to dirty children, images of girls lined down alleys, men filing into the brothels. Although documentaries portray what is considered a true story of sex trafficking, they affirm visually what Simoes found of mediated versions of sex trafficking. Thus, she suggests inviting the narratives of real trafficked victims to give a true account of the realities of the issue would be a more appropriate manner to report on such a weighty social issue, instead of invalidating an already ostracized segment of the population (2010). Sex trafficking is a construction of the powerful through media, whereas the need for less dramatized and more accurate accounts of the problem could instead be displayed.

Sex trafficking as an issue on the agenda of a moral crusade incorporates a number of voices from activists, feminists, religious organizations, and other groups. As a whole, moral crusades are characterized by “forces responsible for transforming such conditions into ‘problems’” (Weitzer, 2007, p. 448). The overall goal is to advance claims about a particular issue that is deemed morally grave and worthy of fighting against due to the scale, size or depravity involved (Weitzer, 2007). For instance, abortion, same-sex marriages and pornography are just a few of the issues both political and religious moral crusades have taken up. In particular, the subject of sex trafficking incorporates a wide range of morally concerned groups, painting a picture of sex trafficking through the lens of six distinct claims according to Weitzer (2007). These claims include that prostitution is evil by definition, violence is omnipresent in prostitution and sex trafficking, customers and traffickers are the personification of evil, sex workers lack agency, prostitution and sex trafficking are inextricably linked, the magnitude of both prostitution and sex trafficking is high and has greatly increased in recent years, and legalization would make the situation far worse than it is at present (Weitzer, 2007). As a critique
of the moral stance on sex trafficking, Weitzer illuminates the core definition of sex trafficking from this perspective. It is heinous. Those who victimize women in such a way are truly evil, which morally means that sex trafficking needs to end. More importantly, it must be stopped now because it is exponentially growing. There is no data that needs to be acknowledged, it is simply that sex trafficking is morally wrong. It is harmful and hurtful, even when not recognized by those involved. Altogether, the moral crusade redefines sex trafficking to be understood through the lens of humanity and human rights, particularly women’s rights.

Altogether, the intersection of the social, health, legal, mediated, and moral elements to sex trafficking give an overarching view of what topics are being discussed in literature currently. Each discipline shares an enlightening aspect to sex trafficking, which has an impact on the understanding of human trafficking. For instance, living in a culture that glamorizes sex and the mediate portrayal of sex trafficking influence how people perceive who are and are not to be considered a victim. The health problems associated with trafficking as well as the prosecutorial explanations of the trafficker’s mental process both highlight the depth and gravity of the victim experience. Further, the VTVPA defines what it means to be trafficked in an attempt to put in place legal structures for prosecuting traffickers, thus formalizing the definition for all other research to utilize. For this research, recognizing the definition of human trafficking as well as the outside influence such as culture and media, are important as I explore human trafficking through the eyes of visitors in an exhibit context.

**MUSEUM TOUR**

In order to better understand *Invisible: Slavery Today*, below is a brief tour of the exhibit following the photos attached in Appendix A. To begin, the exhibit is roughly 2,000 square feet, situated at the end of a glass-walled hallway on the third floor of the Freedom Center. “The
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exhibition explores the causes of slavery, the economic forces that have contributed to its growth, and the response of government, the justice system and the general public to this scourge” (Freedom Center). The layout is divided into two distinct sections or rooms, one that highlights the issue of trafficking and the other that showcases abolitionist efforts. The entrance starts with a wall of neon signs and videos introducing museum visitors the issue of unfreedom and modern day slavery (pictures 1-4). Overall the lighting is dark as visitors enter to the right and the walls are comprised of crates detailing their human contents (pictures 4, 10, 12). The exhibit begins as a hallway (picture 5) in which the five forms of trafficking are introduced through stories and sculptural depictions of sex trafficking, domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor and child labor. After meeting these five stories, the exhibit space opens up (picture 6) into a large room with walls of different displays and freestanding installations. The central installation discusses the topic of sex trafficking (pictures 7, 11). Each side shares more detailed information about sex trafficking, including trafficking, the brothel system (picture 11), and stories of victims. Towards the back wall resides an installation surrounding the demographics of victims and vulnerability (pictures 8, 14, 15). On the direct opposite side of the space is the third large installation giving more detailed stories and depictions of the types of labor trafficking (9, 13). Throughout this first room are videos to watch, interactive displays (picture 8, 14) as well as visual signs of information (picture 16) about the issue without much direction for traffic flow. Museum visitors can wander and investigate as they so choose, seeing, hearing and experiencing human trafficking through the exhibit.

After exploring the first room, visitors keep moving through the walkway of escape (picture 17) into the room of 21st century abolitionists. They are greeted with white walls and colorful signs corresponding to each of the five types of human trafficking (pictures 18, 22). In
this second section, the exhibit highlights four organizations that collaborated with the Freedom Center to make the exhibit and are also working to rescue trafficked victims. They include International Justice Mission, Good Weave, the Polaris Project and Free the Slaves (pictures 20, 21). With these, the walls have large pictures of survivors with their stories (picture 24). Above the stories are the words “free” written high on the walls (picture 19), each letter being made up of small faces of survivors. In the middle are kiosks with computers that invite visitors to share what they learned from the exhibit as well as what they are going to do upon leaving (picture 23). Responses scroll on screens so that all who come in can read what others have said. To exit *Invisible: Slavery Today* visitors again walk through a narrow passage way (picture 23 looking back into the exhibit from the exit). For my interviews, I stood at the end of the hallway in order to connect with visitors as they were exiting the exhibit.

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

By understanding and integrating the researcher’s voice into this study, an autobiographical account of my connection to human trafficking as well as my personal reading of the exhibit is necessary. Through reflexivity, which involves an intentionality to turn inward and reflect on assumptions, meaning and beliefs, my voice as a researcher can be utilized (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Therefore based on my journal entries, the following narrative illuminates my subjective experiences and thoughts, both in regards to the issue of human trafficking and *Invisible: Slavery Today*.

My first encounter with the Freedom Center was in a little less than a year ago, however, the mission of the museum has long been a part of my life. The implications of America’s history with slavery creating a color line between those who are white and those who are black have been a part of my life since I was six years old. My brother is black, Native American and white.
We grew up in an upper-middle class white community. It was not until I came to Cincinnati that I truly began seeing how race still pervades society today, especially in myself. I had to own my whiteness, which meant that my life has been very different from my brother’s in ways that I cannot even understand (Allen, 2009). For instance, I have never had a salesperson follow me around the store to make sure I am not going to steal merchandise. I have never been told I cannot date someone because of the color of my skin. There are long-lasting remnants of the color line, which are still enacting influence on society, life and thus, my research. This is important to mention as I feel a direct connection to the Freedom Center as a whole.

More specifically from my experience, people in the United States see human trafficking, in particular sex trafficking, as a distant issue. Saying such as, it is a tragedy or it is wrong. It is horrific. Opinions like “It can’t happen here” (in the United States) or “I didn’t know there is a difference between sex trafficking and prostitution” are relatively common (Personal Communication, 2013). Every person has a slightly different reaction, a little different notion or understanding of what it means to be trafficked. To truly engage with my research, it is necessary to understand how I am approaching the issue of human trafficking with my own understandings, meanings, and experiences. I became acquainted with the reality of slavery when sitting on a cot next to a sex worker in the dusty streets of Kamathipura’s red light district during my first visit to India three years ago. As a business district, Kamathipura understands and exploits the economic value of men and women. The pimps and madams see that sex trafficking is lucrative, that people can be bought and sold. It makes sense. Before this trip, I had no idea that sex trafficking even existed nor did I understand that modern day slavery is an issue. After two more visits to India, I realize that there is a need to investigate the perceptions and attitude surrounding sex trafficking in the United States. I cannot forget her face, her smile and her hands, even though I
was not able to say anything that she could comprehend due to the language barrier. I cannot forget looking into one of the rooms and seeing a customer hand over rupees, paying for his recent services. Then watching that woman walk out of the room to the streets again. I cannot forget the 30-year old woman who was mute and had only known the brothel as home.

As I enter the Freedom Center, I carry these experiences into the space as well as my continued struggle with the fact that people are viewed as commodities in this industry. I have my own set of understandings regarding human trafficking that are a part of my interpretation of the space. In this section, I candidly invite readers into my analysis of the exhibit in order to be authentic in my research and true to the value of reflexivity during this project. Being in the Invisible: Slavery Today exhibit, I challenge the stance that I also carry. I have a privileged disgust with human trafficking that recognizes how wrong it is, while the exhibit challenges me to think about how I play a role in the enactment of human trafficking. As I interrogate my contributions, I encounter a paradox about my desire to individually help those who are trafficking. Then I am bombarded with the realization that there are structures in place, governments, corporations, institutional implications that are much bigger than my individual, feeble attempts to support the anti-trafficking cause. At one moment I think I need to do something and the next, what can I really do to affect true change? There exists a tension in deciding if I even can and should do something. What does that say about me, my approach to human trafficking? I also struggle with the complexity of the issue. For example on my third trip to India, I was disgusted with myself and my fellow travelers, most of whom were experiencing India for the first time. We went into non-governmental organizations, all committed to rescuing trafficked persons, and took video footage and photographs, asked questions as though they are a spectacle. Their work, their livelihoods were part of a show that we could capture in one
interaction. My privileged stance allowed me to visit and learn and be changed by my experience and then come back to my removed life in the United States. I wrestle with the truth that people are sold, whether that being to a pimp in a brothel, a family who owns a brick factory, or an American home. I not only see what is displayed as a museum exhibit, I interpret and evaluate it according to these real tensions I feel and experiences I have had.

The 4,000 square foot *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit sheds light on human trafficking in today’s world. During my time in the exhibit, I was initially transplanted back to a dusty street on the dirty cot. The sounds, the images, and most importantly, the ominous feeling of the space pressed into me, reminding me of my first visit to the brothel district. The weight of so many eyes watching me made my first visit to Kamathipura one of the most difficult experiences in my entire life. Upon entering the exhibit, I had a similar experience to the day I stepped out of the taxi in Mumbai. Walking from a bright window-walled walkway to reach the neon light, flashing “unfreedom,” the exhibit intentionally creates a dark atmosphere to begin. The use of lighting as a strategic gesture places visitors in a real place of darkness. The exhibit introduces the issue of human trafficking with darkness, inviting visitors to meet the issue of human trafficking first by the dramatic change of atmosphere. The next introduction is to five stories depicted as artistic sculptures, with one being a girl working as a domestic servant in the United States. The exhibit quickly brings human trafficking into the realm of “us”. These five stories are meant to be followed through the rest of the exhibit because they are examples of the five different kinds of human trafficking, sex trafficking, domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor, and child labor. Because I knew this, I stop and engage with each one. In combination with the atmosphere, these sculptures each introduce me to the exhibit, showing a modern slavery with real with faces, names, lives, and feelings. Of all the five stories at the beginning of the exhibit, I connect with
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Tatiana, a young lady who was sold into sexual slavery and worked as a sex worker. This kind of human trafficking, obviously hits a more personal chord with my previous connection to the issue. However, the stories of the other four visual depictions of human trafficking individuals highlight the reach of exploitation today. They are just as important as Tatiana because they are just as enslaved.

Throughout my journey through the space, I note the transformation of each of these five persons wanting to understand how their story unfolds. Unfortunately, the exhibit does not make it easy to meet them again. Instead, the space opens into a large room that makes me feel lost as compared to guided. In the open space, stacks of moving crates just big enough for a human line the walls. One is like a wooden side telling me a girl’s name, her age, her virginity, and what few belongings she can call her own. Next to it is another carrier with a young man’s name, age and recommendation that the new owner needs to “put him in his place” or give him a couple of beatings for obedience purposes. These make up the backdrop of what is going to be told regarding human trafficking. It very literally feels like an old warehouse with nowhere to orient oneself. As I read the organization of the space, it does not bring comfort but chaos. There is not clear place to begin the journey or directional probes to insure that I see every part of the installation. In essence, the exhibit is akin to being in a dark maze with no real knowledge of where to start or even go next. The exhibit allows for me to explore.

Directly in the middle of the large room is a display with a mattress sign saying sex trafficking. As the central most location, it seems like a good place to start. However, the impact of what I am reading and seeing is almost too much to bear. I see the word escape written above a doorway to the right and it seems like a good option right now. It hints at a symbolic connection to trafficking, in which victims do not realize what they are signing up for until they
are in the middle of it and most of the time, it is too late to get out. Once inside and finally understanding, I am already amidst the chaos. I am too deep to retreat and have to figure out a way to make it through. The exhibit is meant to focus on sex trafficking, domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor, and child labor, each of the five types of human trafficking. Yet, the flow that I arbitrarily decided on lead me directly to sex trafficking. The exhibit may want me to make my way around the outside walls but does this spatially indicate the others are not as important? For me, the exhibit follows this line of thinking by literally forcing me to walk past the central installation on my way to the escape. I can skip seeing the forced labor, child labor, and domestic servitude stations, but I could not bypass the one discussing sex trafficking.

In walking through the space, I am constantly registering what I am seeing and questioning what is the exhibit wants from me. I take in the myth boxes that highlight the falsehoods I may believe about modern slavery. By reading every one, watching almost all of the videos and just standing and listening, I begin to understand that my role as visitor is meant to be an experience. Most impactful are the noises that reverberate from the ceiling and across the walls, the sound of bricks being dropped, doors being closed, and the voices in a restaurant. The sounds move me past the walls of a museum, giving me a glimpse of what it would sound like if I were the boy in the brothels or the woman forced to work as a waitress. For me, the interaction with my sense of hearing in combination with the rest of the visual elements deepened what it meant to experience human trafficking.

I choose to make my way around the perimeter displays and watch a couple of videos about survivors and listen to their own stories in their own languages. The exhibit entices me to keep watching them. By watching the undercover video of an owner of a brick company, who laughingly talks about his worker’s debts that he will make sure never truly get paid “If you
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know what I mean…” The evolution of the stories and the impact of each face and name bring
the issue to a heart level. Sex trafficking was not something that I generalized. On the contrary,
human trafficking as a concept is easier to remove myself from. In its place, the exhibit wants me
to put a face to the little boy and a name to the woman. The visual stimulation that comes from
seeing faces, names, and images of those who are trafficked is emotionally and mentally taxing.
The exhibit’s lighting no longer weighs me down, the heaviness of story after story takes over.
The story of a woman being paid to have sex with more than 400 men, the children beaten and
broken to work as housemaids, the many deceived in their pursuit of a better life.

Referring back to the central installation, the materials illustrate a vivid reality of sex
trafficking. By using mattresses as the signage for each story, black smeared paint writing words
like sex slavery and sex trafficking on mattresses draw me in. As I stand and peer into the glass-
paned windows and pull back a curtain to gaze into a small bedroom replica, I interrogate my
moral issues with sex trafficking. I must acknowledge the brokenness in the system where this
sort of business is operating and challenge my taken-for-granted assumptions, such as the value
of the woman’s body as more than just a sight for eyes and a place of pleasure. In this I question
how to I “fix” a system that has such a distorted view? Will capitalism and development be the
savior as they are the goal of this culture? The exploitation of bodies in movies, advertising,
commercials and magazines is hardly noticeable today in the American, highly sexualized
culture (Kotrla, 2010). What is so different about selling the image or idea of the body on a
billboard and the actual body in a bedroom? There is a difference no doubt, but does either
actually tell different stories about what is important? How does the idolatry and glamorization
of women’s bodies and prevalence of porn play along with the reality of sex trafficking? To this
end, I reflect upon the ways our city can truly engaged with human trafficking when it is
conditioned to believe certain meanings regarding bodies, not just in the realm of sex but the deeper notion that bodies are objects and disposable that aids in labor trafficking too. Does the museum communicate enough about human trafficking or simply create education with no attempt to change the structures that say it is okay?

I sit in tension because I am disgusted by this sort of sexual exploitation but also strive to look like the attractive sex goddess that media tells me to be. I know the structures exist. In these questions, I reflect upon the ways of understanding myself that culture tells me to believe. In these reflective moments, there is time to truly investigate my interpretation of the exhibit in its entirety. As I encircle the installation, I make connections to my experiences in the brothels, in particular my memory of watching a customer pay for sex. I do not have correct answer for why human trafficking exists or how to end it, yet examining the issue of “who” soberes me back to the reality of the museum. A huge suspended globe with an interactive wheel underneath asking, “how could you be trafficked?” not in the figurative sense but real indications of high risk. In the same area are puzzle-like bodies hung on the wall describing vulnerability and demographics. Behind each cutout is a description of the “who”. The combination of these really forces me to question my own vulnerability. I do not worry about being trafficked, but the exhibit asks literally how it could happen to me. Therefore, visitors have a place to reflect what it would mean for their person to be trafficked. It is a powerful tactic learn about human trafficking and then be asked to be cautious of your susceptibility.

After the fear, there is the start of light, of hope. The overwhelming heaviness is lifted as I cross the threshold into the second room with white walls, tall ceilings and colorful pictures. The contrast is significant. There are stories of survivors, those living in freedom. This second room is a small sort of remedy to the first; it is the solution to the problem. The call to action
encourages visitors to do something and participate, recognizing four particular organizational partners including International Justice Mission, Free the Slaves, the Polaris Project, and Good Weave. With these who working as 21st century abolitionists, visitors can use computers to share they are going to do upon leavening including telling others about the issue, getting involved in an organization, and watching for the signs of victims. The exit narrows to double-walled pictures blown up of survivors who are thriving and living in new ways as they experience freedom. Freedom is the end of the exhibit.

The contrast from darkness to light, unfreedom to freedom illuminate the transformative process that occurs during the visit. As I explain my personal walk and experience not only in the museum but also with the issue, my interpretations are not conclusive or complete. I do see and question the focus on sex trafficking that is evident in the exhibit. As the literature reviews discussed, sex trafficking is commonly the most highlighted form of human trafficking. The problem with this is that the exhibit could be perpetuating this mistake. Hence, investigating what others experience and respond to from the exhibit is imperative to this research. The audience reception of Invisible: Slavery Today invites into existence a conversation about dominant themes regarding human trafficking. The exhibit is a means through which to see a more holistic view of emergent meanings as well as indulge in the communicative function of the museum as a site for such processes.

AUDIENCE RECEPTION

Audience reception is the intersection between a text and the meanings it carries and those who interpret the meanings with the recognition that the text or in this case, the exhibit, can only come alive with the interaction of visitors (Rowe, 2004). Although, this idea is found in more critical media and sports studies, I believe it applies to this research as the Invisible: Slavery
Today exhibit cannot be understood without interaction. Further, as Gill Lines (2002) puts forth, the incorporation of audience voices through a qualitative approach is a necessary addendum to the textual analysis in order to overcome the limitations of traditional rhetorical criticism, which follows more stringent procedures for the text by a single researcher. Therefore, I assert that it is important for the audience voice to be a key component in the research process through interviews. My personal analysis of Freedom Center’s Invisible: Slavery Today is included as a part of the analysis process. However, understanding the communicative function of the museum through audience reception is the important as the museum is meant to connect with an audience about human trafficking.

Museums have been introduced as a part of the rhetorical field of research, particularly in the sense that researchers visit a site and publish a personal critique of their experience (Burgchardt, 2010). There exists a relatively recent but comprehensive discussion of museums, memorials, and other texts as valid and important communicative performances from the field of rhetorical criticism (Lynch, 2013; Blair et al., 2010; Armada; Dickenson, 2002). In such research, the role of audience reception is limited due to the researcher’s individual task in analyzing the space, such as research about the Vietnam Memorial or the Creation Museum (Blair et al., 2010, Lynch, 2013). The attempt to merge or find hybridity between the material and symbolic dimensions of communication is no easy task. Materiality involves what is physical. It is the text but also the context, for example the exhibit features and the Cincinnati environment (Blair et al., 2010). On the other hand, the symbolic remains in the more abstract realm where interpretation, meanings, and the arbitrariness of the material world is highlighted (Blair et al., 2010). Researchers should strive to not fall into the symbolic trap because only focusing on the symbolic elements of a text is inadequate (Blair et al., 2010). Museums then are an invitation
into the grey area that resides somewhere between the material and symbolic, the physical features such as art and spatial navigation, and the meanings ascribed to these elements. The symbolic interpretation of each visitor is different even though the installation is the same. The material presentation in the museum space invites visitors to not only hear what the narratives the materials are symbolically telling, but to understand the museum within the context of their own personal experience (Charland, 1987).

Important in the discussion of museum as sites of meaning is the nature of spaces as multi-layered texts (Lynch, 2013). The museum context is unique as it has an agenda to educate, memorialize, inform, and entertain. Therefore, “rhetoricians have developed critical perspectives grounded in material rhetoric that aims to identify the ways in which places like memorials and museums engage and persuade audiences” (Lynch, 2013, p. 5). Understanding the performative nature of a space is the discovery of the overlapping layers of meaning that are intentionally and uniquely important for the museum or memorial to actively engage their audiences. In other words, the process of examining what a space is doing is also the undertaking to uncover those layers of meanings that affect the space’s communication. I assert that museums as spaces are typically assumed by visitors to give an objective depiction of reality, akin to documentaries. However, it is necessary to understand that with every part from material selection and lighting to special flow and sound, spaces are subjective (Lynch, 2013; Dickenson, 2002; Blair & Michel, 1999). The decision to include means there is also a decision to not include, selection and de-selection (Burke, 1973). Inherent in the construction of a museum exhibit is the attempt of conveying a particular meaning, a particular experience of the space. The exhibit is situated in a particular context, which for this research is the Freedom Center on the Ohio River in Cincinnati, just as the Vietnam Memorial and Smithsonian Museum are in Washington D.C. The broader
background of the *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit is significant in understanding how the space is interpreted as well as what it is attempting to communicate. Due to its location on the Ohio River, the National Underground Railroad Freed Center is a pillar of the waterfront, especially from the Kentucky view. The museum is a building that symbolizes the freedom granted, literally on the edge of the river that slaves once crossed. Even further, the museum that is most commonly known as a place of American history also educates about modern slavery. There is importance in how *Invisible: Slavery Today* sits amidst a place of freedom, but is continuing to tell the story of slavery that has not ended today. Therefore, these different layers diffuse the boundaries of the formal space and create a text that must be analyzed through the numerous contributing parts (Brummett, 1994).

As part of the sense-making process, my role as the researcher is set in my understanding and previous knowledge regarding this issue as described above alongside how the audience responds to the exhibit. I must engage with visitors of the exhibit in order to better understand how the space functions. The constant interplay between my notions and history in juxtaposition to the meanings of visitors is key tenet for my methodology, which is described in the following section.
Chapter 2 | METHODOLOGY

Research Questions:

In light of the current literature surrounding the human trafficking as well as the need for exploration of museums’ communicative functions from the perspective of audience reception, the following research questions were created in an attempt to address issues from the literature:

1) What meanings of human trafficking emerge from audiences’ responses to the exhibit?
2) What specific physical elements in the exhibit invite for audience interpretation and understanding of human trafficking?

Data Collection

Data collection took place the form of 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews, in which I followed a set of questions but did not obstruct the natural flow of conversation. The interviews were held on-site at the Freedom Center with museum visitors willing to participate after visiting the Invisible: Slavery Today exhibit. The decision to collect data through interviews was informed by the lack of research about audience reception of museum spaces. Much of current scholarship is solely dependent on researcher reception. By engaging in interviews, I was able to tap into visitors’ construction of the exhibit, and further, their conceptions of human trafficking in the United States. Through many interactions and rounds of submissions to the University of Cincinnati’s Institutional Review Board, I solidified my interview protocol and received approval for the technicalities of my research, which include the consent form and recruitment script. I asked potential participants for 20-25 minutes of their time. The average length of interviews lasted 18:27 minutes, with the longest being 30:38 and the shortest being 5:58. I conducted a total of 15 interviews, in which I provided the consent form to read and sign for persons who agreed to participate. During the actual interview, I explored their conceptions,
understanding, thoughts and feelings about the *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit as an experience and realization about human trafficking following my interview protocol, which is comprised of twelve questions (Appendix C). Throughout the first three interviews, I solidified my interview questions, realizing that my original twelve questions allowed participants to connect with the issue and also elicited a more in-depth response for my data collection. By using questions that were worded in different ways but in essence asking the same question, I found that the questions appealed to everyone I talked with. Further in order to be engaged in the discussion and not be constantly taking notes, I sought permission to use audio recording, assuring that participants understand how confidentiality and privacy of their responses will be maintained. Throughout the process of interviewing, participants freely spoke without much inhibition.

As all of them were coming directly toward the exit of the museum, their time to reflect about the exhibit was short. This allowed for very up close and personal data, while at the same time is a limitation as it caused some difficulty, as some participants needed more time to think about certain questions. I stood at a podium near the exit. Visitors were essentially forced to walk by me in order to exit the exhibit and see the video installation directly beyond the *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit. The most profound part of my location was that it at times appeared visitors did not want to walk by me. I noticed that a portion of the time, visitors would turn around when they noticed me in the exit hallway, and go all the way back through the beginning of the *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit. I speculate that they did not know why I was there and instead of attempting to find out, they decided to avoid me. Altogether, the location was ideal in order to engage with those exiting visitors. Only one couple did not want to stand at the podium and speak with me, so we moved into the open foyer and sat on benches for the duration of the interviews.
Data Analysis

Data analysis utilized grounded theoretical methods (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) to describe participants’ response to the exhibit and their perceptions of the social phenomenon of human trafficking in the United States. Grounded theory is a common and accepted practice for qualitative studies (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). However, as Suddaby (2006) explains, there are some common misconceptions regarding grounded theory. For instance, grounded theory has been unduly associated with a lack of literature and the assumption that studies utilizing grounded theory present raw data. As a safeguard against such misconceptions, I clearly indicated my research questions, which were derived from my literature review of audience reception studies and the social phenomenon of human trafficking. Instead, grounded theory exists in the connection and interchange between the researcher, the literature and collected data. At the heart of grounded theory is the understanding, as common in qualitative research, that the researchers lived experiences are a part of the data analysis process (Tracy, 2013).

Grounded theory is defined by two key elements, coding and categorization. I analyzed data first utilizing an open coding framework. In such coding, I read the interview transcripts and simply noted the categories that appeared from the data. At this point, there was not a concrete decision regarding what the categories would be nor were any excluded. Thus, my inductive approach encouraged a constant back and forth between coding informed by my personal experiences in the space as well as the current academic situation surround human trafficking. Open coding is, in essence, the unrestricted first glance over the data. I created 26 categories through this process (Appendix D). I also attempted to define the categories I saw in order to begin to create a coding schema for the data (Charmaz, 2006). In order to truly contribute to this field of research, I began with an understanding of the social constructionist approach which
incorporates my past experiences and interactions as influential pieces to my research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Therefore, during the open coding process, I used my personal experiences as well as my understanding of the exhibit as much of the foreground for the categorization. For instance, a point of great tension for me existed in the conversations about how parents could sell their children into slavery? Having a brother who was adopted makes this question hit a particular chord. I know that his biological mother would not come see him; even if she was doing what she thought was best for him or trying to give him a better life. The side of the story that I experienced was times where my parents were no longer my brother’s parents. There were times when he wanted to go back to his biological family because we were not his family. Thus, the question of a parent selling a child strikes me. I have seen first hand within my family how not being wanting can cause so much hurt and havoc in a child. I sympathize with the victims as I have witnessed the pain giving up a child can cause. Although I made two extended visits to the exhibit myself, I did not understand much this topic would affect me. This is not a problem because it was a key awareness to be constantly interrogating myself throughout the analysis process. The notion of reflexivity then played a major role in the data analysis process, particularly in the first round of coding.

The second round of coding began as the number of transcripts grew to the final number of 15. By this time, I had enough interviews and data to begin drawing connections in the coding schema. There was not a clear break between open coding and axial coding, but open coding continually happened until all of the interviews were completed. Axial coding took the open coding a step further, because this coding was no longer simply to determine categories but begin to explore overlapping conditions in different audience responses to the space and the issue of human trafficking. Thus, I engaged then with not only the open categories but also the reasons
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for each of the categories. I spent time with the data thinking about the different arrangements that could be created. The conditions of the categories (Appendix D), which included the concepts of domestic trafficking, personal connections, exhibit frames, and calls to actions were then cross-axially analyzed in order to discover the congruent streams of meaning across the data. The axial coding did not build from similar words or phrases, although these were helpful. However, I, as the researcher, took into account the conceptual meanings from the already coded categories and sought to investigate the connections as well as the differences amongst these conceptualizations. In my own words, the axial coding consisted of a combination of understanding the American way of life and its impact on human trafficking, the different kinds of human trafficking and the exhibit’s framing of the issue. These blanket themes were very similar to the first iterations. I spent time with the open coding (Appendix E) to draw the connections and found that refinements of the original thought were most helpful. Therefore, I did not discard any axial codes. Instead I adapted them to reach the most abstracted form of the data.

In the final stages of coding, I used selective coding to solidify the theory of my research, taking the raw data into the realm of theory. The goal was integration of the relationships of meanings, to understand how patrons of the museum made sense of the exhibit as well as the communicative function of the space. Thus, this was a process of construction, which means “that an analyst reduces data from many cases into concepts and set of relational statements that can be used to explain, in a general sense, what is going on” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 145). In this construction, also known as selective coding, I concluded that the three relational statements that exemplify both audience reception and the exhibit’s communication were: understanding human trafficking through an American lens, different facets of human trafficking, and the
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exhibit as social construction. Under each of these relational statements, there are layers of axial and open meaning as well as transcripts to illustrate the direct emergence of the themes from the data. Therefore, I analyzed my data using a grounded theory approach, as specified by Corbin and Strauss, which values constant comparison and reflexivity as pillars of a social constructionist perspective (2008). The central themes of my research were then inductively discovered through the open, axial and finally, selective, coding process.

Due to the on-site demands of data collection, I conducted data analysis concurrently with data collection so as to allow for a constant refinement of data collection. Grounded theory allows for data to be flexible and continually edited throughout the collection process. Thus, I adopted the constant-comparison technique that was used to derive my open, axial and selective codes (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002) from the entire corpus of data, i.e the interview transcripts. To be clearer, after each interview, I transcribed the interview within two days of the actual encounter. I then, coded the material based on the open coding schema, which is congruent with my grounded theory methodology. As I engaged with my own perceptions of the museum exhibit as well as the responses in the interview, the very short amount of time encouraged a more accurate dialogue between the data and myself. It would have been a hindrance to the theoretical perspective to wait to analyze the data until the collection process was completed. Instead of taking copious notes during the interviews, I used time directly following to de-brief personally. Some of the interviews caused tension in my own mind. For example, a couple of participants drew conclusions to taxation or student loans as a form of oppressive, slavery-like situations that they experience in their own lives. I then had to interrogate my frustration with such claims that equated what I perceived as a shallow and voluntary connection to the issue of human trafficking. I used the same recorder and intermittently have listened to my de-briefing as
part of my data collection. These in-the-moment ‘therapy’ sessions were enlightening and most helpful to retrieving what I thought and also experienced during the interviews. The initial coding began as soon as I had finished my interview and did not end until the entire research process was closed completely.

**Recruitment Strategy**

In order to recruit participants, I worked closely with the Freedom Center. Although it should be noted that the Freedom Center was not responsible for the actual recruiting, I partnered with them to create a space near the exit of the *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit. (Please see Appendix A for pictures of the exhibit). This space re-designed the set-up that housed an optional survey area about the exhibit. On the onsite days, I engaged with visitors as they left the exhibit, I shared about myself, my project, my research and asked for their willingness to participate. The interviews continued until saturation is completed, in which no new categories emerged in coding as is commonly prescribed in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In order to reach this saturation, I utilized the constant-comparison method aforementioned. Saturation was reached at 15 because the open coding and categorization were fully defined. In other words, new information from interviews from transcripts were not initiating new categories, instead were confirming the categories from the coding process. Therefore, I could assume that the body of data was holistic in its nature and cease interviewing.

**Participants**

As I utilized a theoretical sampling approach to data collection (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002), I allowed the sampling to dictate when theoretical saturation was achieved. By this I mean that I did not strive to meet a certain number of interviews. I allowed the transcripts to determine when data collection was complete. However, I placed an upper-limit of 25 participants to assure
diligence as well as timeliness. Also, to ensure some boundaries regarding participants, I only asked participants above the age of 18. Seventeen adults were willing to engage in this discussion about the *Modern Slavery: Invisible* exhibit and their understandings of human trafficking through their museum experiences. Of these participants, I found that many visitors were not alone in the exhibit. The difficulty with groups and couples visiting the exhibit was in only allowing one of the two to participate in the interview. Although I did engage with four couples or groups, they were most willing to be involved when they were allowed to conduct the interview as a team. For these situations, I only transcribed and used data from one of the two in order to maintain a standard of data throughout.
Chapter 3 | ANALYSIS

The exhibit is a space that communicates in a certain way regarding human trafficking. Like any other narrative, it is therefore both a selection and deflection of reality (Burke, 1973). In my analysis, I explore how human trafficking is communicated as a problem in this exhibit. Exhibits as spaces play an integral role in creating a specific and unique definition of their art or issue, particularly in the Freedom Center that even in its name highlights the issues of slavery. Through the analysis of my interviews conducted at the Freedom Center, I present three overarching themes that speak to a particular social construction of human trafficking according to visitors to the exhibit. These include a) the exhibit constructs human trafficking as an American phenomenon, b) different facets of trafficking and c) the physical features of the exhibit. In the following sections, I unpack the different ways each of these themes played out in the specific conversations with museum visitors.

THE EXHIBIT CONSTRUCTS HUMAN TRAFFICKING AS AN AMERICAN PHENOMENON

Living in America naturally creates an American understanding of the issue of human trafficking. Many would not recognize this because of its taken-for-granted quality. It appears to simply be the way things are. Yet, there are distinctive ways of understanding human trafficking that appears to be unique to us. Words such “freedom” and slavery have strong connotations rooted in a history of segregation and imperialism. The appeal to save is intimately woven into the concept of America.

Humanitarianism is a pillar of our society as one that is able to, willing to, and called to do acts of kindness and improvement for others who, in our eyes, cannot do for themselves. In this discussion, the focus on helping is not without proper motives. It is very real that people do
intend to help not harm. However, in the issue of human trafficking as an American phenomenon, the concept of humanitarianism played a major role in understanding the issue. For example, as one visitor, who I shall name Martha, summed it up:

It makes you want to [help] but I don’t know that I will, you know what I mean. It makes you feel like you should. It makes you feel like something needs to be done and these people need to be helped.

Human trafficking, it seems, is understood as a grave situation that is essentially calling us to action. Knowing about the issue is calling you to action, to do something, making you feel as though you have to do something to help. There is not a clear distinction about who the people are or even what should be done, but the guilt over doing something is an important note to make when realizing the humanitarian value of the United States, as Ronnie mentioned, “it just makes you feel guilty like… what ought I could be doing?”

Similarly, there are iconic persons in American society that exemplify this value. They are the ones that we try to emulate in our giving and doing. And they are praised for their efforts. For those such as Bill Gates, another visitor, Bob discussed the value of humanitarian efforts.

Bill Gates, bless him. I am so glad that he is doing vaccination programs and I think there is possibility for change through that. Will we eradicate malaria? Probably sometime in the future. Yeah I could see that. I could see that happening. But will we turn around a country like Sudan or Ethiopia that has been struggling with the lack of infrastructure, the lack of food, the lack of control? Probably not in our lifetime.

Even though Bob recognizes that our efforts may not result direct benefits or change within the near future, he emphasizes the value of doing it. By mentioning Bill Gates as one of the humanitarians who is praised for doing vaccination programs, Bob draws a connection from the
issues of the world that Americans are trying to solve to the idea of human trafficking. As he acknowledges, from his place as an American, he communicatively assigns America’s role in causing or leading the change on global issues. He further questions the idea of creating change by saying,

Can we effect change there? Yes. We are so isolated in North America. We are ideologues. We think that, 'Oh there. We are just going to send a check and this is going to change over night.'

What is so impressive about this question is the understanding that America has developed a specific answer for what it means to change. Humanitarianism a noble task but it is also safe. As he says we are isolated in North America and can stay isolated because our dollars, our money, is going to the cause. Humanitarian efforts exist in the paycheck. Therefore, understanding human trafficking as a humanitarian issue begs the question of how much can I pay to make this better? Fixing the issue or problem of human trafficking is directly connected to the realization that something needs to be done and I can do it.

After talking to Bob, I recorded my thoughts about my personal humanitarian tendencies.

I am conflicted when I realize that I am an enabler. I support the system that demands for the trafficking enterprise to continue, not only continue but also thrive in today's world. If I am part of making it happen, what must I do to make myself no longer an enabler?

Essentially, I feel the struggle to eradicate myself from the problem. It is like I need to remove myself from the rest of everyone who are perpetuating the system.

Unfortunately, as Bob stated above, the solution is a check mailed to certain organizations that are helping those in need. As he discussed the idea that people can give a solution to the problem with money. I thought about the idea of an enabler, which for me rests in the desire to erase my
connection to the problem. The connection between the checkbook for me exists in the hope that money means I am doing something and therefore, no longer liable. It is a way to clear my name. I have to interrogate the conceptualization of humanitarianism, according to the visitors to the exhibit; human trafficking is better understood through this American lens. The lens that say I give 200 dollars and then I can rest assured that I have done my part to rescue those who are in modern day slavery.

Taking the notion of humanitarianism a step further, which is typically directed at those outside of the United States. A key tenet of the exhibit is that the issue of human trafficking does not only exist in third world countries, those other than our developed Western world, it is going on right underneath our noses. Many visitors made comments such as:

“it happens in our country and in our backyard.”

“I knew... I mean I knew that it was still going on… in like the third countries but didn't know in our country as well”

“my preconceived notions on it, yeah this is an international, an overseas issue. This is something that doesn't happen domestically. Yeah that is one of them for sure”

In understanding human trafficking through an American lens, the realization of how close to home the problem undergirded much of my conversation. The comments above highlight the closeness by talking about it being in the backyard. The participants each begin to entertain the conceptualization of human trafficking as a problem in the homeland as compared to an overseas issue. Molly begins to make sense of human trafficking. She processes the feelings that come with the newfound knowledge.

…It rocks your world a little bit because it is easy to sit back and go that doesn’t happen in America. We have a lot of problems here in America but that’s not one of them. You
know, that’s an Indian or a Cameroon, or a South Africa. That’s their problem. We need to help but we don’t have that here. And then you realize that you do. And that’s, it’s a little humbling to know that people that we are around or people that we see, are Americans with us still do this kind of stuff. Because you know, you hear the stories about men going to Thailand to have you know, sex with young girls. But you are like, ‘Oh that’s Thailand.’ It happens here. And that’s disturbing.

The American lens is unique in its attempt to save others from oppression, but to understand trafficking truly as a problem that needs to be addressed on the home front draws it into a new light. Molly recognizes and acknowledges that there is an “other” in the situation. There exists an “us” and a “them,” an in and out. It is “America” and then it is “other,” saying ‘that’s they’re problem’. It is a problem for those in India, Cameroon, Africa and Thailand but not here. Further, the major point of contention in her excerpt is not that there are people around us doing it but that there are Americans with us who are still doing “this kind of stuff.” Later in our discussion Molly mentions that this is an issue we thought that we had gotten past. If that were the case, then the US would have the authority and voice to address it in other places. Understanding human trafficking through the American lens seems to at first be recognized as part of the other, part of the problems in the world within which America emerges as the savior.

When the reality of our society’s struggle with human trafficking hits home, humanitarianism no longer applies. Humanitarianism is reserved for certain situations like Bill Gates providing vaccination to malaria-ridden countries, or thoughts like “I shall go to Africa, Thailand, and India, where this problem exists.” That does not work for home soil. Participants responded to the exhibit in ways that elaborated their personal role in fighting human trafficking.
As one participant said: “one of the biggest switches that flipped for me was that I contribute [to this problem].”

Emergent in the data is the enlightening realization in which the means to being involved in humanitarian efforts resides in the checkbook and one’s personal consumptive practices. Very quickly upon seeing the second half of the exhibit, participants shared what they felt was their individual call to action, including giving [charity] and doing something. However, the most common call to action was to make careful consumptive choices. If trafficking is happening everywhere, including the US, the importance of being alert in consumer choices cannot be overlooked. There is a connection between consumptive practices that demand bigger and better and third world labor. It may be suppliers, indirect relationships, but the relationship exists as corporations contract organizations in third world countries for cheaper pay, worse working conditions, and faster delivery. Martha introduced how consumerism is connected to trafficking, just the economics of slavery um. That we want things cheaper, faster, and um.. we want it now and so um.. I don't probably even realize what I am contributing to but uh.. in the sense that I am like that too.

Understanding human trafficking through the understanding of how American culture works, specifically to recognize that society wants what it wants, when it wants it and then faster and cheaper. This is inherently an American way of knowing, not only through consumption but also the fast-paced nature of consumption. It is a way to contribute to the trafficking system, but as she says, unknowingly. Tyler, another visitor, shares that there is power in the choice, “you know and I think even like consumption - choosing what you are consuming - not just being a mindless consumer is a step in the right direction.” The implications of his statement lie in the notion of a mindless consumer. There is the assumption that with the desire for ease and convenience in
America, the temptation to be a mindless consumer rears its ugly head. He mentioned choosing to participate in the local movement, which emphasizes the value of supporting your local community. Instead of using the supermarket, check out the farmers market or buy fair trade products because they come from ethical organizations, those that are trying to support a better moral standing in our consumer-driven world. By doing these small steps towards a better marketplace, Tyler perpetuates the understanding of being able to do something with one’s money to fix the issue of human trafficking. This taps into how trafficking is an economic issue. It is part of the supply and demand cycle, making the societal machine run smoothly in the same way that it is necessary for consumers and companies function for society. Logically, if you can alter the demand in America, then the supply will also decrease.

Is sex trafficking, domestic servitude, labor trafficking, bonded labor or child labor our fault? Does changing whether or not one buys at Wal-Mart or the local grocery do anything in the grand structure of institutionalized trafficking? It begs these questions, but even more so, it begs the question of how individual action is a major implication of understanding human trafficking.

I am sure there are a thousand legal issues involved, but I would love to see a whole wall of companies not to buy from. You know, they, you know, they use child labor or use slaves. I think, you know, I try but I can't tell you how many times I am like 'oh shoot' there is another company I have to quit buying from, you know.

In the above quote, Lindsay believes raising awareness about the brands and companies that use exploitative means to meet the needs of their consumers could potentially address human trafficking. She strategizes, or perhaps a better word is dreams, about publicly-condemning companies for their behavior in order to shame them into changing. At the heart of this idea is
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the reality that members of American society believe that their one individual action can make a difference. If I do this, it will make it better. The exhibit did not lead Lindsay to condemn the “bad people” who are the actual traffickers, but instead she questions her role and the corporations influence. Yet, the slight decrease in Wal-Mart customers does not recognize the change that needs to happen at the structural level of corporations, cultural understandings and institutional practices. If America values the convenience of supermarkets and the ease of constant access, there is a larger problem at hand. The problem of human trafficking requires an interrogation of the value placed on companies and corporations. Consumptive practices are an integral part of what drive demand for cheaper, faster, and better. On the other hand, understanding human trafficking through an American lens invites into conversation the realization that such consumptive demands are also implicated in the problem. The taken-for-granted understanding is that it does not happen in the United States, and that we can do something to fix the problem by giving money to other countries where the problem exists. When we realize that we have to play a part in the cycle, we will choose to go to a different store. While at the same time, we still experience the comfort of our car that can drive us to a different store. We exercise our “right” to choose, and we have the freedom to make a small change that we want to “change the world,” which ties into the exhibit’s existence in the American context.

As a researcher dealing with human trafficking, I experience the tension. After speaking with one participant, I processed through the tension in my journal.

I struggle hearing that people believe there is a Band-Aid solution to the problem without seeing the privilege they have in making that choice. There is so many structural and institutional players that make human trafficking complex - in definition and in fighting. I
am so privileged in my seat, one as a researcher, as an American, as a white person.

Trafficking is so much more than this quick fix.

Some participants equated human trafficking with the oppression of government taxation, student loan debt and the decision in other places to live with wealthier families in hope of a better education or opportunity. It is difficult to experience on the side of interviewer the statements of ignorance that can be present in discussions of difficult topics, for example in the American way of understanding human trafficking. Therefore, human trafficking through the American lens is diminished to a horrible and hard to sit with issue. To some of the participants, it is connected to an individual change in shopping preferences. To others, there is recognition of the larger structures that are making it possible. Molly did not note this directly, but brings the latter to light that some do not want to engage with the issue in today’s world.

…And people want to be ignorant. Yes, because it’s easier. It’s easier than going into schools and explaining to children. It is embarrassing to have to go tell kids this is happening because it shouldn’t. You know we are a civilization, a civilized country. This shouldn’t be happening and it is. It is almost embarrassing so a lot of people want to pretend like it is not happening and sweep it under the rug.

She depicts America as a nation that values the easy way out. It is easier and less shameful to not acknowledge the wrong, especially when it means owning it. Additionally, she makes a keen observation that illuminates a very common frame of America that is this is a civilized country. How could something like human trafficking be occurring in a country that is civil? What is civility then? What is civilization and who is not? Jon further iterates this by saying:
And even, you kind of want to keep yourself a little bit ignorant of what goes on. But you know that is not healthy. You need to know. I just didn’t want to know too much. I didn’t want to see too much.

He wants to stay on the edge because it is easier. Human trafficking is difficult, not knowing is the way to be because it is more comfortable. Or as Tim shared,

This is not something I think about a lot necessarily. Maybe it is also because I feel like it is not something I can really do anything about. And I think that my personal, general philosophy is that if there is nothing I can do about it, I don't really try to dwell on it.

The exhibit highlighted organizations actively fighting against human trafficking, International Justice Mission, Good Weave, the Polaris Project, and Free the slaves, and encouraged participants to share what they learned. Most participants valued the acknowledgment that there are people and organizations doing something to end modern slavery. And yet, Tim essentially shares that if there is nothing to do about it that will truly end it, then why bother the mental time and energy to dwell on it? Thus, the exhibit invited him to interact with the showcased abolitionist activities but he still does not feel like there will be true benefit to his involvement. In light of Tim, it is then intriguing to see how Lindsay explained her understanding of the general population coping with such issues as human trafficking.

I think that the way we, the way humanity ignores those issues are by trying not to look at the faces. And I found myself not wanting to look at the faces and you know, making myself even though it hurt. Because, I think that it’s easy to just look at the numbers and be overwhelmed. And then think of, when you see that one face of that one child. Therefore, with most participants there is an illusion that one option of dealing with hard topics is to not deal, to not see reality. The common thread is that human trafficking through the
American lens sees with selective vision. I cannot completely accuse the visitors to the museum with this; I too feel the tension of wanting to look away. In doing this sort of research, I read about human trafficking. I have researched the numbers, watched the documentaries, and spent hours and hours in the Invisible Slavery exhibit. I have had sleepless nights wishing I did not know what was happening and most of my days, I go to coffee shops, eat pastries and write on my apple laptop without wanting to think about how the daily amenities of my life are a part of the problem. I cannot change this issue as a whole. There are 27 million people enslaved, but even while conducting research about human trafficking, I can fall into the trap of complacency. The reflexivity it takes to analyze human trafficking in my own eyes draws me to reconcile the tension of my life and this issue. I recognize how I can be like Tim, who said, “its not something that's ever really in the forefront of my mind. You know, it’s just easy to not think about it when you don't have to.”

Altogether, this theme of human trafficking through the American lens is a complex web integrating the desire to be involved in humanitarian efforts, the realization that it is a problem on the home front, a connection to consumptive choices, and the easier way out, which is ignorance. The complete combination of humanitarian efforts with consumptive practices and calls to actions with ignorance together begin to shed light on how visitors to the exhibit begin to make sense of the exhibit. The next theme naturally transitions from the very personal American lens to the different forms and facets of the issue of human trafficking.

**DIFFERENT FACETS OF TRAFFICKING**

Human trafficking as a social phenomenon is complex. There are five different kinds of human trafficking, sex trafficking, domestic servitude, labor trafficking, bonded labor and child labor, each is distinct and yet the lines blur with how individuals become victims. There are questions
about the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking, and implications about a government that treats victims as criminals. There are also questions from participants regarding the nomenclature “human trafficking.” There may be speculation that like many times in the past, trafficking is an easier way of saying slavery. Slavery has connotations that are hard to swallow and even harder to admit. Therefore, the different complexities of trafficking emerge into a multi-layered account of how visitors attempt to make sense of the grey areas.

A major struggle in the understanding of human trafficking lies in the relationship between prostitution and sex trafficking. It is not a clear distinction parse between those that were forced into sex work and those that willingly choose to do so. Joanna and her mother illustrate the uniqueness of the argument as they process together one of the exhibit’s myth boards, which are boxes on the walls of the exhibit highlighting myths about human trafficking. This one in particular asked whether or not prostitution is and should be considered slavery.

...is prostitution slavery? and and uh. we both.. I hadn't really thought of it… as soon as I saw the question I mean the answer for both of us was yes.

They continue to describe how they understand prostitutes as sort of victims, specifically in the fact that the legal system treats prostitutes as criminals. At the heart of their discussion is the unsettling realization that women who are prostitutes can and do choose to be so. Therefore, there is a distinction in the argument over what is considered human trafficking. Others share very vehemently that the act of choice is that distinction.

So, I mean, not that I think, like I said prostitutes - super duper - you know. But not that I am going to encourage people to go take up that profession, but you know... but I think if its something you are choosing to do, you have the option to stop when you want to. I don't feel that that’s slavery.
Prostitution isn't necessarily - you are not necessarily being forced into that lifestyle - maybe like philosophically. You know what I mean, maybe like sort of like, well because of my socioeconomic state, I need whatever but versus like being literally poor. You know, Prostitution exists but sex trafficking that people, it is not their choice and that being as someone actually forcing them to do this.

The answer lies in the personal decision to follow the path to sex work. Trafficking does not allow for the decision to be made, instead it is made for the many who are victims of sex trafficking. Thus, the common thread is that choice is a part of the equation. The different facets of trafficking are distinguishable because there is no longer an available choice.

For the participants that shared about prostitution, choice was the clear way to differentiate between prostitution and slavery. And yet, prostitution in the context of *Invisible: Slavery Today* makes the line hard to distinguish; the line between the two is not always as clear as those who choose to do so or not. Carrie brings a more blunt description to the table, allowing for a wider cultural understanding of the issue.

I mean even women like I said the sex trafficking probably bothers me the most, even women who go off and they know what, fine I am going to be a prostitute because I need money. Not everyone just wants to do it. Sometimes it's like, I don't know what else to do. That doesn't mean they were expecting to get into a life where somebody is controlling. I mean that doesn't mean that is what they are looking for. It is what they get trapped into.

For me, this statement unnerved me. It is not that Carrie said something that has not run through my mind previously, nor that I would necessarily disagree. However, I associate this with the deeper understanding women and their self-respect. Women being told they have to sell their
bodies are only one narrative being told in the name of sex trafficking. Many others are choosing to sell themselves or even just giving themselves away freely in the name of pleasure. Therefore, a fundamental fact of human trafficking is exactly the ambiguous nature of it.

The exhibit introduces the term “unfreedom” at the entrance of the exhibit. The final hallway is then surrounding visitors with huge letters displaying ‘freedom’ on both sides of the walls. Thus, unfreedom and freedom are bookends for understanding the issue of human trafficking. The dialectical nature of the two invited into existence a place for discussion regarding the different facets of human trafficking. There is a delicate balance between what is free and what is not. By this, I allude to the distinction between the rights that Tim also mentioned,

You don't want me to slap you in the face. Well we got to; we have to have a limitation on our freedom. If I say I need to be free, POW I can hit you. Well no, that is not right. I can't do that. Who decides then what the level is that you can't do? Someone has got to decide.

In his brief example he touches on the tension of freedom and unfreedom. People do not have the liberty to do whatever they want to do at any point in time, his illustration being punching me during the interview. Instead, there are levels to what is right and what is okay. Further than this idea though is trafficking. It is more than just the limitations of civility as he describes or the oppressive taxation that another visitor expressed.

Over tax - Yeah I mean we do not think that over taxation is a form of oppression but as you start to make more money and your money that you are making is not yours. You start to think, hmm why isn't this money mine? I made this money. Nobody. So taxation is a form of oppression in... I think that as much as people wouldn't like to think about it,
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opens up the idea that their life is a little less free than they might think. That there is grey area and just we are not all free.

Trafficking is an unfreedom that reaches another level; a deeper wrong that Tim believes should be strongly and severely punished. In the context of the exhibit though, freedom is just as strong as the term slavery. The history of the word freedom reverberates within the walls of the space. The call to free those who are enslaved elicits a specific fact of human trafficking that is very apparent with the visitors. Even as they do not see the connection clearly between unfreedom and freedom, the choice to do something is tied to the nature of society. At times, like in the sense of trafficking, there is not a way out. Whether it is because of true isolation, coercion or the number of other violent tactics that are used in the process of trafficking, the lack of ability to have a will and follow one’s will, appears to encompass the struggle between what it means to be free or unfree. Joanna notes this struggle of what other types of unfreedom exist and the ways in which structural unfreedom takes place.

I like the term unfreedom that hunger and poverty is a uh its an unfreedom and it.. because there isn't. There is a lot of injustices in our government right now that doesn't allow for people to really get out.

In this, she notes that hunger and poverty are not fair; they are part of the unfreedom. However, it is necessary to emphasize that there is a difference between the structural oppression that many, even in America, feel and experience and that of trafficking. While the former should not be diminished, many of the participant described trafficking as a more abusive and oppressive experience. The distinction is most clearly illustrated in their definitions of human trafficking, in which they recognized that the different facets of trafficking are more complex and difficult to
capture. They may or may not have had an understanding of the issue before but in some way, shape or form they walked out of the exhibit with a new understanding.

After asking the participants about their preconceived notions or previous knowledge about human trafficking, I asked about their new definitions of human trafficking. The interconnected relationship between people as the product, the system of selling and buying, and lack of choice are major components of their new definitions. With this in mind, Jon simplifies human trafficking down, "...um the buying and selling of human beings for multiple purposes against their will. Slavery. Slavery against their will. Basically modern day slavery." As he puts it, there is another word to use instead of human trafficking. Slavery in the modern world is present, where people are still being sold and bought without any choice in the matter. They can be sold into sex work, or forced to work as a child in a brick factory. Either way, it is slavery.

Lindsay echoes this:

I think in some ways, the human trafficking is a little too euphemistic. You know, it is slavery and we need to call it that. Because I think, you know, when you - human trafficking - could mean which ways the subways run and how you... you know, there is, I think we tend to, you know, we tend to come up with polite terms for things. And you know, even the Holocaust, you know, that is a powerful word because we know what it is. But it was, you know, systematic torture and killing of people and I, you know. So I don't know, I think that’s one of the thoughts that struck me today was let's call it what it is. You know, let's - it is slavery and slavery has such negative, I think for most of us, such negative connotations that maybe that would be a little more powerful if we just called it what it really is.
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The connotations with slavery as a historic problem make the term more powerful in describing human trafficking, even more so as the exhibit is situated in the context of the Freedom Center. The comparison between literal traffic and trafficking is interesting as there is an aspect of trafficking that involves the transportation of people. However, Lindsay asserts that instead it seems to water down the issue at hand. Therefore, when defining a big issue, such as the Holocaust or human trafficking, we need to call it what it is. To me, I would agree that terming the issue trafficking may not encapsulate the entirety what happens to victims. Human trafficking is slavery and as with history, slavery benefits someone. Richard builds an intriguing relationship between the history of slavery and today in his definition of human trafficking.

I would say that human capital or human resources or I don't want to get into business but human capital - it is a very valuable resource that has built the economy and people, some people, are realizing that this is a rich, valuable resource and they are trying to take advantage of it, either by controlling or forcing or mistreatment, mistreating it, or not giving it the basic needs, not taking care of them or giving them like false promises or frauding that consent and obligation, trying to take advantage of them when they are emotionally or physically or in economics, or in making money.

People as resources have long been the means for development. The economy and people, or nation, have been dependent on the work of others to reach the “civilized” place that we are at today. There cannot be a separation between the slavery and the concept of people. As he says in the excerpt, people are exploited and manipulated to build world today. People are very valuable resources. Amidst this interview I started reflecting about how people are stripped of their humanity, where I later wrote:
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If people are now resources, are they still humans? Obviously in the physical sense. But there is a reality that for someone to be bought and sold, they are objectified to the point that they are helpful like it would be to stand in an aisle of Kroger looking for new cleaning supplies. When is the point that a person no longer is a person and only a commodity?

The movement from person to object is not a clear one. In defining human trafficking, the objectification of people leads to their lack of agency. There is no ability to change the path. As Martha touches upon, “anything that coerces you to stay on the path you don't want to be on… Economically and psychologically. I know that sounds like poverty doesn't it” as well as Tim saying:

Not being under the will or oppression of another person or organization or group. That you are free of that kind of oppression - not enslaved, trapped, being forced against your will. That your will is your will.

The sense of nothing that comes in not having a will, not having any choice, reverberates back to the term slavery. From the museum visitors then, human trafficking is the oppressive force of someone else over another person, not just in the physical sense but with manipulation of emotions, the mind, and the body in order maintain complete control and keep those who are trafficked in the desired place, profession, or path.

Among these definitions is the realization that if people are the desired resource, then people are the problem. The question to define encourages participants to put into words their own conceptualization of the issue. Thus, they are creating and constructing their perception of the issue, encapsulating their experience into a definition upon exiting the exhibit. The reasons or causes for human trafficking illustrate another key thread. Additionally the connection from
people to relationships, meaningful relationships, informs about the context of trafficking. As both Martha and another participant, Barb, shared, “it almost always a friend or someone you know, someone you trust who turned you over into this, into this trafficking stuff” … “like somebody's uncle and then was somebody's parents do it.” These two excerpts state that instances of trafficking often involve a betrayal of trust. They both note that the trafficker is often not a stranger. Barb specifically talks about an uncle or parents who are the traffickers in the situation. They are the bad guys who are perpetuating the issue, propelling it forward because they are willing to break trust to supply the demand. Jon mentions this as well,

I read the board about the women who marry their husbands and then their husbands sell them immediately. Newlyweds are getting sold into slavery for money. Husbands, you know, so he is selling his newly wed wife into…

As a husband, he expands upon this statement by sharing that he could not imagine selling away his wife. He is supposed to be a source of security for her, to protect her. Instead the very person responsible for her is the one who violently and selfishly chooses the money as compared to the person. With his wife standing next to him, the turmoil is evident. They both just try to grasp the depth of trafficking by interrogating those who actually are involved in the system. Jon introduces the Super Bowl XLVIII on February 2, 2014 and the media attention in regards to sex trafficking and traffickers bring women to the game. In the discussion, he alludes to the trafficker's clientele.

...prominent business men and women – because you know it is young boys as well. So it is prominent men and women, like with the Super Bowl, it is not your average everyday ticket holder that’s buying a $300 ticket that’s doing that. It’s your guys buying skyboxes and VIP seats that are doing it on the back end.
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In the excerpt, Jon recognizes those who are creating the demand for sex trafficking. Therefore, there are both those who supply and those who demand. It is profound to realize to investigate the shock of those who are supplying; it is equally shocking to come to terms with who is buying the services offered. As Bob said, prominent men and women, those who are able to afford skyboxes and VIP seats at the Super Bowl, are not the people that are typically associated with the customer role. He stepped into interrogating the perceptions of power, class and gender in conjunction with the exhibit’s portrayal of specifically sex trafficking. It forces me to step away from the assumption that the lowest level of society is participating in trafficking. Instead, those in society that have power and influence due to their money, and I would say, are praised for their role in society, are the ones who are driving the front seat of the trafficking train.

The understandings of such a system underscore how human trafficking really is involved in the business of people. Trafficking does not exist without those who are forced into it but more so those who are willing to sell others into the system. Lindsay directly asks these sorts of questions,

And even like in a, at a higher level - like when is the point when they realize that, oh selling - either someone else selling a persons body or them selling their bodies themselves - is the only resort? You know?

Lindsay seems to know that there is not an answer for these questions. However, she asks them in an attempt to better understand the causes of trafficking. It is not an easy task to decide when the point of no return actually happens but it is an integral question to this facet of human trafficking. The reasons for trafficking are unclear, akin to a murky swamp that the visitors want to make clean. As mentioned earlier, there may be correlations between consumer choices and trafficking, but the economics of the trafficking system more so reflect the business practices of
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any other major marketplace endeavor. Perhaps, human trafficking evades beneath the surface of society:

I don't really exactly know but it gave you the idea that most people don't think of - you see an employee and you assume they are paid. you assume they are making a salary - you don't think that maybe this person you know is forced against their will to continue doing this because they wanted to get out of their country and it you know, indenturing kind of system.

Tim brings into the light the reality that most people do not think about nor realize the pervasiveness of trafficking. The exhibit shares the story of a waitress, who is working diligently at her job but no one who she is serving even takes the time to think that she is in bondage to the owners of the restaurant. There is an overall assumption that if a person is working, which is adding value, they are being compensated for their value added. They are making a salary. In this statement in combination with the exhibit’s illustration of bonded labor, I had to interrogate my own taken-for-granted assumptions about working.

I simply assume that if someone is working, they are being paid. I even mentally praise them for their work because it is good to have a job, a step on the road to success. And if a person is adding value to an organization, whether a restaurant or a corporation, they logically should be compensated for such value.

In my journaling, I see that I do recognize that the monetary compensation does not always match the value being given, for example, with the glass ceiling for female employees. Taking it a step further draws out the question whether or not a person is has made it to the level of being paid. It is not a part of the normal thought process. It is simply assumed.
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Expanding upon the element of work, the different variations of trafficking each bring light to the complexity of human trafficking. Together, the five different kinds of trafficking are a combined beam weird metaphor here; change that is illuminating the issue, especially for those here in the United States. As the exhibit presents each, sex trafficking, domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor, and child labor, they make up the multi-faceted form of human trafficking. As much of the current literature only focuses on one facet of human trafficking, that of sex trafficking, many of the visitors followed the same line of thinking. They overwhelmingly associated human trafficking with only sex trafficking. For example, the Super Bowl XLVIII recently occurred on February 2, 2014 and there was a major flood of media attention given to the issue of trafficking, which has a major impact on awareness regarding the issue. Although most of the information shared used the term trafficking or human trafficking, it was associated specifically with sex trafficking. Barb expressed what it meant for her to hear about trafficking through the Super Bowl.

Actually when they were having the Super Bowl - they talked about bringing kids into the airport and they were teaching the airport workers how to recognize children that were being brought to the Super Bowl for prostitution and then I am thinking 'What?'

In this, Barb unknowingly also highlights the unclear line between prostitution and sex trafficking. The distinction, as mentioned above, is ambiguous. As Barb showed, the interchangeability of sex trafficking and prostitution can cause some confusion. Further, when dealing with the issue of human trafficking, the connotation of sex trafficking as the sole definition is a facet that needs to be addressed.
Therefore, the realization of other ways that slavery plays out in the United States increased participants’ understanding of human trafficking. For example, Jon was shocked to learn about the woman from Cameroon while in the exhibit. He shares a piece of her story.

I guess these other cases, like for instance this woman that came from Cameroon and you know, she’s enslaved in a house in the United States. I mean you don’t think about people enslaving someone in their home now do you? Forcing them to work so. That is kind of eye-opening. A little bit different perspective now than when we walked in here.

He openly processes about people enslaving servants in their homes still today, which is considered domestic servitude. The woman from Cameroon came to the United States and ended up as a trafficked victim, being forced to work as a house servant. John explains this concept as eye opening. The forms of human trafficking in the United States move this particular social phenomenon beyond the mediated understanding of sex trafficking into a realm that was never considered before. It is a different perspective, one that is hard to embrace because it means that the scope of trafficking is larger. The different facets of trafficking do not make human trafficking easier to swallow but just the opposite, more difficult. For those who were in the museum, including those who did not wish to interview with me, shared the heaviness of the topic.

Others such as Tim explained that human trafficking, in all its forms, is not new to him. As an out of town visitor, he explained how close to home the issue really is for him.

I know about it. I live near China Town in New York and a lot of the people in China Town are indentured workers [bonded labor]. Most people in NY don't talk about it. Most people don't really know about it except the people who live in China Town but all those people are indentured.
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Not only does Tim note that it is a huge problem in one of the largest cities in the United States, he makes sure to point out that from his perspective most people do not know about it. There is no talk in the city about the bonded labor, or as he calls it indentured people. Yet, as Tim made the connection to New York’s China Town illustrates that human trafficking as a whole pervades underneath the knowledge or awareness of many here in the United States.

Tim’s example aligns nicely with another taken-for-granted work force, one that Camela mentioned,

It's like when they were talking about people working in tomato farms and being like indentured servants, like where they can't buy their way out. Its kind of like that's a huge issue for Latinos that come from Central America and Mexico to work here seasonally. And they just kind of get stuck.

There are many ways that human trafficking takes root in the home soil. Both Tim and Camela, though, explain how trafficking happens without realizing that both of these demographics are a part of what is considered normal. Migrant workers are not considered victims nor are those who are selling on Canal Street in Manhattan. They appear to be people from other parts of the world who are taking the opportunity to make it. Thus, people are blinded to the bonded labor that is happening all around. It is unseen because it is seen as normal.

Above all, the different facets of trafficking appear to be summed up in two distinct notions, one is that trafficking is ambiguous and the other is that trafficking can occur because it is a part of the taken-for-granted reality of living. The difference between prostitution and sex trafficking or even sex trafficking and human trafficking illustrate just how ways in which people and society communicate surrounding the issue makes for murky waters, especially because communication is the means of understanding and defining human trafficking. Concrete
definitions are difficult to come up with; instead the definition consists of some key pillars such as the lack of will or choice and being forced to do something. Further, the forms that trafficking assume in the United States are not challenged by the rest of society. It is assumed that parents would not sell their children, that waitresses are being paid for their work, and that those who are on the demand side are not society’s prominent business men and women. Therefore, human trafficking has many different facets.

THE PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE EXHIBIT

The final section of analysis steps away from human trafficking as an issue and investigates the exhibit as the location for social construction. Through the exhibit’s physical features, meanings and perceptions of human trafficking emerge. The exhibit’s materiality plays an integral role in audience reception, specifically in connecting particular aspects of the installation to participants personal stories. Further, the gravity of the issue is a major component of the exhibit. As I entered the space for the first time, I made sure to read the walls that are covered in crates stacked on top of each other. Different boxes have different markers that discuss the contents of the crates, such as “11-year-old girl or male, hard worker, needs some discipline.” The exhibit invited me to put myself inside those boxes. The reality of human trafficking is people are shipped like cargo, moved around in crates like property not humans. For me, this side of trafficking is subtle but impactful, the actual transportation of humans in the process of trafficking. The exhibit gives a particular way of understanding transportation, even though there is not a specific section about the movement of trafficking. Instead, both the conceptualization of crates and the feeling of the old warehouse illuminate the one kind of transportation that occurs through crates. There is not as much room to investigate how traffickers can simply walk onto an airplane with a victim or drive a car full of victims all with
seat belts on and air conditioning. The exhibit constructs a scene that allows the audience to interpret transportation and the role of the trafficker. It is much more inhumane to move a person in a crate with notion than it is for one to fly the victim in coach. Therefore, the subtle crate-lined walls also implicate the traffickers, personifying them as evil. The extreme cases where crates are used assist in demonizing the traffickers and really is a unique background for portraying the issue of human trafficking because it creates a stark contrast to the victims. The walls are the canvas to frame what it means to be a victim and the call to be free is even more powerful in this dichotomy. Further, Camela discusses how the traffickers control their victims based on the exhibit.

…They were also saying on one of the fact or myth boards, they were saying that, you know, just because - it doesn't necessarily mean you have to be physically abused to be in slavery. I mean, kids with Stockholm's syndrome, sometimes the threat. Basically they are in control of your emotions, your mind, things like that and that probably sort of goes back to mental slavery in a way.

The exhibit depicts human trafficking through the myth boards, encouraging visitors to come to terms with the myths they may be believing. As Camela says, the reality is that traffickers are not always physically abusive but can control through threats. The coercive power of people is put on display through the myth board that implicates traffickers again. It is important to interrogate the ways that the exhibit constructs human trafficking. Coercion is a tactic that is powerful to gaining submission, according to the exhibit’s discussion of how human trafficking happens. The emphasis on coercion echoes what the walls are saying, that traffickers are evil. They are framed as the worst of humans, who would be willing to treat other people like objects and to manipulate victims through very violent means. The reality of the trafficker is a key indication of the
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exhibit’s ability to engage with museum visitors’ understanding of trafficking. Molly touches on this conceptualization by sharing,

it’s a whole different story when they get abducted or when the child runs away and they get befriended by someone but when the parents actually willing sell them. That’s rough for me to deal with.

The exhibit’s discussion surrounding the trafficker is combined with the idea of relationships that are supposed to trustworthy. Martha acknowledges that there are those are abducted or that some run away and get into the wrong hands. However, the powerful portrayal of traffickers as family members, uncles, parents who *willingly* sell is much more impactful. The exhibit frames traffickers through the multi-layered construction. The walls dehumanize the victims, showcasing how manipulation and threats are very much a part of the trafficking business. Many of the participants introduced the exhibit’s depiction of parents as traffickers, that family members are actual the ones who put their own children into the cycle.

Camela puts it bluntly when she summarizes all of the forms of human trafficking that are explained in the exhibit space.

I don't think you can rank, you know, that those, the kids working in the carpet factory and the girl that has to screw 4,000 men in 2 months. The kid in the carpet factory, that is just as bad to him. I hate it when people get competitive in their misery. Let's just say it is misery and accept it.

Therefore, human trafficking, as she puts it, is misery. She encapsulates the entire issue as one of misery after exiting the exhibit. The victims, the traffickers, the entire space is one of misery. Many of the participants also allude to the struggle with the topic with an important focus on the global scale of the issue. Peter shared at two different times in the interview about the reach of
human trafficking, “It is still an ongoing situation and I thought it was only in the US but actually it is happening all around the world,” and “But actually it happens everywhere in the world. It is not just slavery. It is more than that.” He uniquely notes that it was obvious that the United States had struggled with the issue of slavery with a well-known history. However, he did not realize that other countries also have histories of slavery and further, that it is still going on today. For him, the exhibit took human trafficking to the global level. While Camela discusses that she did not understand just how pervasive human trafficking is, “I thought it was further away. I thought it was larger cities. I thought it was other countries. I thought that there was nothing I could do.” The exhibit creates a sense of pervasiveness in speaking about human trafficking, which visitors articulated. Molly said, “It's just, just the magnitude of it is just, it’s just hurt... It is not easy to look at.” Thus, the exhibit features human trafficking’s pervasiveness. Tyler summarizes the exhibit in saying, “I guess like seeing how pervasive it is everywhere and its an issue that effects everybody.”

As the exhibit, through the forms of trafficking, the stories, faces and statistic, instill the deep reality of the human trafficking as well as the scale. This experience of the exhibit seemed to instigate a personal response for museum visitors. Participants made sense of human trafficking through making a personal connection, not simply a personal implication. Carrie mentioned,

I guess my eyes were opened to more personal level of it as just having a generalization because I mean, even now - I don't have kids but I have nieces and nephews and its like..

One of them can be taken one day. I mean then, it's very personal.

Carrie recognizes the personal nature of the exhibit by taking human trafficking from the generalization to the specific. Thinking about her niece and nephew, there is an intimate response
to human trafficking. Camela, on the other hand, relates the reality of life and punishment on her memories of her own discipline.

I mean if you think about when you grew up - I can never remember getting spanked for doing something bad but what I do remember is when my parents said, “I am so disappointed in you,” or “you really let me down” or its the emotional that - the physical things can heal, you know? It’s the thing that you really take into your soul that you really internalize. That's what lasts.

As she discussed the tactics traffickers use to keep people enslaved, she draws a line from her own experiences when her parents did not use physical punishment but the emotional and psychological disappointment to discipline. In a small way, the realization that those internal hurts are what have impacted Camela, she shares the connection to a trafficker using threats, manipulation, and emotional abuse as a means to trafficking. From her perspective, the internal abuse that hurts a person’s soul is worse as compared to the body, akin to her parent’s disappointment as a child being what lasts over time. Empathizing with those how are trafficked through her internalization of words is powerful to construct, in a small way, what it means to be trafficked.

The exhibit does not explicitly lead museum visitors to make personal connections to the issue. However, the depiction of trafficking stories led participants to share a story from their local community or relating the issue to their own circumstances. They tried to bring human trafficking to their individual lives. It is powerful when the context, illustrations, questions and atmosphere of a museum space can move visitors to a place of self-introspection. For example, one of the participants shared,
I, as a teenager was a victim of rape, and so when looking at the, you know thinking about how one time of that [being raped]... how it changed me. You know thinking about, you know, if it were multiple people, multiple times, multiple, with no hope of escape. You know, I think that was probably [most impactful to me].

The intimacy of the stories and how they can in some way relate draws visitors to construct their own understandings through the exhibit, thus highlighting the multiple readings of the exhibit. This participant openly shared about how sex trafficking is the most difficult form of trafficking for her because she was raped as a teenager. In the conversation, she mentioned that her experience had changed her. Further, she compared the trauma she faced with the potential trauma faced by someone who would have multiple non-consensual sexual encounters. Not all participants made such intimate connections. Instead, most told stories about trafficking making the news in their own communities. The issue being presenting in the exhibit ignited a connection between the museum space and what people associate with their space, their cities, their experiences. Lindsay shared another story about trafficking in Bloomington Indiana, which a small college town in the heart of southern Indiana,

We found that even in Bloomington, there was a group that was attempting to involve - they were basically preying on pregnant women and young single moms - trying to lure them into prostitution by getting them to sign expensive leases that they couldn't afford to keep - under the promise that the boyfriend would pay for them. And then wanted to involve them in prostitution and then involve their children.

In her community, trafficking happens. Not only that, *even in Bloomington* highlights that it is not only in the big cities of the United States. Camela, also from Indiana, shares about what she has heard regarding human trafficking:
I am from Indianapolis and I heard they found like 20 girls from - I don't know - some place in Eastern Europe that were tricked into... They ended up working in prostitution in Kokomo, IN. Its like, that’s, its like “oh my god, if its in Kokomo, its everywhere.”

Even though she discusses the idea of prostitution, the importance of this comment is the recognition of the closeness of the issue. It is difficult to fathom that human trafficking is going on so close to what is considered to be our space, a place that feels known and can be trusted.

Due to the exhibit’s emphasis on human trafficking being also an issue in the United States through the specific story of bonded labor, the exhibit interrupts previous notions of proximity, which is evident as participants discuss their personal connection.

Further, some participants introduced personal situation that they considered red flags in regards to human trafficking. These situations that may never have been looked further into came to the surface because of their experience in the exhibit and the now heightened awareness of the issue. For example, Matt raises his concern with a recent cruise he took.

We went [into the exhibit], like, just feeling unease and uncertain in situations [where we recognize the issue] like we went on a cruise and it sort of had the feeling of like, what are these people's stories? Everyone is international and wears their country of origin on their shirts. Like it kind of, not saying that you know cruise liners do that necessarily, they feel a little exploitative. Yeah, like yucky.

He is not trying to implicate cruise liners and their business practices. However, leaving the exhibit he remembered a situation that made him uneasy, his experience on the cruise made him question the potential role of human trafficking in the cruise staffing. Due to the exhibit’s educational ability to inform visitors about the scope and scale of human trafficking, interview participants reflectively discussed situations where they should have seen red flags. Therefore,
after experiencing *Invisible: Slavery Today* human trafficking as a problem is more visible. More specifically through the interactive section of the exhibit where the question, “how could you be trafficked?” spans the wall and a wooden body visually describes different kinds of vulnerability, the issue of vulnerability to being trafficked makes participants more sensitive to circumstances that raise red flags. In this, I recorded, in my journal, my processing of how the exhibit could build a bridge between museum visitors and victims, making people almost fearful of being trafficked.

I wonder how many of the participants are truly at risk for trafficking. Does the exhibit in its construction of human trafficking emphasize the pervasiveness of the issue, thus creating a fear that ‘It could happen to me or someone I love”? Some mentioned their children, wanting to educate their sisters and protect their little loved ones. But how would they really be trafficked? The part of the exhibit that asks how can you be trafficked highlights this fear appeal. The piece seems to be saying you are in danger too.

As the interviewer, I questioned the exhibit’s “how could you be trafficked?” question in juxtaposition to a display educating visitors on those vulnerable to being trafficking and demographics of victims to make connections to its visitors. In particular the very materiality of this section involves the fear appeal that trafficking could happen to anyone. In my participant responses, this appeal appears to be transferred to this could happen to someone I love, like my child. Somewhat ironically, the same question, “how could you be trafficked?” ignited in participants a sense of gratitude for their lives thus far. One person mentioned, “and you think, it makes you really think like about how lucky you are and that you didn't end up in any kind of situation like that.”
Participants utilized their interaction with statistics, the stories of victims, the videos and the exhibit’s wall displays to construct their own understanding of human trafficking. Their personal connection to the issue, whether in their communities or red flags that arose from their exposure to the installation, is a monumental aspect of how the Invisible: Slavery Today is socially constructed. By this, the exhibit uniquely brings the issue not only to home but also to heart. The rest of the museum gives a history lesson, while this installation brings to light a current problem that many participants understood through their connection to it. As Molly said, “I felt very heavy, kind of overwhelming. I think maybe because downstairs you are looking at the past and so, you know, to look at the present”

In the same way that the exhibit invited visitors into a space where they could construct meanings with their own experiences, the space tangibly constructed its own conceptualization of human trafficking through its atmosphere and spatial elements. More specifically, to do this, the exhibit utilized strategic lighting. Participants commented on the difference between the two rooms of the exhibit, highlighting the change from one to another. Therefore, the dark and light metaphor in alignment with unfreedom and freedom are highly constructed ways to present and educate visitors about human trafficking.

In speaking about the first room, Carrie describes the art while also highlighting how the first room affects her experience of human trafficking

It [the first room of the exhibit] feels like oppressive, a lot of like strange, like the art that they choose for it is really, really weird. There is like a lot of trash, old cans and crates and to try, it feels kind of oppressive. Then reading all the stuff on the walls and all of the stories, it kind of adds to that experience.
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The oppressive atmosphere in combination with exhibit elements creates a strange experience. What would be considered trash out on the street is being displayed in a museum, which as she puts it is weird to see and understand. Yet, the visitors do experience the oppression in the darkness of the room, the ways that the exhibit portrays human trafficking. It is important to note this because the exhibit is creating a specific feeling of oppression. Carrie could have used other words to describe the nature of the installation but instead she, and other participants, categorized the feel as oppressive and heavy. Therefore, the exhibit is constructing a lens through which to see the issue, one that is ominous and weighty. The exhibit pants a picture of trafficking with the words and the stories but it also utilize the material space and tangible lighting as part of making the experience. Tim later said about the exhibit:

You get kind of sucked inside [the exhibit] first before you like know where you are.

People are not going to be like 'Oh I can go learn about oppression and you know, go hang out in it'. Oh I got trafficked in, trafficked today. That's amazing.

He describes going into the exhibit not knowing what he was actually getting himself into. He then figures it out and later shared:

Yeah actually, honestly there is the escape sign and I really kind of made a beeline for that. Like I saw escape and I was like, “Oh I want to escape this. I do not want to be in this.” And I was very happy to come back into this second part with solutions and color and clean and like nice, happy - here is what we can do - contact your local state governor, that kind of stuff. But I saw escape and I was like, that is where I am going.

He associates the similarities in the introduction to human trafficking while in the exhibit with the true experience of being trafficked. The exhibit figuratively traps him in and he went directly towards what he saw was the escape; entering into a second room with solutions to the dark
problems he had just escaped. It is a profound connection that the exhibit, at least for Tim, attempts to actually make visitors feel the cycle of trafficking. The beginning of the exhibit is a dark and narrow hallway that introduces you to the five types of human trafficking through visual depictions of victims. However, the entrance does not quite explain the depth of what museum visitors are entering into in the sense of human trafficking. Then walking into the second room with dark lighting but more open space is like being simultaneously intrigued with videos and installations and being trapped by the very issue at hand. That is until walking through the doorway that exclaims escape into a room of solutions. “The stories are really sad but what I loved was when you come out of the dark part, there is this bright room and it says, 'what can you do?'”

In addition, the exhibit features areas that allow visitors to explore different aspects of human trafficking. One specific area in the first room is the central installation about sex trafficking (see Appendix A). In particular, one of the four sides of the installation is a glass window to gaze upon a labyrinth of walls, dead-ends and mattresses. The image reflects a brothel environment and Tim describes how this particular image relates to the experience of trafficking.

Yeah I mean the maze with the mattresses. The idea that you are isolated. You are brought around. You are consumed. You don't know where you are. You know put somebody in that situation. It is not easy to do that with somebody. Give them a place to like imagine themselves in this situation.

He is profoundly in tune with what this side of the installation is communicating not only in the material replica but in the isolation and experiences that come with the maze. This piece of the exhibit transplants museum visitors to a brothel and allows them visualize the maze from a bird’s eye view. The dead ends and intricate passageways are clear, inviting participants to imagine
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themselves in the midst of the maze. As Tim says, feelings like being isolated, consumed, and lost.

In contrast to *Invisible: Slavery Today*’s entrance and first room that highlight the issue of human trafficking, the second space showcases what is being done to bring freedom and 21st century abolitionists who are doing it. Lindsay directly spoke about the change when moving into the abolitionist room.

It's weird this [second] room is so much brighter and I think that is intentional because they, you know, like this is a dark situation, a dark place but you know there are ways out. There are people trying to help, which obviously is a good thing. The somber does quite go away yet.

She recognizes what happens as visitors go through the exhibit, the change from one room to the next. The second room is brighter, clean and colorful as Tim discussed. Like the old saying, there is light at the end of the tunnel, both figuratively as the exhibit shows those who have been rescued but also literally as the lighting dynamics of the space change. Similarly, Camela responded to the question about the atmosphere by engaging with both the first and second spaces.

I think it [the first space] was still, it was still a lot of feeling, feeling a little overwhelmed still. But it [the second space] was more, at least, there was hope and encouragement to see the faces of the people who did get away. And you know, I was having to remind myself to not just think about the ones that are still enslaved but to think about the ones who got away so it motivates me.

The threshold into the abolitionist room offsets the difficulty of the first space. It does not take away completely the heaviness of the first part, however, the exhibit ends on a bright note, one
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that is motivational and encouraging to the visitors. The contrast between the darkness of human trafficking with the lightness of those who are rescuing victims and the stories of survivors are in tension as visitors experience the entire exhibit. There is a back and forth between the hard reality of the issue and the stories of those fighting for the enslaved, which the exhibit instigates in the lighting. The tension is one where there is no solution, however, the opposing feelings create a space for reflexive thought such as with both Lindsay and Camela, who share about the heaviness never really leaving. It is good to be reminded of the successful stories, however, these do not eradicate the difficulty of how the exhibit portrays human trafficking. To sum it all up, one participant said, “I mean there were lots of it that I didn't like. I didn't like looking at but I thought it was really well done and really powerful.”

In alignment with the tension the exhibit creates through the atmosphere, another common comment arose from my interviews regarding slavery of the past and the issue today. The Freedom Center as a museum is about the National Underground Railroad and slavery of the past. Yet, this installation is telling another story about what is happening today. Therefore, Invisible: Slavery Today is constructing a conceptualization of slavery that exists in the present, which is most foundationally connected to the context of the exhibit. Molly distinctly questioned this:

Why is this still happening? …[I thought] That we have dealt with [slavery]. That is in the past. Something that has been dealt with, that we thought we moved past and you walk here and you realize that not everyone has moved past it.

Richard echoes these sentiments,

I thought that it [slavery] was already.. Uh I thought it was something already, a past due issue, like something that had been before but is not happening any more.
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Therefore, the exhibit introduces a relevant issue to visitors while being situated in a museum that is known for being about the past. Particular in this is the construction that human trafficking is truly modern day slavery through stories of recent victims, the words *slavery today* in installation’s title and current news about rescue work. Further the realization the human trafficking is a global and national issue connects visitors to today’s problem, in the here and now. It is pervasive and present in today’s world. The exhibit, then by its very existence, plays a major role in illuminating what is happening currently and forcing visitors to wrestle with the implications of human trafficking existence today. Molly registers the struggle between what is in the past and the current situation, utilizing the exhibit specifically inside the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center as the foundation for her construction.

Like it’s a shameful or humiliating, like that this is an issue. Everything that we came out of over there, we came over, we came above that and now you walk over here and you realize. You know, just like there was a quote on the wall over there about using the Underground Railroad to get people out of slavery and now they use the underground system to, criminals use the underground system to get them into it.

The correlation of what used to happen to rescue slaves and how slavery is being kept underground today is profound. The connection to history because museum visitors spend time in the other exhibits where they explore a slave pen, watch a video about the civil rights movement, and read about *12 Years A Slave*. The context of *Invisible: Slavery Today* is an environment, which does bring a sense of shame and humiliation and is incorporated into the exhibit due to its situated location. After personal reflection, I realized that the exhibit presents a unique and intriguing dichotomy being situated in the Freedom Center. The museum is about freedom but in this, the center also must be about slavery, which my notes expressed.
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This exhibit sits amidst an entire center about freedom. It is the Freedom Center but is sharing what is happening today, which is not freedom. The contradictions between learning about the past and seeing the present are a perfect backdrop for the issue. There could even be a foreshadowing that in the future the Freedom Center will display the ways that this sort of slavery was overcome.

Altogether, the physical space embedded in the Freedom Center is integral in the social construction process. The exhibit equips visitors with an installation about modern day slavery. It also utilizes specific elements, such as the atmospheric lighting, installations about vulnerability and sex trafficking, the continuity between the past and present, the subtle invitation for personal connections, and overall reality of the issue, to construct its own version of human trafficking. It is not to say that it is an incorrect conceptualization being played out through the intentional choosing of materials, words, and orientations. It is important to recognize there with every selection there is also something that is being discarded. However with that being said, the exhibit creates a place for versions of human trafficking to come into existence as the audience interprets what is being said. The social construction piece comes into play as I try to understand what participants understand because they only have the opportunity to process certain aspects of human trafficking.

Therefore, the analysis of my interviews involves the interweaving of these three major themes. Understanding human trafficking through an American lens, the different facets of human trafficking, and the exhibit as social construction and materiality illustrates the audience responses to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center’s *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit. In the following discussion, I address my research questions specifically, considering the relationships between emergent meaning and the exhibit’s features. Finally, I discuss how I
believe the exhibit is communicatively performing well and highlight some recommendations for future growth based on participants’ comments.
Chapter 4 | DISCUSSION

The *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit is a space that invites visitors to learn about human trafficking. Through the visual elements, spatial qualities and overall message, it is inviting museum visitors into a space to learn and create meanings surrounding human trafficking. It is a way to understand human trafficking, the different forms that it takes, in a museum setting. There is meaning behind the layout, the choice of materials, the lighting and the specific words that tell the story of victims. It is not only the curator that is part of the social construction process but the visitors to the exhibit engage in this same process as they experience and interpret the messages. The audience reception is, thus, an integral piece in understanding how the space functions communicatively. By tapping into participants’ construction process, deeper understandings of human trafficking are framed and understood being rooted in the exhibit’s illustrations and definitions of the issue. Participants’ understanding of what the reality of life is for those who are trafficked resonates throughout the interviews. Although many had some previous knowledge of human trafficking, the scope, gravity and proximity of human trafficking captivates the audience through making one’s way through the exhibit.

The goal of this project was to investigate the meanings of human trafficking that emerge from the audience responses to the Freedom Center’s *Invisible: Slavery Today* exhibit as well as reflexively analyze how visitors utilize the space to understand the issue. To do so, I used a qualitative approach to hearing and analyzing visitors understanding of human trafficking. My research is not only valuable for the sake of understanding how museum exhibits perform communicatively but also that my analysis approaches the space in a new way. I sought to answer two particular research questions. 1) What meanings of human trafficking emerge from
audiences’ responses to the exhibit? 2) What specific physical elements in the exhibit invite for audience interpretation and understanding of human trafficking?

Through analyzing interviews with visitors three overarching themes emerged. First, the exhibit constructs and critiques human trafficking as an American phenomenon, which visitors then understood their individual role in the issue. The need for humanitarian efforts, specifically the exhibit’s call to action, highlight the American lens through which human trafficking is created. Also, visitors discussed the different facets of human trafficking. By defining the issue and digging into the reasons for human trafficking, visitors processed through the ways that human trafficking plays out, particularly in the US. Finally, the physical features of the exhibit allowed visitors into a unique space to feel and experience human trafficking. The exhibit materiality interacts with the audience, shaping and playing an integral role in understanding the issue. For example, visitors responded to the exhibit with personal stories, those they had heard and others that were part of their own stories. Altogether, the audience’ responses inform how visitors used the space to understand the issue as well as how the exhibit encouraged those certain experiences.

This research is only the beginning in regards to human trafficking research and a supplemental work to what already exists surrounding sex trafficking. A particular location bounded this study, meaning that the findings cannot be generalized on a larger scale. However, there is room for further research. Seeking to understand how the American population makes sense of human trafficking is critical. I utilized a space that is designated to addressing the issue; yet, a museum is not the only avenue for information. It will be important in the future to continue finding spaces that are integral in constructing dominant attitudes surrounding human trafficking, for example the media. Further, this research has the potential to open a new
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perspective on the connection between social change and museums targeting current social issues. My emphasis on understanding perceptions through audience response is potentially valuable to shed light and understanding on how to understand other social issues as well as join the cause through advocacy and awareness. By understanding how dominant perceptions shape and create the meaning of human trafficking in the context of the Freedom Center, social movements and anti-trafficking organizations can better address the community who are influenced by this particular portrayal of human trafficking.

I believe it would be beneficial for the communication discipline to insert itself between the legal discourse of human trafficking and community engagement. As discussed in the literature review, VTVPA is in place to protect victims and prosecute traffickers. Yet, there is a definite gap in knowledge surrounding the issue from the side of the community. There is an inaccurate understanding its pervasiveness or that sex trafficking is only one type of human trafficking as was the experience of most of the participants before coming to the exhibit. Thus, policy efforts are not fully able to flourish because the proximity and scope of human trafficking is not in the realm of the community conscious. Communication scholars could be a bridge spanning the policy research, which is important, however, translating that research to the community is lacking. There is much to celebrate with education regarding the issue and those who are part of the anti-trafficking movement. Yet, communication research can be the connection point between the true. Particularly in the role of activism, communication bridges between the legal policies and implementation. Practically speaking, communication research can emulate health communication research, which has had great success in communicating health issues to specific communities and critically interrogating the means, context, culture and other dynamics at play in the translation process. Further, I believe that in future research, there
is an opportunity to re-create perceptions of human trafficking. My research is just stepping into how an American audience understand human trafficking, including little glimpses into the taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding the issue like that it is a foreign issue or that it is only sex trafficking. Ensuring that dominant attitudes are accurate is a major implication of such research, which can affect policy, health, activism, and so on. All of these potential implications support the importance for this research in order to improve the current academic situation but also achieve social goals.

In conclusion, the exhibit is an extremely accomplished and successful space for understanding human trafficking. First, much of participant’s understanding of trafficking before coming to the exhibit associated human trafficking with only sex trafficking. *Invisible: Slavery Today* discusses and educates on all five forms of human trafficking, which further include domestic servitude, forced labor, bonded labor and child labor. As the analysis shows, the scope and gravity of the issue were major take-aways for museum visitors. Second, the exhibit brings the issue home to the United States. Visitors read about a real story of trafficking in the US, which is bridging the gap between the attitudes of “this is not our problem” and “it happens here.” Lindsay’s closing remarks bring this point home.

I thought everything was just. just so amazing and interesting… The actual stories, making it real and bring names, actual faces to all of it. Um. Makes it more real. Makes it hit a little harder. Yeah it makes it a little rough. Yeah, when you through the other one, which it is sad as well but there, you know, older and you hear about all this. But these are people our age and younger than us who are going through all of this so it makes it hard. That we have dealt with. That is in the past. Something that has been dealt with,
that we thought we moved past and you walk here and you realize that not everyone has moved past it.

Through the interviews, it is clear that the exhibit’s content and context caused visitors to really analyze their feelings about how near trafficking exists, whether that was shared through personal stories or forward comments about their shock. Overall, participants only had applauds for *Invisible: Slavery Today* and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Tim who connected deeply with the exhibits features, said:

> Yeah it was good. It was, I mean, good typography. Good uh use of materials - printing on the napkins, tablecloths and it was a very thoughtful exhibition. Somebody really really thought about this and designed this. It was really great... It is not an art exhibition. It is a very different kind of exhibition. There are not a lot of these kind of exhibitions, at least in New York City. Well Good. Good for whoever is making this happen.

While other shorter comments included, “I guess for a first time through and a first, real introduction - it was very good. I learned a lot more and learned things that were missing and all that,” “I mean there were lots of it that I didn't like. I didn't like looking at but I thought it was really well done and really powerful,” or “I liked it. I feel more educated about it. Yeah. I didn't like the subject but I like being able learn more… It makes me more aware.” The only point of struggle for participants was the actual topic of human trafficking, like one participant shared:

> Yeah I mean I liked all of it pretty much. Yeah. It's brief enough. It's two rooms. I feel like if it was like a whole floor, it might get a little bit like I don't know, like too much - kinda feel like I have to go, to leave. And so, it is so brief and I feel like it does a good job sort of like, chunking the different types of servitude, you know what I mean. And
like it puts it in a really easy to understand way.

Even in this, visitors did not regret their visit. Instead, they praised the Freeom Center for taking a step to illuminate human trafficking in its entirety. To this, I agree and applaud the Freedom Center for its initiative to create this exhibit and not only that, but to build a space that powerfully connects with museum visitors and truly allows them to engage with human trafficking in a way never done before. Paige’s final description *Invisible: Slavery Today* puts it best.

I think that it also gave you a supposed, a feeling of being trapped and I think they did a really good job of that, with the lighting and sounds and that. And also, I noticed were you were that very narrow passage. You couldn't get of there without going by you. It is like who is she? and that whole thing. And I felt like that was all purposeful. But it doesn't have a sense of hopelessness. That is not, to me, a part of the exhibit because I mean the whole problem is so bleak and as an individual we are so powerless to significantly do anything about it that you could just slit your wrists in terms of life in general to this bleakness. But the exhibit, to me, did not. That was not the emotion that was there in terms of.. as the person because they showed you the organizations that are working.. so there is hope...
Appendix A
Appendix B

Recruitment Script

Throughout my time on-site, I engaged with 26 of participants utilizing the script below. Of those 26 persons, 15 were willing to interview with me, in which my discussion with them moved to the interview protocol.

Hi, my name is Alyse Zook. I am a Master’s student at the University of Cincinnati. I am working on my thesis, trying to understand how people make sense of sex trafficking in the United States. In order to do this, I am asking visitors to have a short discussion with me after going through this exhibit. It would take roughly 20 minutes if you are available. I would love to be able to discuss and hear from you about your thoughts.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Hello. I am a graduate student at the University of Cincinnati. I am working on a project to understand your experiences at the exhibit you just visited, and your perceptions of human trafficking in the United States.

Thank you very much for being willing to take time and speak with me today. Our conversation today will remain strictly confidential. As we agreed, this interview will last 25-30 minutes. Also, I have an informed consent form here that has some information about your participation and this project. Please take a minute to read this, and at the bottom, please sign your name should you choose to participate. If you have any questions or concerns from the document, please feel free to ask me before you sign. If it would be more helpful, I am happy to go over the informed consent form with you. I have another copy of the consent form for you to take with you.
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Would it be okay if I audiotape our conversation? This will help me focus on our conversation and maintain active listening and eye contact throughout our discussion. Only me, my faculty advisor and the members of University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board, if necessary, will be able to access my data. And as noted in the informed consent form, specific measures will be taken to protect your identity in reporting your experiences in the findings of this study. Your identity will not be disclosed at any point in time.

1. How did you learn about the Freedom Center?
2. Why did you decide to visit this specific installation (Invisible: Slavery Today)?
3. What struck you most about Invisible: Slavery Today?
4. Share some of your thoughts and feelings about human trafficking before coming to the Freedom Center.
5. Was there a particular part of your experience today that you thought was most insightful to your understanding of human trafficking?
6. How did the atmosphere of the space make you feel?
7. [Follow up to Question 6] Was there anything striking to you about the atmosphere of the exhibit?
8. Did this exhibit in any other ways change your perceptions of this issue?
9. Were there any parts of the installation that you did not like or understand?
10. What did you think about the five personal stories?
11. Would you engage in any action related to this issue after visiting this exhibit?
12. What could the exhibit do better? If anything
Appendix D

Open Coding

1. Vicious Cycle
2. India as site of Sex Trafficking
3. Involvement Children
4. Old versus Current Issue
5. Feelings of Light verses Darkness
6. Consumptive Efforts/Personal Contributions
7. Unfreedom and Trafficking
8. Human Trafficking Definitions
9. Reality of the Issue/Life
10. Global Scale
11. Personal Experiences
12. Elicit Responses/Individual Call to Action
13. Humanitarianism/Empowerment
14. Hard Knowledge verses Easy Ignorance
15. Prostitution verses Slavery
16. Exhibit Features
17. Reasons/Causes for Human Trafficking
18. Forms of Human Trafficking in US
19. Sex Trafficking as Human Trafficking
20. Organizational Involvement
21. Ohio’s Role
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22. 400 Men Narrative

23. Museum Text verses Other Texts

24. Is Human Trafficking bad?

25. First Introduction v. Previous Knowledge

26. American Understanding of Life verses Other Parts of the World

Axial Coding

American Way of Life and its Impact on Human Trafficking

Different Kinds of Human Trafficking

Exhibit frame of Human Trafficking

Construction of Meaning Around Human Trafficking

Selective Coding

Understanding Human Trafficking Through American Lens

Different Facets of Human Trafficking

The Physical Features of the Exhibit
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Appendix E

Open Coding

Personal Notes

* reflection on how |
  responded (frustration) |
  + some respondents
  + truthfully critical

* cultural barriers
  ≠ universal truth
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Axial Coding

Selective Coding
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