

U.S. Media's Failure to Set the Agenda for Covering Sex Trafficking

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Abstract

The sex trafficking industry poses a clear and present threat in society, but the American public seems to be unaware of the gravity of the issue within the U.S. Analyzing the agenda setting theory by focusing on stories on the New York Times and CNN websites gives evidence that the media failed to inform the public. The public's lack of awareness was found to be due to the presence of social media and the birth of online newspapers. For a bigger impact, the media can create a social consensus through more high profile articles and personal stories and place them in prominent, high trafficked areas of their websites.

I. An Outlook of the Sex Trading Industry

Human trafficking is a broad and multifaceted issue, which contains the illegal activity of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking falls under the umbrella of human trafficking, but is specifically targeted at exploiting, vandalizing and coercing women and children into sex without their consent. This form of modern day slavery has been a problem around the world for centuries, but the realization that millions of people are being trafficked specifically for sex in the United States has only recently been covered as a top story within the past two years. The number of people who are actually aware of the problem appears to be shockingly low, although human trafficking is the second largest illicit business in the world.

This is not a new problem at all. In the 1900s America shipped workers from China for the purpose of forced labor, which also led to the selling of Chinese girls because of their erotic appeal (Shelly 237). The other issue, both abroad and in the U.S., that has created barriers in attempts to fight the issue is the perception that these women are prostitutes and therefore are choosing it as a career. Prostitution became more public and even accepted during the late 19th century because it would "provide sexual outlets for military men and laborers in metropolitan and colonial areas . . . by ensuring police oversight of brothel areas, state officials and their supporters believed they could provide for men's presumed sexual needs, maintain public health and social order" (Limoncelli 7). This "necessity" meant that women were starting to be trafficked to fill brothels over borders like cattle throughout the world.

Evidence of this problem is seen in the League of Nation's documents. There have been conventions in 1904, 1910, and 1921 to fight trafficking through anti-trafficking laws (Limoncelli 8). More recently in 1978, the United Nations held another convention and drafted rights for immigrants, but it was not signed until 1990 and not enforced until 2003. By 2005 only 27 countries had ratified the treaty (Naim 103). This shows the slow progression of laws and action at the governmental level.

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The other reason sex trafficking has particularly received little attention in the past was due to the perceived value and rights of women. In many countries and cultures, women were not seen as important or equal with men. The International Abolitions Federation helped to show that all women, including prostitutes, deserved equality, justice and liberation (Limoncelli 51). Fighting against stereotypes that trafficked women were prostitutes further stifle the call to action. In 1935 the secretary for the British committee of the International Abolitionist Federation said, "I have always believed that if you believe in liberty you will see to it that your weakest link in the chain is secure. The weakest link is the prostitute since few people care whether she is justly treated or not" (69). Her argument then is still pertinent today, as the fight for the marginalized and hurt needs to be societies' first priority.

Anti-sex trafficking awareness fell out of the public light until the 1980s, when the fall of the Soviet Union combined with the start of globalization sparked the return of trafficking at a global level (Limoncelli 150). The reemergence of trafficking no longer took the old form, but with the accessibility of the Internet and new technology, traffickers were now able to communicate around the world to move a woman to the desired customer.

With the fall of the Soviet Bloc, there was hope of new freedom. Ironically, slavery of women has increased to tens of thousands of girls being exported from Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Russia (Naim 92). Before the 1990s trafficking was mainly geared toward mail-order brides, but once the Soviet Union collapsed, a new sex market emerged, facilitated by criminal groups operating internationally (Kelly 87). Today, traffickers, or pimps, are able to take the women and children across borders more easily due to the international gang movement. Gangs no longer operate in one area, but members are located across the world, just as they are spread across the U.S. (Shelly 232). With the increase of communication, trafficking women from one country or state to another is easier.

A third major problem is the economic gain combined with political corruption and government failure. In China alone, there is an estimated profit of \$1-3 billion a year in smuggling women (Naim 88). This is partly made possible by the political corruption to help deport women out of the country. Some Chinese coast guards "conveniently disappear" when a shipload of illegal girls are sent out to another country (101). The problem that has been seen across borders is that "those in charge of curbing these illicit businesses are in fact personally profiting from them" (100). In the past, the problem was addressed by helping those victims, but the issue is rooted in the economic gain that is driving the industry.

Sex trafficking is on the rise in the 21st century due to the slow process of governments creating, signing and then enforcing new laws. Looking into multiple forms of illicit activities, Robert Kelly reported that "the favorable economic conditions also provide an environment conducive to transnational crime . . . the global commerce system offers so many opportunities for rapid growth that law enforcement agencies cannot keep pace" (Kelly 7). With acts and laws taking three to ten years to be ratified, nothing is stopping this profitable trade. The laws, however, are seen as a threat to globalization because the basic nature of the acts are calling for increased border security, less trade between nations and enforcing ways to make travel between nations more expensive (Naim 107). Governments have to take away the profit motive by making the consequences severe enough in order to tackle the core of the issue. While data for illegal activity is hard to confirm, and is usually underestimated, the Trafficking In Person (TIP) recently reported that the industry generates about \$57 billion by trafficking 800,000 women and children each year (Parrot 9). The supply and demand chain is how the industry keeps growing. Unlike other illicit trade, such as drugs or weapons, people can be used again and again, and so supply does not get depleted (Kelly 87). In Cambodia alone girls are forced to serve 7-10 men a day, maybe more if the girls are younger because they are seen as more desirable (Parrot 10). In the United States the Polaris Project reported that Latino gangs in particular have women serve 20 to 35 men a day for 15 minutes costing the men \$30 each (Comparison Chart). Their bodies are used and abused until they are no longer profitable and then they are literally thrown out.

The industry is able to find so many children and women because of the dire social condition in which they are found. The one child law in China, the destructive nature and displacement of war or the status of being an illegal immigrant in the U.S. all feed into the industry (Parrot 12). Pimps use the allure and promise of giving the girls a better life or giving them passage into the United States. But once they arrive in America, their passports that have often been bought in the black market are taken from them and they are told they have to work off their "debt" to the pimps before they are released. This debt is usually intangible and simply made up by the traffickers (Naim 95). Due to the abuse, both physical and mental, fear of being caught by authorities and the threat of hurting their family, the trafficked victims are bonded to their pimps. Being seen

as illegal immigrants also has made it difficult for the victims to seek any help from authorities in the past, especially in America. Police have arrested some of these women for being illegally in the U.S. or for being prostitutes instead of arresting the pimps or buyers of the sex (Bennets). Illegal drugs are also the main way the pimps are able to bind their victims, since they force them to become addicted so they stay with or come back to their owners in order to feed their forced addiction (Shelly 241). The combination of seeking a better job or life, parents selling their children for money to merely survive, economic imbalance, unequal rights for women, political corruption and economic gain all have made the sex trafficking industry the fastest growing illicit trade in the world.

Analysis of this issue in the United States gives perspective to how the industry has grown and changed with little coverage on the degree and danger of the problem. There are three different aspects that have resulted in 100,000 to 300,000 child victims of sex trafficking in the U.S. each year, which do not include the thousands of women trafficked into the U.S. for sex ("Media Coverage"). First, the girls are not only brought in from other countries, but are often kidnapped or coerced into the industry due to lack of means to survive or with promises of love or a better life. Often the trafficked woman knows the pimp. Girls and women from within the U.S. are preferred since transporting them across the borders is not needed. The another major contributor to the sex industry is pornography. Over \$9 billion is spent on pornography each year (Parrot 8). This small subset of sex trafficking is often forgotten due to its being online. Women and children are still forced to participate, as shown in one sex video called "Rape Camp." The women in the video were from Cambodia, but the video could be seen in the U.S. The men could choose how the women would be humiliated and tortured through voting over the Internet. While the creator was arrested by Cambodian authorities, the site still stayed up because the server was based in the U.S. (9). Finally, the sex trafficking industry primarily started as mail order brides but has expanded into a network of shipping and selling women across the U.S. "The boom in trafficking women and children for sex has utilized the Internet to display the wares in cyberspace equivalent of slave auctions . . . women are listed 'for sale' on the web at several points of the supply chain" (Naim 102).

Another misconception is that trafficking only happens near the border or in a few big cities. This is an epidemic that has reached far across the nation and into suburban areas. The most recent studies have found that "Johns," or men who buy the women, live primarily in the most affluent counties in the U.S. like "in Montgomery and Fairfax counties, around Washington D.C., and in states with a strong commitment to the welfare of their citizens, like Minnesota" (Shelly 246). California, Florida and Texas, due to their location near the coast or the border, are the top states with trafficked women, and North Carolina is rising since most trafficking happens on trucking routes (241). The connection of highways 85/40/95, with the immigrant working force in the area plus one of the largest military bases, makes it a prime place for traffickers to travel to (252). The U.S. is one of the leading countries introducing legislation to stop trafficking, but there is still a lag between drafting laws and arresting the actual pimps and Johns. Presently, people who are caught with marijuana have to spend more time in jail than someone caught trafficking women and girls (Naim 104). These facts only begin to scratch the surface of the underground sex trafficking industry, but also point to the need for this issue to be more prominent among the news and media, not just in the non-profit world.

II. Changing Roles of the Mass Media in Setting Agenda

The agenda-setting theory was proposed by McCombs and Shaw in 1968 and since then has created a strong structure and basis for how the news generates awareness and operates (Takeshita 275). The well-established definition for agenda setting is "the phenomenon of the mass media selecting certain issues and portraying them frequently and prominently, which leads people to perceive those issues as more important than others" (Wu 776). The understanding that the news has this power also presents a responsibility for reporters to seek out and portray critical and unjust problems in society. The immense number of studies on the theory have shown the effects and responses of the public when the news is able to "set the agenda." Yet, the emergence of the Internet and newspapers going online, as well as clips of TV being found on the different websites, have started to weaken the power of reporters to set the national agenda.

Agenda setting should not be confused with "framing," which is concerned with how the news portrays an issue. Framing is not based on the issue itself, but more the applicability of the issue after it is reported (Scheufele 15). The distinction is important because the main issue of sex trafficking already has a particular

perception, but the problem is the frequency of news media and so awareness of the issue.

Another aspect of this theory is called second-level agenda setting, which is based on the evolution of the agenda-setting theory in the past 30 years. Research in 2009 has proposed that the strength to set the agenda is driven not solely by the frequency but also feelings about the problem (Wu 777). This is strongly correlated with the addition of images to a story to convey the meaning. The study showed that the addition of personal video clips and pictures to create a story to produce a feeling or attitude has only partial correlation to whether the public thought the person in the visuals more prominent or important (781). When looking at international issues instead of politics, second-level agenda setting played more of a role on how the public thought either positively or negatively about a nation due to the media's report on it (Wanta 367). Though, the mere negative or positive portrayal of that country did not automatically determine the participants' view of that country. Both of these findings confirm that second-level could have the potential to convey importance about how people personally felt about the issue, but that the frequency of an issue is still more significant in raising the awareness of issues.

The agenda setting effect of print and broadcasting media outlets also differs. After looking at stories in the *New York Times* and on the national news channel, participants were asked to recall stories that they perceived as the most important. While stories on the news channel seemed to have more impact on what they thought were the most pressing matters in the world, it was the newspaper readers that had a better recall of the stories after a two-week time gap (Hu 233). Salience cues, like stories being displayed on the front page, also played a role in readers' remembering stories and in determining their importance when the readers were asked to recall the stories they read. The category of the top stories they remembered was international problems, followed by the economy. Newspapers had a more powerful influence on an individual's retaining the information of an issue, while broadcast stories had a more initial impact, but were more quickly forgotten (235). The issue of how often a story is repeated and which medium is chosen can have dramatic effects on the perceived importance of the story. This highlights the importance of salience cues.

Salience cues and selection are integral parts of the theory. Agenda setting is determined by which stories are selected by the news media; the salience cues tell the reader or viewer that which story is important. If a story is not printed on a newspaper or given adequate time on television, there are no ways to show that it is important to the general public (Wanta 365). Selection is, therefore, the first step, but cues like the headline displayed in bold, appearing on the front page, or being broadcast on different networks have proven to point the public to issues demanding attention (Conway 41).

A new factor that has disrupted the agenda setting theory slightly is the addition of the Internet, which has blunted salience cues. A study conducted with 15 college students watching a CNN news broadcast and visiting a CNN website confirmed the importance of TV news, but also revealed the fragmentation the Internet brought to the perception of news importance. The students ranked the importance of stories more consistently with each other after watching their broadcasts than when they ranked the top stories immensely differently after going online (Conway 43). The important stories on TV were determined by salience cues, but the stories that the participants chose online were decided based on their interest. The stories that were perceived as more exciting, like a car race, were remembered more easily by the participants, but they were ranked less important by both the online users and TV watchers (45). The two studies highlighted the inconsistencies in the agenda setting theory. Salience cues like length guided viewers to identify the most important stories on TV, but the absence of prompts online led readers to veer from the media's intended prominent stories.

With the increasing use of the Internet for seeking and gaining information, other studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of agenda setting. The theory may now suggest a loss of consensus on main issues among the general public. In one study, some participants read the online version of the *New York Times* and others read the print version for a total of one week, and then were asked to rank the most important stories. The online readers had broader responses to the question of what was important, as the online channel gave more choices on stories that the individual identifies with. Print readers chose the stories that in general had more cues, bigger headline, on the front page, etc., and were less varied in their responses (Althaus 179). It was reported that "online news sites encourage users to be highly selective in their consumption of news content . . . readers of printed newspapers are likely to be exposed to stories that they might not have been actively seeking, particularly if those stories appear on the front page. In contrast, online newspapers tend to organize the news into topical categories that draw readers immediately to those stories most likely to fit their information preferences" (182). This process of division and personal selection could lead to a public that is ill-informed and divided on issue importance (Takeshita 285). In the past, agenda setting was a tool

that helped build consensus and build themes for the public.

The role of the media has helped bring together different demographics to form shared experiences, but with the increasing use of the Internet as a primary news source, the news is being tailored by the individual (Althaus 197). The Internet created an environment that enables people to connect with like-minded others around the world and “make the identification with special-interest agendas more likely. The disruption of broadly shared public agendas, which the traditional mass media have helped sustain, would likely maximize social cleavages” (Takeshita 286). Personalization has been implied as a positive development since the gatekeeping role of journalists might be dispelled and more accountability is demanded (Althaus 198). Journalists can no longer form the consensus, but are made to be experts in specific areas to find out the truth. This could mean the end of the media setting the agenda, but there are still reports that people will not completely shift to online news sources. Thus, the discussion of issues online is based on the amount of coverage they receive on TV. Research still has yet to be done on the influence that blogs have on the news and the topics that are chosen or discussed (Takeshita 289). The idea that everyone is a journalist removes the role of gatekeeping by the media, and also removes the hierarchal nature of bringing the nation together around one issue, since now every person can report on their personal agenda.

The final issue relevant to agenda setting is the actual type of story and the priming effect of a story. When the mass media try to set the agenda by reiterating it, there is a danger of desensitizing the public if the story is overplayed. When a group was instructed to watch crime stories during the news broadcast, researchers found participants were ambivalent to the violence, as present culture has amplified the occurrence of violence in order to entertain and captivate the audience. In the news, homicides took up 29% of the total broadcast time on average, but only accounted for 2% of all crimes in America (Young 1676). This sensationalistic style reflects the research that a story creating fear is perceived to be more important than otherwise.

There is another limitation that journalists must consider. Reversal theory by Apter has countered the sensationalistic type of reporting. He thinks there is a threshold point when the fearful stimuli become too personal and so threatening that people switch from “sensation-seeking” to “sensation-avoiding” (Young 1690). Sensational news keeps the viewers’ attention, but there is a limit to its power. This was further supported by the finding of a study where participants were asked to watch both the local news about crime in their area and then national news about crime. The results were contrary to the original hypothesis that participants would fear more due to the amount and degree of crime in their area reported; instead personal connection to a crime was the main reason that fear was produced after viewing a crime on TV. The fear people felt did not correlate with the degree of importance participants placed on it (Gross 421). The agenda setting power is, therefore, not determined by the personal experiences of the viewers. The study showed that “there is no evidence however, that the news induces people to think or feel about those issues in a certain way. The news may make crime a salient topic for audiences, but it does not make them afraid” (423). Media portrayal and influence is not all-powerful: It helps to sway what topics receive attention but not how people feel about them; this takes personal action and experience.

Understanding the personal component of news was the subject of a study in 2010, which gives powerful insight into agenda setting. The study surveyed participants throughout the 2000 gun control controversy as three events were happening in the news: few violent gun shooting incidents, President Clinton’s address, and a march on Washington for gun control. While the coverage continued for consecutive weeks, the importance of the issue for citizens dramatically increased. What created the most attention and awareness was the public demonstration, not President Clinton’s speech or the shooting. The research showed that citizens thought that the gun law was important due to the response of the march against guns, which was several months after the shooting itself and made the issue “new” again (Smidt 82). The success of the march might be important because it was last in sequence and already supported by the credibility of prominent figures addressing the same issue (85). Combining a dramatic event, a political figure’s address, and then a personal response, led the public to believe in the high importance of an issue and communicated the power of the agenda setting theory. This new research has shed light on the discrepancies and failures of the media to set the agenda about sex trafficking.

III. The *New York Times* Coverage of Sex Trafficking

To see whether the media have succeeded in, or failed at, setting the agenda, the author counted the number of articles in the *New York Times*' website archives regarding sex trafficking in the U.S. Not only counting the number of relevant articles, the author analyzed their content to find their story types. The types were divided into "political," "opinion based," "hard news," "art or movies," "human interest" and "sports coverage." Though the agenda setting theory focuses on accessibility and frequency, the types of articles written on sex trafficking in the U.S. could reveal the reason the weight of this issue has not been registered in the public eye.

When the author entered "sex trafficking" into the search bar of the New York Times homepage, a total of 5,080 results were generated. When the option of 'articles only' was selected, deleting all blogs from the search, the number came down to 1,030 articles. In comparison, search words of "drug trafficking" generated 11,040 results and 4,530 articles, respectively.

Since the focus of this research is on the sex industry over the last 10 years, the author ignored the articles previous to 2000 and had a total of 980 results left. One problem with the search results was due to the different connotation of both human and sex trafficking. Human trafficking was automatically factored into the search results, but did not necessarily correspond to sex trafficking. Some articles used the two interchangeably, which made it more complicated to find specially the articles about sex trafficking. A lot of the results were also connected to drug and organ trafficking. Another error to consider was that searches produced a different number of articles each time the phrase was put into the search bar.

After going through each page, the author found only 270 articles specifically focused on the problem of sex trafficking. Among them, 131 referred to the sex industry only in the United States from 2000 to 2012; 88 articles focused only on international incidents; and 51 stories focused on the sex industry both in U.S. and other countries. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the 131 stories only on the U.S. sex industry: news stories were the most numerous type, followed by opinions, arts, political stories, human interest, and sports.

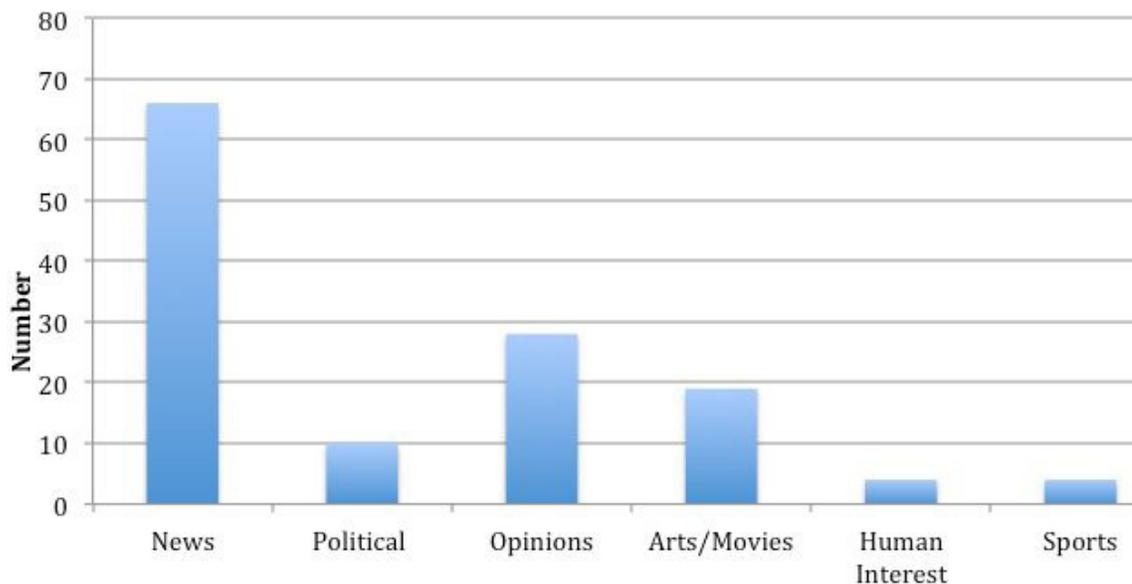


Figure 1. Types of Sex Trafficking Stories in the NYT website

Frequency of coverage on this topic each year gives insight into the progression of sex trafficking in the media. In 2000 there were no specific articles about sex trafficking in the U.S. The one that referred to the United States was actually an international story on failing to tighten international laws on the problem. In 2001 there were more sex trafficking articles about the industry in Asia, Italy and Cambodia, but only one slightly geared to United States, as they highlighted how passports were being faked to import women into the

country and around the world. In 2002 the coverage continued to highlight other countries that were dealing with the problem including the rising problem in Europe and Thailand even with the help from America. One article detailed an arrest of six accused of trafficking women from Mexico for the purpose of selling sex.

By 2003 more articles were printed about the sex industry, but any necessary arrests or actual accounts did not come to light. The upcoming 2004 election created some pressure on the Bush administration to tackle the problem, but more on what would be done worldwide. Nationally, the most dramatic was the article *The Girl Next Door* in 2004. This was the first documented instance of a trafficked girl talking about her situation anonymously, forcing the realization that this happened in America and could be happening next door to you.

During 2005 columnist Nicholas Kristof came forward as the leading opinion writer and advocate against sex trafficking. This also marked the increase of opinion articles and letters about the subject. Kristof wrote six opinion pieces within 2005 alone, and continued to write an average of five each year. This was also the first year a movie that had a message on sex trafficking was reviewed. In 2006 the number of opinion articles about sex trafficking outnumbered any other types of articles. The focus of these articles was also still on international problems.

Throughout the following six years there were about half a dozen more movies, TV shows or books that tackled the problem through a fictional story line. The attempts to get the attention of those watching a fictional show to this problem could help raise awareness of the topic, but also runs the risk of blinding them to the severity and factuality of the industry.

Starting in 2007, the number of articles that focused on the issue in United States dramatically increased. The articles, however, were more opinion based and less hard news about the actual arrests of pimps or crackdown of the industry. In consecutive years the number of articles on arrests and the breaking up of brothels increased, but still only made up a small percentage of the total coverage. Also 2007 was the first time an article was written on the Craigslist sex ads. In 2008 - 2012, except for 2009, several articles were written about Craigslist and other online selling community websites putting up ads for sex. The response from readers on these articles included questioning if those girls were trafficked or chose this as a job, which created a muddled understanding of the horrors of what was going on. In 2009 coverage of domestic and international sex trafficking was almost even, marking a growing shift of awareness.

From 2010 on, the author categorized articles on the sex trafficking problem in America and counted the number of stories under each category. The author also counted the total number of articles on other countries' sex industry; however, she did not identify the category of each story. That's why Figure 1 reflects only stories on the domestic sex industry.

There have been more articles within the past two years, but they mostly came from the editorial/opinion section of the paper. In 2010, there were several articles on the response of celebrities or causes that hoped to help raise awareness. The larger number of articles in 2010 was due to one event that generated multiple articles: Americans were jailed in Haiti. While the reason for being jailed centered on sex trafficking, all the follow-up articles focused primarily on their jail time and their release, not necessarily the sex trafficking problem. In both 2011 and 2012, Kristof wrote most articles focusing on sex trafficking. Especially in 2011, he wrote most articles on the breakdown of criminal activity of pimps—totaling four articles. Already in 2012, there have been a large number of articles on the subject. If the previous trend is any guide, there should be an increase in articles on the issue in the U.S. during the rest of the year.

IV. Breakdown of CNN Videos

The video clips on the CNN website could reveal if the media are powerful as suggested by the agenda setting theory. Research indicates that television news had a more immediate impact on the viewer than written articles (Hu 223). The procedure of searching the *Times* for stories on sex trafficking was also used on the CNN website. The results totaled 331 articles, but when only videos were selected, there were 68 videos dating back to 2005. About 22 videos were dedicated solely to sex trafficking around the world and seven that mentioned both U.S. and world problems, leaving 39 clips that mentioned the problem in U.S. for the past seven years.

The videos were almost evenly split between documentaries focused on personal stories of victims

and personal advocacies. In 2011, most videos focused on special reports on the sex trafficking industry, either as a whole or as part of specific details of the industry. There were only several videos on actual arrests of pimps or Johns. CNN has dedicated a whole program, called the Freedom Project, to the problem of modern day slavery, which includes sex trafficking. Since 2011, it has been posting and uploading videos weekly to raise awareness about the larger problem of human trafficking. In early 2012, it contains videos that are also geared toward the personal stories and shocking reality of individuals who have been trafficked.

The most common type of videos on the CNN website was news, followed by personal and documentary stories, as Figure 2 shows the 39 clips that focused on U.S. sex trafficking issues.

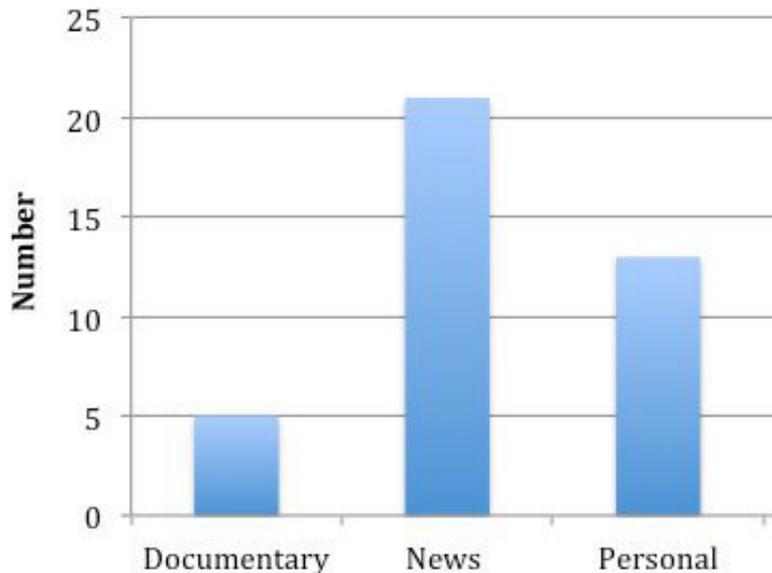


Figure 2. U.S. coverage of Sex Trafficking in the CNN website

V. The Next Step and Hurdles to Face

The *New York Times* and CNN have produced a small number of stories, but they have sought out and produced increasingly more stories each year on this dire issue of sex trafficking. The understanding that human trafficking as a whole exists is no longer a point of contention, but the simplistic coverage as well as the public's misunderstanding that sex trafficking does not occur in the United States is the responsibility of the media community to correct (Kloer). According to the agenda setting theory, more coverage in different manners will produce more social awareness. According to the agenda setting studies, most people will consider the problem in America to be important when it is dynamic, longer in length, is aided by personal stories, a video report is produced, and a public demonstration takes place, but a written article is better remembered.

The stories at the *Times* and CNN websites have been dynamic and about the issue as a whole, but didn't connect them to the personal implications nor documented public demonstrations. Kristof's opinion articles were strong and emotionally gripping, but were from one voice and were not on the front page, so they failed to give the public the salient cues they needed to know that this is a prominent matter. The other articles were mostly letters and editorials, which attracted only the readers who are seeking out the issue.

A study by Smidt (2010) correlated a public mass demonstration with the elevation of a problem to highly important, which supports the need to write about what 'real' people are doing to elevate the issue. The hard line to walk is how to convey the issue without turning people away due to the graphic nature of the industry. The stories can help the victims, but more could have been said about the force, destructive nature and motives of the pimps. A UN study challenged the media that "the coverage of trafficking has also been naïve . . . the media hasn't done a good job of focusing on trafficking as an economic issue as well as a hu-

man rights issue. We haven't held corporations as accountable as we should for their connection to slavery" (Kloer). Simple awareness of the problem is starting to be covered, but the consequences, law enforcement failures and the arrest and prosecutions should be covered if the press aims to follow the agenda setting theory to bring about a social consensus. Most people read what they think affect them personally. Economic issues are relevant to most Americans and are often on the front page; the sex trafficking industry can be covered as an economic issue to gain attention from readers. The depth of the problem has yet to be felt by the press or media as a whole.

There are several large hurdles in this endeavor. The biggest one is whether the agenda setting theory is applicable when people are increasingly using the Internet. It leads to the personal selection of news, and this individualistic nature has lessened the power of the agenda setting theory and made the social consensus fall apart (Althaus 179). Everyone has his or her own cause and fight, which then facilitate new movements or non-profits, but hamper the emergence of the most prominent issues in the world. There is a lack of information here because more studies on the selective nature of the Internet potentially causing the agenda theory to lose its power have yet to be published. This does not mean journalists or the media should stop doing their job. Journalists should not to be advocates, but they are called to pursue issues and bring all the dirty details into light (Saar).

Another hurdle is how to do this without inflicting more harm or putting a girl in danger of being found by her pimp. The use of personal stories is effective, but not the only outlet to pursue. First, there is confusion on the use of terms of sex trafficking because articles use prostitution, child abuse, human trafficking and mail order brides when talking about the same issue. A UN correspondent who understands this issue mentioned that "we haven't come up with a common language, a common message or even a common goal in our reporting and coverage of human trafficking" (Kloer). Consensus on the media's part will help bring about a social consensus on the gravity of the sex trading industry in America.

The media are not fighting alone. It has been strengthened through advocates who place human rights and change at the forefront. Countless websites, non-profits and individual groups have started campaigns, awareness programs and profit shares to help end human and sex trafficking in the world. The problem is that even with these programs, sex trafficking is still on the rise and is still a non-existent issue to many Americans. The perception of illicit trade and the mobilization to confront it has not changed, and that "gap in perception—and ultimately in action—is not shrinking despite the growing daily evidence of its importance and our ineffective ways" (Naim 218). The media causing awareness in all spheres of life through front-page action and infiltrating all interest areas to show the effects of sex trafficking could help narrow that gap. It could then catch the attention of individuals, which would create a social consensus to end the demand of the industry. The fight needs to start with the men who watch, buy and sell sex. Using media that confront the demand and call to every person to do the same is the next step in fighting this awful trade and hopefully ending an unspeakable crime.

"As long as there are men who objectify women and prefer to buy sex . . . as long as there are pedophiles intent on sexual gratification, and as long as there are individuals for whom financial gain is the only concern, women and children will continue to be kidnapped and enslaved" (Parrot 35).

The media might not have the same power to set the agenda as they did in the past, but it is also not fulfilling the role to put the most important stories at the forefront, not once, but continually to enlighten the public. The media's job is harder than ever before with the advancement of the Internet, but this issue is one of the gravest injustices that humans have seen. The reports should not cease until every woman and child no longer fears being used as a commodity, but is treated with justice and equality.

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