

MOVING BEYOND THE SENSATIONALIZED:  
A MIXED METHODS APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING SEX TRAFFICKING  
NEWS COVERAGE IN THAILAND

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## **ABSTRACT**

Meghan R. Sobel: Moving beyond the sensationalized:  
A mixed methods approach to understanding sex trafficking news coverage in Thailand  
(Under the direction of Dr. Anne Johnston)

Human rights violations regularly occur around the globe, sometimes attracting local and international media attention. Such coverage is often criticized for sensationalizing or over-simplifying the issue(s). However, little research has analyzed media representations of such issues, so it is difficult to speak to the validity of those criticisms.

This dissertation used news coverage of sex trafficking as a window into how English-language news media in Thailand, a geographic region with an understudied media landscape, represent human rights abuses and frame social problems. By using a mixed methods approach, this study quantified the framing of news coverage with a content analysis and utilized in-depth qualitative interviews with journalists, anti-trafficking advocates, survivors of sex trafficking and consensual sex workers to understand why coverage looks the way(s) that it does and how anti-trafficking advocates can act as media advocates to push coverage in new directions.

Findings from this research revealed that the majority of sex trafficking articles were crime-related news stories that focused on trafficked women and children and lacked discussions of risk factors and social status/race indicators such as statelessness. Results also demonstrated that sex trafficking was largely reported on in relation to other

countries, yet primarily cited official sources from within Thailand. Victims' voices were generally absent as were remedies that might help bring an end to trafficking.

The interviews revealed a deep contention among respondents regarding the definition of sex trafficking and very unclear notions of choice as a result of social and familial obligations. Additionally, findings demonstrated a tense relationship between journalists and advocates – which resulted in a phenomenon that I termed 'protective attention directing' – as well as a similarly adversarial relationship between the Thai police/government and the press, both of which impact coverage of sex trafficking.

While this study demonstrated areas in which coverage could be improved and relationships could be strengthened, reporting on sex trafficking is not a static phenomenon; rather, it can be continually reshaped. With effort taken by all parties, it is possible to see news coverage created within journalists' limitations that is respectful to victims and representative of the complexities of the issue.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
CHAPTER I .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Human Rights .....	5
Sex trafficking as a human rights violation.....	6
Sex Trafficking in Thailand.....	12
Thailand: History, Culture and Media .....	16
Legal mechanisms of press control.....	20
Extralegal mechanisms of press control.....	25
Media’s Role in Preventing Human Rights Violations .....	31
Impacts of Coverage on Human Rights Violations .....	33
Media Advocacy and Framing.....	36
Media and Sex Trafficking .....	40
Importance of Understanding How Thai Media Cover Sex Trafficking .....	44
Present Study .....	47
CHAPTER II.....	50
METHODS .....	50
Phase 1: quantitative content analysis .....	51
Overview.....	51

Analysis of News Stories.....	51
Research Design.....	52
Coding instrument and measures.....	57
Intercoder reliability.....	60
Phase 2: in-depth interviews .....	61
Sampling Frame.....	63
Interviewing.....	65
Statement of positionality.....	68
Analysis.....	71
CHAPTER III .....	72
FINDINGS.....	72
Phase 1: Analysis of News Article Findings .....	72
Amount of news coverage.....	73
Framing techniques: Article type and terminology used to describe trafficked persons and traffickers.....	75
Framing techniques: Age, gender and status of trafficked persons.....	80
Framing techniques: What issues are identified as connected to trafficking.....	82
Framing techniques: Sources cited.....	86
Framing techniques: solutions or remedies suggested.....	89
Overall.....	90
Phase 2: In-depth Interview Findings .....	90
Theme 1: How sex trafficking is understood and written about.....	94
Sex trafficking is a contentious issue.....	95
Varying definitions of sex trafficking.....	95



Complicated notions of choice.....	100
Sex trafficking is a difficult topic to write about.....	105
The challenge of telling the story without re-victimizing.....	106
Issues of language.....	108
Reporting on sex trafficking can be time-consuming.....	111
Journalists report that NGOs are not helpful.....	113
Theme 2: The relationships among the press, NGOs/IGOs and government/police and how they complicate coverage of sex trafficking.....	120
Coverage impacted by the relationship between NGOs and the press...	120
Media are necessary but have associated risks.....	121
Advocates skeptical of media.....	123
NGOs not reaching out to media.....	128
Disconnect between NGOs/IGOs and journalists.....	129
Coverage impacted by the relationship between the Thai police/government and the press.....	130
Government corruption.....	131
Press freedom.....	133
Lese majeste and defamation laws.....	133
Pressure from junta.....	137
Self-censorship.....	140
Information comes from the police.....	142
Saving face.....	145
Theme 3: Need for more variation in the type of sex trafficking related stories and images.....	149

The need for more variety of sex-trafficking stories.....	149
Pictures are problematic.....	152
Not all sex workers are trafficked.....	155
A focus on survivors.....	159
Summary of interview results.....	168
CHAPTER IV .....	162
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	162
Summary of Findings.....	162
Implications of Findings .....	168
Theoretical implications.....	176
Practical implications.....	179
Recommendations for Policy and Journalistic Practices .....	175
Limitations .....	179
Directions for Further Research.....	182
Closing.....	185
TABLES .....	186
Table 1 .....	186
Table 2 .....	187
Table 3 .....	188
Table 4 .....	189
Table 5 .....	191
FIGURES.....	193
APPENDICES .....	200

Appendix A: Coding Protocol .....	200
Appendix B: Interview Map .....	210
Appendix C: Article for advocates and survivors to read and give reaction to.....	214
REFERENCES .....	215

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 Differences in type of article and episodic/thematic framing, by publication...	186
Table 2 Differences in gender, statelessness and hill tribe mentions, by publication. ...	187
Table 3 Differences in presence of remedies, by publication. ....	188
Table 4 Descriptive information about interviewees. ....	189
Table 5 Applications of each code by type of interviewee. ....	191

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Difference in number of articles over time, by publication.....	193
Figure 2 Difference in terminology used to describe trafficked person, by publication.	194
Figure 3 Difference in age of trafficked person, by publication. ....	195
Figure 4 Difference in framing techniques regarding how the topic is presented in conjunction with other ideas, by publication. ....	196
Figure 5 Difference in presence of other types of trafficking, by publication.....	197
Figure 6 Differences in dominant issue, by publication. ....	198
Figure 7 Differences in presence of various sources, by publication. ....	199

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

On Nov. 6, 2011, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof live-tweeted the raid of a brothel in Cambodia, posting tweets such as, “Girls are rescued, but still very scared. Youngest looks about 13, trafficked from Vietnam” and “I’ve been told to rush out of town for safety. That’s what I’m doing now” (Nash, 2011). Critics were quick to condemn Kristof for the tweets, asking questions such as “When a *New York Times* columnist live tweets a Cambodia brothel raid, who benefits -- the women or the reporter?” (Carmon, 2011). In an effort to attract audiences and to convey efficiently the severity of the issues he covers, Kristof tends toward graphic, even gory, details in his columns in the *Times*. For example, a 2008 column about acid attacks against women stated:

Acid had burned away her left ear and most of her right ear. It had blinded her and burned away her eyelid and most of her face, leaving just bone. Six skin grafts with flesh from her leg have helped, but she still cannot close her eyes or her mouth; she will not eat in front of others because it is too humiliating to have food slip out as she chews (Kristof, 2008).

This and scores of other articles like it have made Kristof a celebrity to his fans, but also the target of significant criticism from others (see, for example, Carmon, 2011; North, 2012). Journalists like Kristof on the ‘humanitarian beat,’ that is, reporters who write about topics relating to human rights abuses, humanitarian crises or international

development, have been criticized for sensationalizing or misrepresenting the issue(s) (see, for example, Ahmadu, 2000; Kassie & Parsons, 2013; Khazaleh, 2010). ‘Poverty porn’ as scholars and activists have referred it to, is when aid organizations or media outlets use graphic descriptions or images to elicit an emotion while typically oversimplifying the complexities of the issue (Roenigk, 2014). ‘Poverty porn’ can certainly be seen in human rights reporting, as demonstrated by the work of Kristof described above, as well as other types of journalism, such as war reporting. One key question that surrounds this topic of ‘poverty porn’ is whether sensationalism is justified if it helps lessen human rights abuses.

This question is difficult to answer, particularly without knowing the context within which each story was written or each photograph was taken. Many of these well-intentioned journalists are likely doing the best they can while working within severe time and resource limitations. However, relatively little scholarly attention has been given to reporting on human rights abuses and how such coverage is created. This is problematic given the multitude of human rights violations that occur around the world and the high numbers of individuals impacted by such abuses (International Labor Organization, 2012), as well as the possible impacts that the coverage can have on how audiences understand the issue.

One example of a globally prevalent human rights abuse in which media coverage has been criticized for sensationalism is sex trafficking (Hawthorne, 2011). As defined by the United Nations (2000), sex trafficking is:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving

of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation.

Scholars have begun to turn their attention to the intersection of sex trafficking and mass media, and a growing body of literature has begun to analyze Western news coverage of sex trafficking. Such research has revealed that coverage is episodic (focuses on a specific event such as a raid or an arrest, and can limit public understanding of the issue), does not suggest remedies, focuses on official sources and lacks the voices of victims (Johnston & Friedman, 2008; Johnston, Friedman & Shafer, 2012; 2014; Johnston, Friedman & Sobel, 2014).

Media advocates have attempted to push coverage in new directions for an array of public health-related topics to ensure that issues such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use are framed appropriately (see, for example, Wallack & Dorfman, 1996; Dorfman, Wallack, & Woodruff, 2005), but little scholarship has analyzed human rights-related media advocacy. Given this lack of scholarly attention directed to media advocacy in a human rights context, the time is ripe to analyze how journalists create the frames used in human rights coverage and how human rights activists can influence that framing.

Given the plethora of human rights violations associated with sex trafficking, examining sex trafficking news coverage can act as a case study for understanding human rights coverage more broadly, with the goal of learning how the quality and the quantity of coverage can be improved. Sex trafficking is a problem in all corners of the globe, but is especially so in Thailand (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Given that prevalence and a lack of research in the area of Southeast Asian media, this study focused on Thai news coverage. This research expands our understandings of media framing and media



advocacy in the context of human rights reporting in Thailand through a mixed-method approach involving two phases. Phase 1, a quantitative content analysis of sex trafficking newspaper coverage examined how English-language newspapers in Thailand framed the topic. Phase 2, a series of in-depth, qualitative interviews with journalists, anti-sex trafficking advocates and researchers, sex trafficking survivors and consensual sex workers examined the challenges that journalists faced when investigating and reporting on sex trafficking. This part of the study also considers the reactions they received to their articles, how advocates and survivors viewed existing coverage and how they would like to alter coverage in the future, and how the anti-trafficking community should assist journalists moving forward.

There are several important conceptual areas and topics that provide a foundation for this research project, which are reviewed in the following sections. The first area reviewed is the definition and explanation of what human rights are and how sex trafficking is a violation of those rights. After providing that foundation, I review what the sex trafficking problem looks like in Thailand, a description of the Thai media landscape, and some possible influences on Thai journalists that may contribute to or inhibit them from freely writing about sex trafficking. I then describe what the literature has said about the role of media in covering human rights violations and potential impacts of such coverage on combatting those abuses, and then turn to notions of media advocacy and media framing to understand if and how advocates have attempted to shape media coverage by altering the frames used. Finally, I explore how scholars have researched the linkages between news media and sex trafficking to better identify what trafficking news

coverage looks like in other parts of the world and what gaps remain in our understandings of media coverage of sex trafficking.

## **Human Rights**

First, in order to understand human rights news coverage, it is worthwhile to discuss what human rights are. Human rights are a set of principles that lay out certain standards of living that all humans are entitled to (UN General Assembly, 1948). Human rights are interrelated, interdependent and indivisible, and view all humans as equal (Stellmacher, Sommer, & Brähler, 2005). Human rights are often guaranteed by national and international laws, in which governments are obligated to act (or not act) in ways that prevent and protect the human rights of all their citizens (OHCHR, 2014).

Nelson Mandela (1990) once said, “To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity” (para. 4). Recognizing and respecting human rights is important for the well being and, as Mandela (1990) said, “humanity,” of individuals, but is also important for society at large. Promoting the basic human rights of all people can result in a more tolerant and respectful society and can positively impact how members of society interact with one another (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). Examples of acts that would violate a person’s human rights can range from ethnic cleansings against specific groups, to unsafe working conditions or lack of access to safe drinking water, among many others. Individuals can have numerous rights violated at the same time or by the same action. For example, depending on the specific instance, the occurrence of sex trafficking could violate multiple of an individual’s human rights at the same time.

**Sex trafficking as a human rights violation.** Understanding what trafficking is in relation to the UN definition provided above, scholars and activists have conceptualized sex trafficking as a violation of human rights and have identified a number of fundamental human rights violations that may occur in the context of sex trafficking. For example, a violation of women's rights and children's rights (German Federal Ministry, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2003), a violation of the right to health (Beyrer, 2001), a violation of the right to be free from slavery (Androff, 2010; Fitzpatrick, 2003), a violation of freedom from torture (Todres, 2006), and a violation of the right to work in favorable conditions (OHCHR, 1966a), making it important to view sex trafficking through a human rights lens. The human rights framework for sex trafficking draws upon international human rights standards and principles, which have been encoded in international treaties, covenants and protocols (German Federal Ministry, 2008).

Much scholarship has discussed sex trafficking in the context of a violation of women's rights or children's rights. Approximately 80 percent of sex trafficking victims are believed to be women and children since they are often marginalized and disproportionably affected by root causes of trafficking (German Federal Ministry, 2008) such as structural inequalities and discrimination (Fitzpatrick, 2003). However, while the root causes that may put an individual at risk of being trafficked are human rights violations, the actual act(s) of trafficking comprises a number of violations of women's and children's rights, as well.

Sex trafficking violates a woman's right to life, liberty and security of person (UN Women, 2012) as well as violating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women's guarantee of equality (UN General Assembly, 1979).

Further, child sex trafficking is in violation of article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989), which says that states need to take an array of measures to prevent the sale or trafficking of children for any reason. Additionally, the sex trafficking of children is in violation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography which directly addresses and prohibits the trafficking of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation (OHCHR, 2000). Moreover, sex trafficking violates all aspects of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN General Assembly, 2000).

Furthermore, varying levels of human rights violations exist *among* trafficked women based on a woman's race or ethnicity. Some scholars argue that women trafficked from Asia are trapped in "racializing colonial frameworks" that depict them as culturally backward, whereas women from Soviet nations are viewed by Westerners as representing a temporary diversion from progress due to economic instability (Hua & Nigorizawa, 2010, p. 414). These varying constructs justify differential treatment of trafficked persons as either "worthy" or "unworthy" and allow for some trafficked persons to be seen as "innocent victims" for the public, human rights activists, service providers and the state (Hua & Nigorizawa, 2010). Selectively understanding trafficking as only involving white women, and only allowing such individuals to be considered victims of human rights abuses, is problematic, thus, it is important to understand and acknowledge that sex trafficking is a gross human rights violation for all victims, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity.

Additionally, sex trafficking has been conceptualized as a violation of an individual's right to health. Civil conflicts pose significant health threats to civilians, particularly women, and an array of human rights abuses occur during these civil conflicts, including rape and an increased vulnerability to being trafficked, resulting in health consequences such as high levels of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (Beyrer, 2001). However, sex trafficking is also a violation of the right to health outside of conflict settings, because of high levels of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as physical or psychological violence and restrictions on a victim's ability to seek health care (UNGIFT, 2014).

Further, sex trafficking can be thought of as a violation of the right to be free from slavery. It has been argued that the transatlantic slave trade has long been understood as a violation of human rights and therefore modern-day slavery, a phrase and notion used to describe human trafficking, should be thought of as an equally barbaric human rights violation (Androff, 2010; Fitzpatrick, 2003). While some sex trafficking situations may not involve the same types of permanent ownership that were common during the slave trade, the exploitation and deprivations of liberty can be thought of as parallel, and, as Murphy (2014) stated, "the basic elements of slavery – the forced labor, the lack of pay, the inability to escape – remain the same" (p. 1). This slavery violates a number of basic human rights (Androff, 2010), for example, the fundamental individual right to life, liberty and security of person which is guaranteed in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN General Assembly, 1948) and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (OHCHR, 1966b).

Additionally, the UDHR and ICCPR both state, “no one shall be held in slavery and servitude” (OHCHR, 1966b; UN General Assembly, 1948).

Additionally, sex trafficking can be understood as a violation of the right to be free from torture. In many cases, sex trafficking can involve acts that can be considered forms of torture or inhuman/degrading treatment, which is prohibited in a number of documents such as the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OHCHR, 1984), Article 5 of the UDHR (UN General Assembly, 1948) and Article 7 of the ICCPR (OHCHR, 1966b). Moreover, under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, trafficking can be considered a crime against humanity or a war crime under some circumstances. The human rights abuses associated with sex trafficking can be so grave that the Statute of the International Criminal Court includes “enslavement” in its definition of crimes against humanity (Todres, 2006; 2014). Lastly, sex trafficking is often in violation of Articles 6, 7 and 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which recognize the right to work as well as to work in just and favorable conditions (OHCHR, 1966a).

However, while it is clear that sex trafficking violates a number of basic human rights, it is crucial that laws intended to protect individuals from trafficking are not themselves so restrictive that they also infringe human rights. The Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Sigma Huda (2005), stated that victims of trafficking can suffer from “re-victimization” as they are often “criminalized and prosecuted as illegal aliens, undocumented workers or irregular migrants rather than as victims of a crime themselves” (p. 6). Similarly, Mary Robinson (2002), the High Commissioner for Human

Rights, suggested that mechanisms be created to monitor the human rights impacts of such laws and initiatives.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that not all people think that human rights are the driving force behind anti-trafficking efforts or that trafficking should be conceptualized and addressed from a rights-based approach. For example, it has been argued that while human rights concerns may have played a small role in the creation of the Convention Against Transnational Crime and its supplemental treaties, it is actually sovereignty and national security issues that are the driving forces behind the efforts (Gallagher, 2001).

Additionally, sex trafficking can be thought of as a particularly complicated issue because some individuals and organizations claim that sex trafficking largely does not exist; rather, the idea is merely a narrative crafted by aid organizations seeking funds from well-intentioned populations that know nothing about the issue. The debate surrounding sex trafficking is especially contentious in Thailand, where many anti-trafficking organizations operate. Empower Foundation, an organization working to promote the rights of sex workers in Thailand stated that there are now “more women in the Thai sex industry who are being abused by anti-trafficking practices than there are women being exploited by traffickers” (Fenn, 2015, para. 4).

It is further argued that familial obligations, that being, the duty for children to financially care for their parents and other family members, are prominent in Thailand. And as a result of this duty to one’s family, many underage sex workers are making the decision, among poor options, to engage in sex work in order to fulfill the financial

obligation that he or she has to their family. For example, in a discussion of child sex workers, Montgomery (2010) argues:

Child prostitutes are usually portrayed as the most pitiful and victimized of all sex workers. For them, there can be no discussions about force or choice, agency or empowerment; they are simply abused and irrevocably damaged by their experiences. Prostitution steals their childhood, betrays their innocence and ruins the rest of their lives. This overwhelming emphasis on abuse and sexual degradation obscures other equally important aspects of their lives, however, in particular the complex set of familial and social relationships and responsibilities that are often of greater importance to these children than the intermittent sex work they perform.

Some critics of these arguments claim that suggestions that these young children are fulfilling their family obligations by engaging in the sex trade merely enables Western men to rationalize their actions so they can engage in sexual exploitation of “foreign” children because “it is accepted there” when they would never do so in their home countries (Lyons, 1999, p.8).

Despite the controversy, this study focuses on the bulk of scholarship that points to the existence of sex trafficking and the practice being a violation of numerous human rights. However, it is important to understand the complexities surrounding the issue and efforts will be taken to include an array of voices in these discussions throughout the study. Additionally, trafficked individuals can be referred to as a number of different things, ranging from “victim” to “survivor” and many other phrases. In this dissertation I will use both the words “victim” and “survivor” to describe trafficked individuals due to the changing words used in the field and in the literature but neither are intended to depict the individual’s level of responsibility or agency.



## **Sex Trafficking in Thailand**

By some estimates, there are 27 million slaves in the world today (Bales, 2007). While that figure could justifiably be questioned given the difficulty in measuring the scope of the problem, that estimate is the statistic most commonly cited by advocacy organizations (Androff, 2010). It is estimated that the majority of those slaves, 15-20 million, live in South Asia and Southeast Asia (Bales, 2007), which is why the focus of this dissertation is on one of the trafficking “hot spots” in Southeast Asia - Thailand. While the Thai government’s efforts to fight sex trafficking are gradually increasing, as whole, the government tends to minimize the issue, making it difficult to collect reliable information and data on the scope of the problem (Sorajjakool, 2013). However, while the specific statistics are unknown, according to the U.S. Department of State’s 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report, Thailand is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking to occur, much of which is sex trafficking or forced labor.

Thailand has a long history of sex trafficking and varying forms of commercial sex work, dating back to the early 1900s when thousands of unemployed, homeless women began to sell their bodies in order to survive (Sorajjakool, 2013). When the Korean and Vietnam Wars broke out, the demand for sex rapidly increased and new brothels arose to serve foreign soldiers, whose presence in Thailand kept the market alive and helped its proliferation (Sorajjakool, 2013). While prostitution is illegal in Thailand, commercial sex services have gradually expanded with the rise of tourism and foreign investments in the region (Sorajjakool, 2013), and along with this demand has come a rise in trafficking.

In the 1980s, women and girls, mostly between the ages of 12 and 16, were commonly trafficked from poor, rural hill tribes in the northern parts of Thailand for commercial sex work in the cities (Sarkar, 2011). In the 1990s more women and children were trafficking into Thai cities from the Greater Mekong sub-region -- largely from Burma but also from Laos, Cambodia and the Yunnan province in China (Sarkar, 2011). It is believed that the disparity in economic development between Thailand and neighboring countries in the Mekong sub-region has been the impetus for a great deal of cross-border migration into Thailand that has driven individuals to seek work in Thailand and end up forced into sex trafficking (Sarkar, 2011).

However, fully understanding how and why sex trafficking occurs in Thailand can be a complicated task, largely due to the confusion between a consensual sex worker and a victim of sex trafficking. Some sex workers do not view themselves as victims; rather, they participate in commercial sex work because of the economic opportunities they derive from it (Sorajjakool, 2013). Often times these consensual sex workers do so because they do not have any other means to make a living wage; however, others are not doing so consensually and are deceived or coerced into sex work and forced against their will by the use of physical and/or psychological violence or threats of violence (Sorajjakool, 2013).

One thing that is clear, however, is that often times both consensual sex work and sex trafficking are due to poverty and a lack of opportunities. Girls are often forced into commercial sex work in order to help subsidize her family's income, largely because of gender inequalities that result in girls being seen as expendable, and laws and law enforcement, as well as some cultural and traditional contexts, that provide them unequal

protection (Sarkar, 2011). This is especially the case with children from Northern Thailand's ethnic minority hill tribes such as the Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Thai Yai, Thai Leu and Luwa (Sarkar, 2011).

One aspect that puts these populations at such increased risk of being trafficked is that approximately half of Thailand's hill tribe people are thought to be "stateless" (Lynch, 2005). Most hill tribe individuals were born in Thailand, and one or both of their parents were born in Thailand, so they are legally eligible for Thai citizenship under Thai law (Park, Tanagho & Gaudette, 2009). However, in practice, discrimination against these ethnic minorities is common and the Thai government often does not recognize their citizenship or provide them with the necessary documentation or proof of citizenship (Park et al., 2009). Without this documentation, individuals are ineligible for healthcare and education, and are restricted in their movement outside of their village or province (Park et al., 2009).

Additionally, these populations could be understood from a racialized perspective as "stateless" individuals are commonly viewed as having a lower social status than lowland Thais (Sarkar, 2011). Sarkar (2011) explains that hill tribe children are at very high risk of being trafficking because,

Being under privileged, having little education and little understanding of the dangers of leaving home, and with no alternative viable means of income, children from tribal groups often leave for or are lured to work in urban areas and fall victim to prostitution. The situation is so desperate for some living in hill tribes it has been reported in some cases that women and children from tribal groups succumb to the pressure of prostitution in an attempt to feel more 'valuable' and become 'accepted' by Thai society. (p. 65)

In attempts to curb the trafficking problem (or silence international criticism), Thailand passed a comprehensive anti-trafficking law in 2008 that criminally prohibits all

forms of trafficking, including sex trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2014). The law stipulates penalties ranging from four to 10 years' in prison if convicted, which is sufficiently rigorous in comparison to other serious offenses (U.S. Department of State, 2014). In 2013 the Thai government reported investigating 674 trafficking cases, prosecuting 483 suspected traffickers (including 374 for sex trafficking), and convicting 225 traffickers (U.S. Department of State, 2014). The majority of convictions resulted in sentences ranging from one to seven years' imprisonment, with 29 receiving sentences of more than seven years and 31 receiving sentences of less than one year (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

However, reports of government corruption are common in Thailand. In one such case, the Thai government reported "disciplining" (though it is unclear what that entails) 33 police officers for protecting a brothel where child sex trafficking victims were found (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Additionally, there are reports of officials protecting brothels from raids and inspections, as well as officials who have "colluded with traffickers; used information from victim interviews to weaken cases; and engaged in commercial sex acts with child trafficking victims" (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Given this corruption and lack of efforts by the Thai government to "fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking," in 2014, the U.S. State Department downgraded Thailand to tier 3, the lowest ranking in the Department's annual Trafficking in Persons report in which it ranks countries based on efforts of local governments to combat trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

## **Thailand: History, Culture and Media**

The complexities that surround the topic of sex trafficking in Thailand, and the government's response to the issue, can only fully be understood within the context of the country's history, culture and current political landscape, which, in turn, influence the Thai media landscape.

Thailand has a long history, beginning in the mid-14th century, and the country, known as Siam until 1939, is the only Southeast Asian country never to have been taken over by a European power (CIA, 2014). A bloodless coup in 1932 led to a constitutional monarchy (Royal Thai Embassy, 2014). Since then, Thailand has experienced several rounds of political turmoil including a military coup in 2006 that ousted then Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat, and was followed by large-scale anti-government street protests in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (CIA, 2014). In 2011, Thaksin's youngest sister, Yingluck Chinnawat, was elected Prime Minister (Marshall, 2014). In early May 2014 Yingluck was removed from office and in late May 2014 the Royal Thai Army staged a coup against the caretaker government, placing the country under martial law (CIA, 2014). In June 2014, King Bhumibol gave his approval to an interim constitution created by the junta, resulting in immense power given to the military (BBC, 2015). Martial law continued until March 2015 when the Coup-appointed Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha was given permission from King Bhumibol to end martial law and replace it by an executive order under article 44 of the interim constitution, which gave the military sweeping powers (BBC, 2015). Some critics referred to this executive order as 'the dictator law' because of its oppressive and draconian nature (Associated Press, 2015).

Currently, Thailand, a nation of more than 67 million people with more than 93 percent of the population identifying as Buddhist, continues to experience political unrest (CIA, 2014). This fluctuating political environment, coupled with commitments to the monarchy and Buddhism, makes Thailand a fascinating and culturally-rich place, but because of the influences of those elements on the media landscape, understanding the media landscape can feel like trying to hit the bulls-eye on a moving target.

What is known about the Thai media landscape is that, currently, there are approximately 17 Bangkok-based daily newspapers, six terrestrial channels (3, 5, 7, 9, 11 & PBS), hundreds of cable and satellite channels, 204 AM radio stations, 334 FM radio stations, and approximately 4,000 community radio stations in Thailand (Plotnick, 2013). Social media also have a large and growing presence in Thailand. As of February 2014, there were an estimated 24 million Facebook users in Thailand (Sakawee, 2014) and when Instagram (an online photo-sharing and video-sharing social networking service) revealed a list of the top 10 most-“Instagrammed” locations of 2013, two of the top 10 locations were in Bangkok (Siam Paragon shopping mall and Suvarnabhumi Airport) (Instagram, 2014). The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Thais were commonly stopping to snap “selfies” during political protests (WSJ Staff, 2013).

While this growing social media presence undoubtedly has an impact on how Thais construct and disseminate information, Collingham (2012) argues that with such an influx of information available in the digital world, local news sources become all the more necessary in order for citizens to make sense of all the content around them. She states that, “it's the very abundance of information and news now available to everyone that makes the role of the local newspaper even more important” (Collingham, 2012,

para. 6). Given this importance of newspapers and official news outlets in order to provide clear information to audiences, this study will focus on the Thai newspaper landscape in order to better understand how official news is created. Hereafter, references in this paper to “Thai media” indicate traditional print newsrooms, newspapers and professional reporters.

However, despite an array of media platforms and outlets, there is a lack of scholarly attention given to the Thai media landscape and existing literature on the topic is rather contradictory. In 1965, John Mitchell published one of the first known English-language descriptive works analyzing Thai media. In doing so, he concluded, “Possibly the first thing a student of Thai journalism learns is this: Not very much is known about it” (Mitchell, 1965, p. 87). Not much has changed in that regard since 1965.

When evaluating the Thai media landscape, one thing we do know is that “authenticity” or “truthfulness” is far less important than who is saying what and who has the power to say it (Streckfuss, 2011). The Thai government is said to have an “obsession with secrecy” to ensure that the country’s three main pillars -- religion, nation and monarch -- remain strong (Chongkittavorn, 2001, p. 179). In order to maintain this strength, attempts are made to keep all government-held information private and limit the freedom of the press to openly criticize and debate. Thailand is ranked 130th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index (Reporters Without Borders, 2014a), and it has been argued that the Thai press can be understood largely under the idea of a long history of censorship dating back to the early days of the press in Thailand (Lim, 2014).

Some say that this history of censorship began to change with the Black May events of 1992, which are argued to have been a key turning point in Thai media reform efforts (Brooten & Klangnarong, 2009; Chongkittavorn, 2001; Yong, 1995). Black May is a common name for a series of anti-government protests that took place in May of 1992 and the accompanying violent military crackdown that resulted in the deaths of 52 protestors and the disappearance or injury of many more (Pineda, 2010). For the first time, many protestors used their cell phones to share information and coordinate meeting times and places (Katsiaficas, 2012). In addition to the use of cell phones, the print media played a key role in the protests.

All of the state-owned broadcast media were said to have “toed the government line” during the protests, but a few privately owned newspapers rebelliously reported what was happening (Yong, 1995, p. 49). These privately owned newspapers became the only reliable source of information during those protests (Yong, 1995). For example, *The Nation* ignored a government censorship order and ran detailed, sometimes gory, articles and pictures of the violence committed against the pro-democracy demonstrators by the Thai army. One image that was printed on the front-page of *The Nation* featured a group of policemen beating a young protestor already on his knees, and the image became a widely seen symbol of state brutality (Yong, 1995). Despite threats from the government to close down the newspaper or block delivery routes, *The Nation* continued to publish detailed stories and images about the uprising. Eventually, the military-backed government headed by Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon collapsed, and while that certainly cannot be entirely attributed to the news media, it is suggested that the media played an important role in it (Yong, 1995).



However, despite some claims of progressive reforms towards a more free press, many still argue that journalists in Thailand are significantly limited in content that they can report on (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005; Streckfuss, 2011; Yong, 1995). A number of both legal and extra-legal mechanisms restrict this freedom of the press in Thailand, and ensuring that Thailand's three main pillars mentioned above (religion, nation and monarch) remain strong is likely a driving force behind many of these mechanisms. The legal mechanisms include various measures of state control via laws and constitutional statutes as well as systems of media ownership.

**Legal mechanisms of press control.** Attempts by the state to control content and distribution of print media in Thailand go as far back as the early days of Thai newspapers. One such effort, the 1941 Printing and Publishing Act, allowed for tight censorship of print media. The role of controlling the print media fell to the Director General of the Police Headquarters, who was entitled to prohibit the printing, publication or importation of any material the he or she believed “might disrupt public order or offend public morality.” As a result, the *potential* to offend would be sufficient grounds to ban publication or distribution (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005, p. 53). In 2007 the 1941 Printing and Publishing act was replaced with a new Printing Act that had fewer restrictions and lighter penalties for violations (Freedom House, 2010), but could still limit media content.

Another formal mechanism of state control over the media is strict defamation laws, that are so restrictive, in fact, that they have been referred to as “draconian” and “oppressive” (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005, p. 57). However, it is unclear exactly what constitutes defamation and what a journalist could be sued for,

making these laws broad and wide reaching. In principle, defamation laws in Thailand are subject to the constitution, but in practice, the laws are enforced “universally” against journalists who criticize public figures. Individuals and businesses can file defamation suits against the media and do so at alarmingly high rates (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). Plaintiffs regularly file defamation cases with claims for “exorbitant damages that, if awarded, would completely bankrupt a newspaper publisher” in order to silence dissenting perspectives (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005, p. 81). Often times journalists who write critical reports of politicians or prominent members of society for allegations of corruption are sued for defamation, regardless of whether the reports are true (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). In addition to silencing critical voices, these defamation laws have brought about a climate of fear and resulting self-censorship in the Thai media (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005).

Streckfuss (2007) makes the case that the long-term effects of these defamation laws have skewed the way that Thai society approaches and perceives “truth.” However, this media control does not mean that the public cannot find out the truth, but rather, they must do so in circuitous ways (Streckfuss, 2011). Knowing that the media are heavily controlled provides an arena for rumors and gossip to grow among the public, resulting in a blurred line between what is true and what is false (Streckfuss, 2011).

Little is known about how defamation works with regard to reporting on sex trafficking, but in 2013 there were media reports of “trafficking-related complicity by Thai civilian and navy personnel in crimes” involving the exploitation of asylum seekers from Burma and Bangladesh (U.S. Department of State, 2014). While this is primarily

labor trafficking, not sex trafficking, the Thai navy claimed that these reports were false and filed defamation charges against two journalists in Thailand (“U.S. Department of State”, 2014). It is unclear what the outcome or punishments for those journalists were.

Other important formal mechanisms of press control in Thailand are lese majeste laws. Provisions in the constitution have given respect to the monarchy from the first constitution in 1932 to the most recent in 2007 (Streckfuss, 2011) and an interim constitution in 2014. The 1997 Constitution places the King above comment or criticism by stating in Section 8, “The King shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated. No person shall expose the King to any sort of accusation or action” (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005, 70). This law has been referred to as, “the keystone of the regime of power over public discourse” (Jackson, 2009, p. 375).

It is believed that decades ago, journalists could report critically about the monarchy, and the lessening of this freedom might be due to increased punishments (Streckfuss, 2011). After the 6th of October Massacre (a government attack on students protesting the return of a military dictator in 1976), the ruling military dictatorship increased the penalty to a minimum of three and a maximum of 15 years in jail for each count of defamation — a penalty that was more than twice as high as during the absolute monarchy (Rojanaphruk, 2010).

Similar to the defamation laws, we know the lese majeste laws are strict, but we do not know exactly what this means for journalists. It is believed that jail terms for Thai citizens violating lese majeste laws tend to be harsher than for foreigners (Streckfuss, 2011), but little information is available about what exactly constitutes a violation of lese

majeste laws for both domestic and foreign journalists. We do, however, know that there has been an increase in numbers of prosecutions of lese majeste cases recently. Before the 2006 coup there was an average of five lese majeste cases each year but since 2006 there have been more than 400 cases (Horn, 2011). This demonstrates unwillingness by authorities to address the chilling effects of the lese majeste law and, rather, use of the law as a weapon for silencing criticism and public debate. Today, Thai journalists practice rigid self-censorship on anything even mildly critical of the monarchy (Freedom House, 2013; Rojanaphruk, 2010).

Furthermore, systems of media ownership contribute to a controlled press environment. Large conglomerates and prominent families, many with political ties, own the majority of print media in Thailand (Freedom House, 2013). Politicians own many of the nation's newspapers and as a result, the press has regularly given partisan support to such politicians (Lewis, 2006). Radio and television have remained largely under the direct or indirect control of the state, although satellite television has grown in popularity (Freedom House, 2013). The Thai government and army own more than 700 radio stations and Thailand's six free-to-air television stations are owned by four government entities (the Public Relations Department, the Thai Public Broadcasting Service, the state-controlled Mass Communication Organization of Thailand and the Thai Royal Army) (Freedom House, 2013).

Another example of this system of media ownership can be seen in the case of Independent Television (iTV). In 1996 iTV was created and became the first non-state owned Thai TV channel, but in 2000 it was taken over by the Shinawatra Group (Shin Corp), a large conglomerate, and by 2004 Prime Minister Thaksin's family had bought

iTV, resulting in the “non-state owned” channel looking very similar to the rest of the state-owned media (Lewis, 2006). Media ownership by large conglomerates and the state result in a lack of independent news, and in turn, media that is free to criticize large businesses and the government. It has been suggested that the first step to reforming the Thai media system is media ownership reform (Lewis, 2006).

Additionally, to enhance concerns about media ownership by conglomerates and the Thai government, no foreign ownership of television or radio is allowed in the country (Lewis, 2006). Foreign Business Act B.E. 2542 prevents foreigners from owning media organizations in Thailand, which further limits varying perspectives and content. In addition to not being able to own Thai media organizations, foreign news outlets can be banned from Thailand and are subject to many of the same censorship restrictions. In the early days of newspaper production in Thailand, foreign publishers had been exempt from prosecution by virtue of being subject to laws in their home country rather than to Thai law, but that is no longer the case today (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). For example, in January of 2002, the Thai government banned sales of Hong Kong-based *Far East Economic Review* (FEER) under the 1941 Publishing Act because Prime Minister Thaksin disliked an article that was critical of the government’s privatization plans (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). Some scholars believe that this was an attempt to send a warning to both domestic and international media outlets to not write negatively about the government (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005).

**Extralegal mechanisms of press control.** In addition to the formal devices of media control, a number of informal/extra-legal mechanisms also exist to restrict the free

flow of information, including self-censorship, intimidation and violence against journalists, an urban-rural divide, an array of languages/cultures, sensationalist/crime-focused reporting, Buddhism, hierarchy/access to information, a Bangkok-centered society, media as a profit-making entity and political instability in the country.

Self-censorship on topics involving the monarchy and other leaders, including politicians and prominent businessmen, remains standard in Thailand (Freedom House, 2013). This self-censorship is likely the result of continued violence against journalists. Between 1979 and 1984 at least 47 journalists were killed in Thailand, and since 2000 the murder rate has fluctuated between one and three journalists per year (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). Some of these murders have been traced back to journalists angering certain (often prominent) people by reporting on societal problems and/or exposing corruption (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005).

In addition to the physical violence, intimidation and harassment of journalists appears commonplace. For example, in the aftermath of the Tak Bai massacre, a 2004 anti-police protest that resulted in 85 deaths (Amnesty International, 2013), the state's main concern seemed to be focused on controlling what information was released to the public. The Thai police invited journalists to a press conference at the police headquarters, but when the reporters arrived, they were served summonses to surrender any video footage of the events, and several were held and interrogated for many hours (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005).

Furthermore, there exists a significant urban-rural divide in Thailand, in which things like differences in education levels, socioeconomic status and access to resources exist. Another difference that comes along with this urban-rural divide is differences in

media consumption. Television consumption is the most-consumed medium in Thailand, with approximately 86 percent of all Thais watching it on a daily basis, followed by radio, which 48 per cent of the urban population and 33 per cent of the rural population listen to daily (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). The large consumption gap, however, can really be seen when looking at newspaper readership. More than 72.3 per cent of urban Thais report reading newspapers “regularly,” compared with 45.1 per cent of the rural population (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). It is unclear how the rise of the Internet has impacted this, though it could likely only further this divide.

In addition to the urban/rural divide, there is a great deal of linguistic diversity in Thailand. The official national language is Thai, based on the dialect spoken in the central provinces around Bangkok. However, there are significant regional variations in the dialects of Thai spoken in different part of the country as well as a great deal of native Malay speakers in the Southernmost provinces and a number of unique Hill Tribe languages. However, languages other than Thai, Chinese and English are “all but absent from the newspapers and broadcasters that constitute Thailand’s media” (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005, p. 14). While this linguistic variation is a great thing for cultural diversity, it requires a high number of local/regional media outlets, which can be difficult to maintain.

Furthermore, authors have noted the sensationalist nature of the Thai news media, that being, a focus on scandalous and shocking news -- often crime reports with gory pictures and details. Streckfuss (2011) argues that the way ‘truth’ is perceived in Thai society is a result of strict defamation laws that result in a sensationalist press, and may

not actually reflect what is true in society. Another explanation for the sensationalism focuses on the relationship between the media and the police. There was a rise in crime in Thailand following WWII, and an increase in crime stories (and accompanying lurid and gory images) in Thai newspapers (Lim, 2014). However, this explanation claims that the rise in sensationalized crime reporting was not because the press was acting as a mirror of society and reflecting what was happening in the country, but instead, the sensational crime stories were the result of the media's relationship with the police (Lim, 2014). Because the police so tightly controlled political reporting (and journalists were facing threats and violence for reporting on political topics), the press turned its focus to crime reporting instead, meaning that newspapers reflected levels of policing, not societal changes (Lim, 2014). However, despite varying theories about how the sensationalist reporting came to be, it is argued that sensationalized reporting has been, and continues to be, a mainstay in Thai media (Lim, 2014).

Additionally, as previously discussed, we know that Buddhism is very prevalent in Thailand. It is one of the three main pillars of Thai society, and more than 93 percent of the Thai population is Buddhist (CIA, 2014). An immense amount of respect is given to Buddhist monks and disrespecting the religion or the clergy is not something that is acceptable in Thai society. Religion in Thailand permeates into many aspects of Thai life and it is not uncommon to see images of senior monks on the walls of businesses or homes. However, little scholarship is available regarding the linkage between Buddhism and the media.

It has been stated that the earliest newspapers in Thailand had some degree of press freedom as long as their content did not offend the Buddhist clergy (Lim, 2014) and



that journalists could be punished for making “any disparaging remark” about Buddhism via lese majeste laws (Chongkittavorn, 2001). However, it is unclear exactly what would ‘offend’ the Buddhist clergy or what punishments would come if this was done. This appears to be a highly under-researched area, which is problematic given the prevalence of Buddhism in Thai society. There is a strong need for more research to analyze linkages between Buddhism and the media.

Next, Thailand is a hierarchical culture, so access to information is based on whom you know. In accordance with Buddhism, many Thais believe that all living things are in a hierarchy based on merit and power (Hanks, 1962). However, while power is conceptualized similarly in English and Thai as either a personal characteristic or as a result of experience, merit is quite different. In Western cultures, merit is conceptualized as a fixed character trait, but that is not the case for a Thai person, who can continually gain or lose merit (Hanks, 1962). While individuals are born into certain ranks in the hierarchy, the system is fluid and individuals are not stuck in the rank they were born into; rather, they can move ranks according to merit achieved and resources accumulated (Hanks, 1962). However, despite the fact that individuals can move among the ranks, the hierarchy plays a significant role in the media, determining who has access to information and what stories get reported on (in other words, which people get their stories told).

“The Thai press is said to reflect the hierarchism which was such a pervasive feature of Thai society. Only *phu yai* (senior people) counted; ordinary people were irrelevant, unmentioned and voiceless” (McCargo, 2000, p. 239). While it remains unclear exactly where the line is drawn for who counts as *phu yai*, and how this relates to both who can gather information as well as who/what topics get reported on, this is

highly problematic and will certainly come into play when analyzing media coverage of sex trafficking, as victims are likely not considered *phu yai* in a traditional Thai sense.

Most of those *phu yai* individuals reside in Bangkok. Bangkok became the capital of Thailand in the late eighteenth century, and in the mid-1980s the city filled in many of its canals and built complex highway systems, allowing the economy to grow (Lewis, 2006). Critics have argued that only events occurring in Bangkok matter and that there is a widely held belief that “Outside Bangkok was simply the provinces, where nothing of political significance was deemed to occur, unless the prime minister or some other *phu yai* [senior people] deigned to make an upcountry visit” (McCargo, 2000, p. 238-239). McCargo (2000) stated that only local stringers cover news events that occur outside of Bangkok, which is referred to as ‘provincial news.’ However, even with this near embargo on news from outside Bangkok, McCargo (2000) has suggested that investigative teams of experienced reporters could be based in Bangkok, but should be ready to be deployed at short notice anywhere in the country when a major story breaks so that events that occur outside of Bangkok still receive the same investigative attention from seasoned reporters.

Further, some critics argue that much of the media industry in Thailand is intended to serve a profit-making function rather than a public service. There are very large investment and profit opportunities available in media organizations, and some scholars have argued that those opportunities are what attract business people to become involved, rather than a desire for open communication, an informed citizenry or robust debate (The Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005).

The primary source of income for most media outlets in Thailand is advertising revenue, with the exception of the State-run Channel 11 that operates under the Public Relations Department budget (Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2005). The increasing commodification of the media and heavy reliance of advertising revenue limits the scope of content that can be covered. This problem affects media organizations throughout the world and is not unique to Thailand, but it certainly present in Thai media.

Lastly, political instability in Thailand can play a significant role in the freedom of the Thai press. It is important to understand that while Thailand has had a constitutional monarchy since 1932, it has experienced continued political instability, and at the time of this dissertation, was under the power of a military dictatorship.

After the Thai monarch relinquished absolute power, Thailand was under control of authoritarian regimes for four decades, in which the practice of “suppressing the media, justifying it as essential to the protection of the king and the state” was commonplace (Chongkittavorn, 2001, p. 179). The threat and fears of a communist insurgence, which lasted until the 1980s, only made those media suppressions appear all the more rational. During this period, “journalists could be jailed on the mere allegation that they were communists or collaborators,” which could be done if they reported even the slightest bit critically about the current political regime (Chongkittavorn, 2001, p. 179).

This political turmoil, and resulting media suppressions, continues today. The military coup that occurred in May 2014 resulted in the blocking of some international media transmissions into Thailand, notably CNN and BBC, and all local television networks were limited to broadcasting information from the army in order to “prevent

distorted reports” (Reporters Without Borders, 2014b). Thai Public Broadcasting Service (TPBS) attempted to air its programs by posting them on YouTube, but it was shut down by the Thai military, and the network’s deputy director, Wanchai Tantiwithayapitak, was arrested (Reporters Without Borders, 2014b).

However, one could question whether such suppressions of media actually have any impact on society or social problems. The media can play a key role in how the general public understands issues, so limiting the content or perspectives can restrict how citizens understand, and in turn, respond to, these issues.

### **Media’s Role in Preventing Human Rights Violations**

Literature has long confirmed the power of the media to influence what topics audience members think about (see, for example, McCombs & Shaw, 1972). However, more important to this study is news media’s ability to shape *how* we think about certain topics via the framing used in the story. But we do not know exactly how this works with regard to human rights reporting, because few studies have empirically analyzed how human rights journalists define and frame the issues, or how audience members understand and react to human rights-focused news stories.

A number of human rights scholars and activists, including Mary Robinson (2002), the High Commissioner for Human Rights, have suggested that the media have an important role to play in increasing public understanding of human rights abuses and encouraging policy changes. As a result, human rights organizations reach out to news media in different capacities in attempts to utilize the media as a tool to stop human rights violations via publicly shaming human rights violators, educating policymakers and the public, or attempting to attract international resources.

For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW), a well-known transnational human rights organization, works with the media to publicly shame human rights violators. HRW maintains close relationships with foreign correspondents and provides information to journalists with the hope that they will broadcast the information to a wide audience (Bogert, 2011). However, a 2014 study analyzed coverage of human rights NGOs in mainstream international news media and on social media and found that 40 percent of 257 human rights NGOs analyzed failed to appear in even one news story, and those NGOs that did appear were larger organizations with more resources (Thrall, Stecula & Sweet, 2014). Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Oxfam were found to account for 50 percent of all NGO news appearances between 2010 and 2012, and ten percent of the NGOs sampled made up 90 percent of coverage (Thrall, Stecula & Sweet, 2014). The situation appears similar on social media. The top 10 percent of the sample accounted for 90 percent of YouTube views, 81 percent of Facebook likes and 92 percent of Twitter followers (Thrall, Stecula & Sweet, 2014). The study found that there is a threshold of around \$10 million annually before an NGO will begin to get attention (Thrall, Stecula & Sweet, 2014), meaning that only the most prominent organizations can expect to see their work featured in mainstream news media or receive much social media attention.

Additionally, changes in media systems in recent years have resulted in a decline in foreign correspondents, which means a decline in the flow of information from NGOs to mainstream news organizations, and as a result, human rights organizations have begun to generate news on their own. HRW hires professional photographers, videographers, and radio producers to travel and work with its researchers and create

multimedia content for distribution on the HRW social media sites, and Amnesty International has created a ‘news unit’ where it employs five professional journalists to write human rights stories (Bogert, 2011).

However, this ability to generate content is largely dependent upon the resources of the organization, and cost likely prohibits many from hiring dedicated journalists or photographers. Furthermore, there are challenges associated with distributing that content once it is produced. Bogert (2011) explains:

With budgets for foreign news in decline, one might expect editors and producers to be grateful for the offer of material from non-profit sources. But that is not always the case, and the answer depends on the country, the media outlet, and the NGO. The BBC, for example, rarely takes material from advocacy groups for broadcast. CBS, in the US, recently tightened up its regulations for taking content from outside sources. *Time* magazine will not accept images from a photographer whose assignment was underwritten by an NGO. (p. 31)

While there are certainly fair questions and criticisms about any journalist’s level of objectivity or neutrality, those questions are amplified when the content comes from a human rights organization with a clear agenda. It could be argued that facts presented by an NGO seeking to advocate on behalf of victims of abuse are no less trustworthy than facts presented from a journalist employed by a media conglomerate, but nevertheless, human rights organizations must work around this and have tried to use social media to do so, as they can post their own content without interference. However, as of now, social media, unless gone ‘viral,’ does not have nearly the same reach as do the big news organizations (Bogert, 2011).

### **Impacts of Coverage on Human Rights Violations**

However, even when the human rights organization or its work is reported in the mainstream news media, one could question whether it actually has any impact on the

human rights violation. Scholars have made some attempts to investigate various aspects of this question.

Research has exhibited the impact of news discourse on policymakers, because media steer attention toward certain policy domains while ignoring or downplaying other aspects or issues. For example, a study of U.S. policy-making decisions regarding African nations illuminated the impact that media discourses and representations have on government officials by revealing that most members of Congress had little knowledge of or direct experience with Africa, and therefore they relied heavily on the media for information with which they based policy decisions upon (Wiley, 1997). Similar notions could apply to policymaking decisions regarding human rights violations on a global scale, though research would need to confirm that.

Further, journalists reporting on human rights abuses at a newspaper in Mexico explained that they believed they were having an impact on the human rights violations in a number of ways. They described that they were acting as a form of “counter-power” to the state and that by covering human rights abuses occurring in the local community, the coverage “can awaken a moral outrage in the public” and cause audience members to be grateful they are not in that position, and in turn, want to do something to help (McPherson, 2012, p. 108). These same journalists report being hopeful that by reading about such human rights abuses, constituents will put pressure on their elected officials which would result in governmental action and thus achieve what Pretess et al. (1992) would describe as the classic policy agenda-building aim of this type of journalism (McPherson, 2012). If politicians themselves are readers, journalists said they hope that the human rights coverage could also appeal to their humanity directly and stir them to

act, “as one editor explained, ‘ensuring that institutional machinery functions’” (McPherson, 2012, p. 108).

News media have another power to stop human rights violations in that, in addition to the attention that comes from a published story, pressure can be placed just a journalist investigating a human rights violation. Meaning, “the threat of the media’s coverage is enough to prevent violations from occurring if that coverage is guaranteed” (McPherson, 2012, p. 109). Additionally, journalists described being hopeful that their coverage would not only mobilize citizens and government officials, but that it would also have an important educational aspect for citizens in that their readers would learn that they have an array of rights (McPherson, 2012).

However, some might argue that all of these hopes of human rights journalists are overly idealistic, or at least, unproven. There is a gap in research regarding whether or not these goals of human rights journalists are actually achieved, but some scholars have discussed ways that media might be more likely to encourage action to lessen human rights abuses, which can be of great interest to anti-trafficking advocates seeking to encourage action. One technique that has been discussed as a way to mobilize people to act after reading or seeing images about human rights violations is through the use of shock media. “Shock media has been proven effective in an advertising context, in PSAs, and is now increasingly being used in human rights reporting, particularly op-eds” (Borer, 2012b, p. 147).

One of the most prominent journalists to utilize a shock media approach in a human rights context has been *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof who, as previously discussed, regularly employs text that graphically details the atrocities and



photographs of dead or mutilated bodies (see, for example, Kristof, 2005; 2008). Other examples of such jarring images and gruesome text can also be seen in war reporting (see, for example, Dassanayake's 2014 article about the conflict in Gaza, or Baker, Gordon and Mazzetti's 2014 story about Ukraine). Kristof has bluntly explained that the graphic pictures he uses are intended to spur his readers to action. He wrote, "It's time for all of us to look squarely at the victims of our indifference," and "Americans will be stirred if they can see the consequences of their complacency" (Kristof, 2005, para. 1 & para. 3).

However, little data are available regarding the effectiveness of shock human rights journalism or appeals from journalists in moving audiences to action. Despite the power of media frames to influence how audiences understand issues, this does not necessarily lead to action on the issue. Despite the lack of empirical data, human rights journalists may believe they are having an impact in various ways and thus, advocates of different causes often try to shape media coverage in accordance with their own or their organization's beliefs.

### **Media Advocacy and Framing**

Given the power of the media to shape audience understanding, a body of research has emerged about media advocacy, the act of persuading the media to shift coverage of an issue in order to impact policy decisions (Dorfman, 2003; Dorfman & Krasnow, 2013; Wallack & Dorfman, 1996). Media advocates aim to use media as a tool to "apply pressure on decision makers for policy change" (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2013, p. 295). Media advocates aim to do this by shaping the debate around a specific issue, and the subsequent media coverage, to include policy solutions (Dorfman, 2003). Framing is

believed to be a key element of media advocacy (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2013) and much of the media advocacy literature has come out of the field of public health to ensure that issues like alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use are framed appropriately (see, for example, Wallack & Dorfman, 1996; Dorfman, Wallack, & Woodruff, 2005).

In the context of social issues, the framing used in news stories, meaning, the way that the story is constructed and what topics are highlighted, can dictate what the problems are (Entman, 1993), and this can especially be the case with emerging topics that audiences do not fully understand and typically do not have firsthand experience with (Johnston, Friedman & Sobel, 2015). Sex trafficking is one of those topics, which means that without a inclusive understanding among scholars, policymakers, or the general public regarding what sex trafficking is and why it occurs the news media decide how to characterize the topic. While the topic of sex trafficking has gained attention in recent years, there still remains a lack of cohesion of understanding regarding what the practice entails, with commingled notions of migration, sex work, sexuality, gender, victim, consent, and coercion (Wallanger, 2010). This lack of uniformity allows media, through the framing of the various aspects of the problem and presenting it to audiences, the ability to dictate how policymakers and the public understand that problem and, subsequently, respond to it (Berns, 2004; Harp, Loke & Bachmann, 2010; Gilboa, 2003; Piers, 2002; Wiley, 1997).

Framing can have important practical implications for how audiences understand, and in turn, respond to, social problems. Research revealed that most television news is framed “episodically,” meaning that it discussed topics in terms of individuals or specific events and lacked context, as opposed to thematic stories, which provided background

information, causes and/or consequences (Iyengar, 1991). In the context of social problems, audiences tend to interpret episodic stories in a way that blames the victim or individual in the story, as opposed to thematic which tend to lend themselves to more notions of collective responsibility (Iyengar, 1991). Given that the majority of news stories are framed episodically, public health scholars have urged advocates to “help reporters do a better job describing the landscape surrounding individuals and events so the context of public health problems becomes visible” (Dorfman, Wallack, & Woodruff, 2005, p. 327). The same concepts could be applied to the issue of sex trafficking.

However, framing has been referred to as “a scattered conceptualization” due to the array of conceptual definitions and operationalizations that have been associated with the theory (Entman, 1993, p. 51). Goffman was one of the first scholars to develop the general concept of framing in 1974; he defined it as a “schemata of interpretation” that enables individuals to “locate, perceive, identify and label” ideas, phenomena, occurrences or life experiences (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Entman modernized this definition by specifying, “to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a ‘perceived reality’ and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 51).

It is believed that the manner in which information is presented (the frame in which it is presented) is at the conscious or unconscious discretion of the communicator and reflects the conscious or unconscious judgments of the message creator. Frames are embedded in texts and can sway a receiver’s understanding of the communicated text, by highlighting pieces of information about an item, event or topic, thus, increasing the

salience of that specific piece of information (Entman, 1993). Frames are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings; the concept of a frame has been studied as a noun, a process and an effect. In addition to the four different functions described by Entman (1993) – problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation – frames can have multiple homes in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and/or the culture (Entman, 1993). Frames occurring in various locations within the communication process can function similarly in that they select and highlight aspects of the event/idea in which arguments are then constructed (Entman, 1993).

Some scholars believe that frames are the result of commonly accepted cultural assumptions or ideologies. Such frames can dominate news coverage for long periods of time, as well as have the potential to inhibit social activism and limit social and political awareness among audience members (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009). However, the debates surrounding framing theory continues as some scholars disagree that frames inhibit social activism and argue that they can in fact stimulate social activism. Such scholars posit that frames conditioned by the social atmosphere or ideology of the current time, (Mora & Makipaa, 2008), and can change in different contexts. Frames are not static characterizations; rather, they change with time, and reframing can occur any time a situation presents incongruent information and more plausible explanations emerge for why something appears the way that it does (Goffman, 1974).

Furthering that argument, it has been alleged that because framing can be a fluid process, frames evolve over time and can be reformatted by journalists or their sources in order to parallel the current social and political environment (Bronstein, 2005). D’Angelo

(2002) argued that news frames can be tied to the prominence of social movements and that media effects can be seen in the success of such social movements. This process of frames adapting to different social or political landscapes by emphasizing different aspects of the issue or event is called ‘frame changing’ (Houston, Pfefferbaum & Rosenholtz, 2012). Research on frame changing analyzes the process by which media organizations use different frames throughout various stages of the life span of an event or topic (Muschert & Carr, 2006).

Clearly, there is an array of ways to utilize notions of framing. Given the lack of research on the framing of human rights issues in Thai media, this study will be set in the perspective of Entman’s (1993) four-part typology for classifying the functions of frames, which says that in the context of social problems, frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies, to better explore the basics of how the frames in these stories function, specifically how the problem is defined and how solutions are discussed.

### **Media and Sex Trafficking**

While research on the linkage between mass media and sex trafficking is in its infancy, scholars in recent years have begun to turn their attention to the connection. A growing body of literature has emerged that analyzed media coverage of human trafficking or specifically sex trafficking. However, this research is currently limited to media from Western countries and little is known about how journalists in the rest of the world report on the topic. Nevertheless, a number of themes and patterns have emerged from previous research that examined the ways that media represent trafficking in Western contexts, which is valuable to understand.

One of the first studies was a 2008 content analysis of newspaper coverage of human trafficking (broadly, as opposed to sex trafficking specifically) in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which found a limited range of viewpoints represented (Gulati, 2008). It also revealed that coverage primarily discussed human trafficking in terms of sex trafficking, relied on official sources, described criminal activity as the primary cause for trafficking occurring, discussed policy changes as the most common way to combat trafficking and lacked the voices of victims (Gulati, 2008). Another early study was a 2008 content analysis of specifically sex trafficking news stories, which revealed that, similarly, news coverage primarily focused on raids of brothels and massage parlors, arrests, and the efforts of legislators and law enforcement officials to fight trafficking with stricter laws and greater enforcement (Johnston & Friedman, 2008).

More recent research analyzed sex trafficking coverage in major U.S. newspapers and determined that stories were primarily framed as a crime issue, portrayed as episodic rather than thematic, suggested few remedies, focused on the opinions of official sources and lacked the voice/perspective of trafficking victims (Johnston et al., 2015). The authors reason that in order for the media to fulfill their watchdog role, a wider range of news frames must be used (Johnston et al., 2015).

Interestingly, however, a separate study of sex trafficking coverage in major U.S. newspapers revealed that more types of voices, more causes of sex trafficking and solutions to the problem, and more discussions of individuals and their experiences were present in coverage that included transnational references to trafficking (Johnston et al., 2012). Also, education and public awareness were found to be the most common

solutions mentioned, as were consequences such as violence and emotional trauma, but news stories failed to address consequences to global public health (Johnston et al., 2012).

Similarly, sex trafficking-related stories and images in U.S. government publications, NGO materials, news media and popular films prominently featured rescue narratives and discussions of criminal justice solutions (Baker, 2013). This rescue narrative can reinforce traditional gender and sexuality ideals, “where female sexual purity is in danger, girls and women need to be protected and rescued, and men are heroic rescuers” (Baker, 2013, p. 20). It is argued that such discourses, in conjunction with criminal justice solutions, will not bring an end to sex trafficking (Baker, 2013). Rather, policies need to address the root causes of trafficking such as structural factors that put populations at increased risk of being trafficked, unjust economic systems and “conservative ideologies of gender” (Baker, 2013, p. 20). Additionally, research on portrayals of sex trafficking in Hollywood and independent films as well as the Dateline NBC special “Children for Sale” revealed that a rescue narrative was most commonly used in these media as well, and called for a wider range of experiences to be portrayed in sex trafficking-related films so that audiences can better understand the complexities surrounding cases of sex trafficking and strive for more localized, criminal-justice focused, solutions (Baker, 2014).

As a whole, Western media have primarily reported on sex trafficking episodically, focusing on brothel raids, and efforts of legislators and law enforcement officials to prevent trafficking (Gulati, 2008; Johnston et al., 2014; Johnston & Friedman, 2008). Coverage has largely featured the voices of official sources and left out the voices

of those who are arguably affected most profoundly, trafficking victims (Johnston, Friedman & Shafer, 2012; 2014). Further, coverage has promoted rescue narratives and reinforced traditional gender stereotypes (Baker 2013; 2014). The existing research points to a need for more diversity of frames in trafficking coverage from Western media. Gulati (2008) argued that by only representing a limited range of viewpoints, the "views and decisions of established policy makers" are legitimized and alternative views are marginalized (p. 2).

It has been suggested that news media need to stop covering trafficking in the piecemeal and incomplete way that is currently being done (Wallanger, 2010). Instead, trafficking survivors and anti-trafficking advocates should be the driving forces behind changes in coverage by fighting for deeper and more thoughtful coverage of the topic (Wallanger, 2010). It has also been argued that journalists and editors need to learn more about sex trafficking such as the differences between trafficking and smuggling, prostitution and sex work, illegal immigrant and undocumented (and sometimes unwilling) worker, and so on (Wallanger, 2010).

Of course, it is important to note that journalists face a number of challenges when reporting on human rights violations, specifically sex trafficking. First, sex trafficking is an illegal activity, sometimes run by complex organized crime networks, meaning that journalists face safety concerns when investigating and exposing this type of activity. Additionally, reporting on any type of victim, especially a victim of a sexual crime, poses an array of unique ethical challenges that reporters must navigate. It has been suggested that journalists must take special precautions to "avoid dwelling on



gratuitous or salacious details” and be cautious as to not imply any form of victim blaming (McBride, 2013, para. 8).

Furthermore, the language used for discussing human rights issues such as sex trafficking varies a great deal between organizations, governments and individuals (The International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002). Additionally, laws surrounding the topic are continually changing and can be difficult to interpret and understand (The International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002). Further, globalization is resulting in vast changes for the global media landscape, and journalists must continually adapt to these technological and conceptual changes (The International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002). However, despite these challenges that journalists face, previous research illuminates a pressing need for media organizations to dive into the issue and provide an array of viewpoints on the topic.

### **Importance of Understanding How Thai Media Cover Sex Trafficking**

Given that sex trafficking is a documented human rights violation that is pervasive in Southeast Asia, analyzing media discourses of the issue from the region provides a unique opportunity to use sex trafficking as a case study for understanding human rights reporting more broadly in a geographic location that is often overlooked in mass communication scholarship. It is worthwhile to understand how media represent sex trafficking for a number of reasons. First, the news media can serve many functions with regard to trafficking including playing a role in informing the public on the trafficking problem and explaining the complexities of the causes, consequences and possible solutions (Johnston et al., 2014). Additionally, news media can work to garner public support for anti-trafficking efforts and give a voice and sense of empowerment to victims.

The media can influence public discourse about the topic, as well as encourage action on the part of the public as well as policymakers. The mass media have the potential to expose the tactics used by traffickers to warn potential victims and end misconceptions (Hughes, 2000, in Johnston et al., 2012).

However, the news media also have the prospect to do harm. The media's depiction of glamorous or privileged lives in developed countries can contribute to an environment that helps trafficking flourish by enabling traffickers to deceive economically disadvantaged individuals into believing that with the help of the trafficker, they can receive legitimate employment in Western countries and, in turn, have a better life (Hodge & Lietz, 2007). Additionally, when news media portray female victims of male violence as responsible for their own abuse – as they often do – “the news is part of the problem” (Meyers, 1997, p. 117). That idea could apply to coverage of sex trafficking, in that, if news media blame victims for their own exploitation, such coverage could worsen the problem and make it difficult for victims to seek assistance.

Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the ways in which news media structure content and organize information can provide understandings about the news functions, routines and values of different media organizations. Newspaper stories are products of their social and historical contexts and analyzing them can help understand how topics are understood and represented (Soderlund, 2013). For example, in the case of prostitution and commercial sex, analyzing historical news coverage highlighted how journalistic treatment of the topics became a way for the *New York Times* to reclaim its place as the authoritative news source, something it had lost to muckraking magazines, as well as shape norms of press coverage about the issue (e.g., who were ‘reliable’ sources).

(Soderlund, 2013).

News stories can also contribute to or create public conversation, making them particularly useful to consider. Articles about sex trafficking have been analyzed and understood as examples of stories acting as links in mediated public conversations (Soderlund, 2013). Specifically, initial accounts of white slavery in largely circulated magazines created the rationale for public meetings, which were events that newspapers, specifically the *Chicago Tribune*, could report on. As a result, the *Tribune* then became a forum for activists to voice their opinions about the need for state intervention to stop sex trafficking (typically referred to as ‘white slavery’ at the time, as a way to distinguish it from the transatlantic slave trade) (Soderlund, 2013). These changes can be attributed to changing modes of information gathering and sourcing, and a shift from sensationalism to more objective reporting (Soderlund, 2013). Meaning that, while sex trafficking itself is a worthwhile cause and reason to examine media coverage, it can also allow for conclusions to be drawn about larger societal institutions, such as the practice of journalism and economic/social beliefs, practices and changes of the local society at the time.

Furthermore, from the point of view of an activist, it is important to understand how media represent sex trafficking in order to realize what changes need to be made. For example, research found that after an anti-violence group collaborated with journalists to create a handbook of best practices for reporting domestic violence murders, news coverage improved (Ryan, Anastario & DaCunha, 2006). Reporters demonstrated greater understanding of partner violence, were more likely to contextualize domestic violence murders as social problems requiring intervention rather

than as private tragedies, and cited advocates as sources twice as much (Ryan et al., 2006). Similar changes are possible with coverage of sex trafficking, but only after a full understanding of how media coverage has depicted the issue, which has yet to be understood in a Thai context.

### **Present Study**

This study explored how Thai news media reported on sex trafficking as well as how the role of anti-trafficking advocates and trafficking survivors played into such media coverage. Building on previous research (Gulati, 2008; Johnston et al., 2012; 2014; Sobel, 2014), this project investigated how Thai journalists reported on the topic of sex trafficking, including how existing coverage was framed; what challenges journalists faced when researching and/or writing about the topic; what responses they received from colleagues, the public and anti-trafficking advocates; and what they believed anti-trafficking organizations could provide to make reporting on the topic more efficient and effective in the future. Further, this study examined how anti-trafficking organizations, advocates, and survivors view news coverage of sex trafficking by analyzing what areas they believe have been reported on accurately; what areas they imagine could be improved upon; what, if any, their experiences have been like with journalists; and what they suppose that they can provide to journalists to help improve both the quality and quantity of coverage.

Considering the importance of media representations and the relative lack of scholarly attention given to the topic, this study used a mixed methods approach to systematically inquire how and why news coverage of sex trafficking is framed in the way(s) that it is, and what can be done to improve coverage. While scholars from an array

of fields have tried to understand the topic of sex trafficking and a small but growing body of literature has analyzed American news coverage of the issue, little is known about how Thai news coverage of sex trafficking functions despite the prevalence of the problem in the country, as well as how and why journalists crafted the stories in the ways that they did.

Given the increasing public attention devoted to the topic of sex trafficking, the expansiveness of the problem, and the documented lack of diversity of frames in the coverage, the landscape was ripe to explore how the idea of media advocacy can apply to framing of sex trafficking while taking into account the challenges that journalists writing about the topic may face. Additionally, given the lack of mass communication research focusing on Southeast Asian countries, this study aimed to begin to fill that gap in scholarship by analyzing Thai media coverage and interviewing Thai and foreign journalists based in Thailand. This work has the potential to make available information on a commonly misunderstood and understudied area, in turn, aiming to lessen the gap in understanding between journalists and anti-trafficking advocates with the goal of increased and improved coverage of sex trafficking. This research can shed new light on traditional notions of human rights journalism, media advocacy and the framing of social problems. In attempts to do so, this study posed the following exploratory research questions:

**Phase 1 Research Questions:**

RQ1: How often did Thai newspapers cover sex trafficking from September 1999 through September 2014?

RQ2: In what ways did newspapers frame the issue in terms of sources cited, problem definition and solutions offered?

**Phase 2 Research Questions:**

RQ3: How do anti-trafficking advocates and sex trafficking survivors view the news media and understand their role in it?

RQ4: How do journalists make sense of their own reporting on sex trafficking, view themselves in relation to advocates and survivors, and comprehend the impact, if any, that their reporting has on eradicating sex trafficking?

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODS**

In order to examine what existing coverage looks like as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with reporting on sex trafficking, this study consisted of a quantitative content analysis to analyze existing coverage as well as in-depth qualitative interviews with journalists, anti-trafficking advocates and researchers, survivors of sex trafficking and consensual sex workers. A specific focus was on coverage of sex trafficking and survivors/advocates of sex trafficking, rather than human trafficking broadly.

Given the surreptitious nature of human trafficking, specific statistics are unknown, but many accounts claim that sex trafficking is one of, if not *the*, statistically most prevalent forms of modern-day slavery, ranging from 79 percent of trafficking cases (UNODC, 2009) to 58 percent (UNODC, 2012) to 43 percent (ILO, 2008), depending on the source of the data. However, it is important to note that these statistics may not reflect the true scope of the problem. Sex trafficking tends to be the most frequently reported form of exploitation in comparison with others: forced labor, organ removal or the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts (UNODC, 2009), for example. Despite these discrepancies, the present study was based on current statistics demonstrating the high prevalence of sex trafficking.

## **Phase 1: quantitative content analysis**

**Overview.** This study consisted of a quantitative content analysis of the news frames present in sex trafficking-related stories appearing in five English-language newspapers in Thailand from September 1999 – September 2014. By analyzing 15 years of content, conclusions can be drawn about how newspapers currently present the topic of sex trafficking as well as how and when that changed, if at all. Thailand was selected for this study because of the high rates of sex trafficking and the understudied media landscape, as previously discussed. The study was set in the context of previous research conducted by Johnston, Friedman and Shafer (2014) and Johnston, Friedman and Sobel (2015) within the broader framework of Entman’s (1993) four-part typology to classify the functions of frames. However, this previous research has examined sex trafficking coverage from Western media outlets, and using a U.S.-based coding instrument may not be appropriate for an international setting. Thus, the codebook was adapted to better function in a Thai media environment. Additionally, in order to further understand this coverage from Thailand, a close qualitative reading of the news stories was done to contextualize the quantitative findings and allow for any new ideas or themes to emerge that were not accounted for in the codebook and may be unique to Thailand and the Thai media landscape.

**Analysis of News Stories.** All articles were analyzed with a quantitative content analysis. Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2014) define content analysis as “the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods” (p. 3). It is argued that quantitative content analysis can prove to be a more powerful method than surveys and



interviews because of its unobtrusive nature and its lack of reliance on subjective perceptions (Krippendorff, 2004). Additionally, employing the use of coders and verifying intercoder reliability when using quantitative content analysis allows for the validity of the study's design to be solidified (Boettger & Palmer, 2010).

Content analysis of media texts is particularly useful (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2014) and can be especially beneficial in framing studies (Entman, 1993). Identifying and describing frames can be used in content analyses to determine textual meaning by measuring the salience of components in a text and assessing the relationships between the elements of highest salience and the audience's schemata (Entman, 1993), making content analysis a useful method to understand how news media frame sex trafficking. However, given that the codebook used was initially created for Western texts, all articles were also closely examined qualitatively and themes and patterns were isolated that occurred a number of times or consistently happened in a specific way (Miles & Huberman, 1984). These themes or patterns that emerged provided context for the quantitative findings and provided the ability to note any places in which the codebook was not suitable.

**Research Design.** Data were selected for this study largely based on the language and country of publication. Only English-language newspapers from Thailand were included. English-language newspapers were selected for this study because their audiences are often the educated elite. In other words, many of the audience members of these newspapers are likely policy-makers, NGOs and diplomats, so they are likely to be the decision-makers with regard to anti-trafficking efforts and legislation, making it worthwhile to analyze how the issue is presented to them. As a result, this study analyzed

the news frames present in the past 15 years of coverage of sex trafficking in the two largest English-language daily newspapers in Thailand, both based in Bangkok, *The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post*, as well as three weekly, regional newspapers from geographic areas outside of Bangkok, *Pattaya Mail*, *Phuket Gazette* and the *Chiang Rai Times*. These five newspapers are the primary English-language newspapers in Thailand, with *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post* being the largest English-language newspapers in the country.

The *Bangkok Post* has a daily circulation of approximately 75,000 (ePaper Catalog, 2012). Its major shareholders include the Chirathivat family (owners of Central Group) and GMM Grammy, a Thai media and entertainment company (Gruppe, 2010). The *Bangkok Post* is said to be the most widely read English-language newspaper in Thailand, with readership numbers larger than its circulation due to the sharing of newspapers among friends/family and the presence of the papers in hotels (Thai Newspapers, n.d.). *The Nation* has a circulation that ranges from 60,000-80,000 and it is the flagship publication of the Nation Multimedia Group, a prominent Thai media company (Sutthisripok, Bain, Stats, Chaban & Holland, 2006).

While the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* are both English-language dailies targeted at foreigners and the educated elite, they are staffed differently. The *Bangkok Post* was founded by an American editor in 1946 and is staffed with a mix of foreigners and Thais. *The Nation* was established in 1971 and is directed and staffed more predominantly by Thais (Prado, 2010). It has been argued that *The Nation* tends to be more critical of the government but is also better at reporting on local events in comparison to the *Bangkok Post*, which is said to provide a more farang (the Thai word

for foreigner) or ‘internationalist’ view (Prado, 2010). However, those perceptions are yet to be empirically examined.

The three regional newspapers, *Pattaya Mail*, *Phuket Gazette* and the *Chiang Rai Times* represent smaller newspapers produced outside of Bangkok. *Pattaya Mail* is a weekly publication with a circulation of approximately 5,000 that focuses primarily on local news in and around Pattaya, a beach resort popular with tourists and expatriates located on the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand (Francomasia, 2011). *Phuket Gazette*, also a weekly, is the island of Phuket’s largest English-language newspaper with a circulation of 25,000-35,000, depending on the season, and more than 80% of the local newspaper readership market (Phuket Today, n.d.). The *Chiang Rai Times* is a weekly English-language newspaper focusing on local events in the Northern part of Thailand (Chiang Rai Times, n.d.). These five newspapers represent unique media outlets in different parts of the country with varying audiences. It is also worth noting that English-language newspapers in Thailand have an impact that is “disproportional to their circulation” because they “circulate much more than their circulation figures represent because they are in hotel lobbies and a lot of other public places. So they do influence an impact on policy” (D. Feingold, personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014). It is meaningful to analyze Bangkok-based newspapers as well as regional newspapers to understand the similarities and differences in how sex trafficking is presented to audiences, as well as journalistic practices and limitations of journalists, from news outlets in provinces with vastly different social, cultural, linguistic and economic landscapes.

This study focused on print news sources as opposed to broadcast media. There is a gap in scholarship analyzing news ecosystems in Thailand, meaning, the ways that

news is produced, shared and disseminated among differing forms of media. However, research has revealed that in the U.S., “while the news landscape has rapidly expanded, most of what the public learns is still overwhelmingly driven by traditional media—particularly newspapers” and that such newspaper content “set the narrative agenda for most other media outlets” (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010, para. 5 & 7). While this certainly does not confirm that such an ecosystem exists in Thailand, it suggests the possibility of such an arrangement, and provides support for the importance of analyzing Thai newspapers, though research is needed to confirm this. Additionally, given the lack of research on Thai media, it could be argued that it is necessary to start with legacy news (i.e., newspapers) to understand Thai definitions of news. Subsequent research could then draw on those findings to analyze broadcast and new media.

This timeframe, the last 15 years (September 1999 – September 2014), allowed for current discussions of trafficking to be analyzed as well as to understand how frames have changed as the topic has emerged in recent years. This timeframe enabled a longitudinal analysis to be conducted around a number of anti-trafficking initiatives in Thailand, including the implementation of a 2008 comprehensive anti-trafficking law and a six-year National Policy Strategy on human trafficking for 2011-2016 created by the Prime Minister (U.S. Department of State, 2014). While the six-year National Policy Strategy was not yet completed, this timeframe allowed content to be analyzed from before these initiatives as well as to see how it changed through September 2014, including the 2014 TIP Report status downgrade of Thailand.

The unit of analysis was newspaper articles. For the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*, a census was used; all of the sex trafficking-related articles in the 15-year time

period were analyzed. For the *Pattaya Mail*, *Phuket Gazette* and the *Chiang Rai Times*, all available articles were analyzed. In order to gain a full picture of how the topic is presented to audiences, news stories, news briefs, editorials, wire stories, book/film reviews and any other articles that focus on sex trafficking were included.

Archives for *The Nation* were retrieved from the LexisNexis database using the search terms ‘sex trafficking,’ ‘human trafficking,’ ‘sex slavery,’ ‘prostitution,’ ‘solicitation’ and ‘flesh trade.’ Between September 1, 1999 and September 1, 2014, this 15-year search returned 936 articles. Archives for the *Bangkok Post* were retrieved from a number of sources. Archives from Nov. 19, 2012 to Sept. 1, 2014 were retrieved from the LexisNexis database using the same search terms, resulting in 374 articles. For articles prior to Nov. 19, 2012, a search was first conducted in ProQuest of *Bangkok Post* indices using the same search terms, which returned 661 article citations. The dates from these citations were then compared with a list of *Bangkok Post* archives available on microfilm from the Center for Research Library’s Global Resources Network. Center for Research Library staff then scanned all requested articles from their microfilm archives and emailed them to the University of North Carolina library. While the Center for Research Library’s microfilm archive is nearly complete, it is missing a few dates. For the dates that were missing and featured articles about sex trafficking according to the ProQuest index (114 articles), each article was requested via interlibrary loan from other libraries around the world that had a copy of that specific newspaper. They were sent to the University of North Carolina library. In total, 1,149 articles were analyzed from the *Bangkok Post*.

In addition to the two primary English-language dailies based in Bangkok, three regional newspapers were also analyzed. Using Google to search the sites of each newspaper, articles were retrieved from *Pattaya Mail*, *Phuket Gazette* and the *Chiang Rai Times*. These Google results were compared against archive searches on each newspaper's website to ensure that as many articles were retrieved as possible. The search resulted in 106 articles from *Pattaya Mail*, 41 from *Phuket Gazette* and 86 from the *Chiang Rai Times*. In total, 2,318 articles were analyzed.

It is important to note that while the analysis of articles from *The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post* was comprehensive over the 15-year time period, articles from the three regional newspapers was likely not comprehensive. There are no reliable archives of the regional newspapers, so it is possible that some sex trafficking-related articles will be missed. However, it is worthwhile to analyze the available articles to gain a more complete appreciation of how the issue is presented to varying audiences in different areas of the country. The difficulty in obtaining articles for this study demonstrated the challenges inherent in studying Thai media and likely why there has not been more research in this area; but it does not diminish the need for such work.

**Coding instrument and measures.** As discussed above, Entman (1993) rationalized that frames have four main functions: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. The most important of those functions are the problem definition and remedy suggestion phases (Entman, 1993). Given the lack of research on Thai media coverage of sex trafficking, this study focused on those two functions. Therefore, this study aimed to determine how Thai newspapers define the problem of sex trafficking and what, if any, remedies they suggested. Entman (1993)

stated that problem definitions are “usually measured in terms of common cultural values,” so this study attempted to better understand what cultural values are associated with sex trafficking (p. 52). This analysis can provide a basis for future research to analyze the other functions of frames present in the coverage.

In order to understand how (and when) the problem is defined and how solutions are discussed, all articles were coded quantitatively and then analyzed qualitatively. Stories were first coded quantitatively to describe general similarities and differences between newspapers and to gain an understanding of how the topic is understood and presented to audiences in Thailand. Initially, each article was read to determine whether it specified the type of trafficking that occurred. In Thailand, the term “human trafficking” is often used to refer to an array of exploitative situations, one of which is sex trafficking. If the article did not specify the type (meaning it just uses the phrase “human trafficking”) or was not about sex trafficking, it was not analyzed any further. If the article did specify that it was about sex trafficking or used the phrase “human trafficking” but it is clear from other parts of the article that it was about sex trafficking, it was coded in full according to the variables described in the next paragraphs.

After creating a collection of articles that focus specifically on sex trafficking, in order to answer RQ1 and determine if and when coverage increased, the amount of coverage was an ordinal measure calculated by measuring the number of articles containing the search terms that appeared in each newspaper in each year. Next, in order to answer RQ2, which aims to understand how the coverage is framed, a codebook was adapted from Johnston, Friedman and Sobel (2015).

Articles were first coded for basic information such as date of publication, name of publication, headline, author, article word count, section and page number of where the article appeared, and what type of article (news story, editorial, review, news brief or press release). Then, in order to better understand how the problem was defined, articles were coded for whether sex trafficking was discussed in conjunction with any other form(s) of human trafficking (forced labor in the fishing industry, forced agricultural labor, bonded labor, involuntary domestic servitude, organ harvesting, the use of child soldiers, other, or no other type), whether sex trafficking was the main focus of the article, age(s) of trafficked person(s), terminology used to describe the trafficked individual, gender of the trafficked individual, whether the article referenced issues of citizenship/statelessness or ethnic minorities/hill tribes, whether the article referenced an international aspect of trafficking or trafficking in areas of Thailand outside of Bangkok, whether the article made any reference to Buddhism or the monarchy, what the dominant frame of the article was (crime, policy, human rights, public health, morality, migration, societal problem (non-health), economic, a call-to-action, or other), whether the article portrayed sex trafficking as an isolated incident or recurring problem, and what sources were cited (law enforcement/government official or document from within Thailand or outside of Thailand, social worker/advocate, victim/survivor, trafficker or their spokespeople, a non-expert witness, a different news outlet/wire service, or other source). Articles were then coded for whether they suggested a remedy for bringing an end to sex trafficking, and if so, what that solution was (increased punishments for the individual performing the sex act(s), increased punishments for the trafficker, increased punishment



for the sex buyer, policy changes, the creation or promotion of NGOs that advocate, care for and work on prevention efforts for survivors, or other remedy).

Further, in addition to the quantitative coding, all articles were read qualitatively to tease out underlying or implicit messages, themes and frames that can contextualize the quantitative findings. This allowed for unpacking of arguments and ideologies in a more meticulous way to further make sense of discussions of sex trafficking beyond what the quantitative content analysis revealed.

**Intercoder reliability.** During intercoder reliability training, a few minor changes were made to the initial codebook. The primary change was removal of specific number of sources (item 23 in the codebook). Types of sources were still coded for, but numbers of unique citations were not. One type of remedy was broadened to include reintegration efforts, which resulted in the category being called “Creation of programs that advocate, care for and work on prevention or reintegration efforts.” The primary researcher provided expanded explanations and examples of definitions and variables such as item 6 in the codebook. After these changes were made to the codebook, intercoder reliability was tested. Using Krippendorff’s Alpha, intercoder reliability between two trained coders was assessed on a randomly selected 10 percent (N = 232) sample of articles: publication name (1.0), headline (1.0), date (1.0), word count (1.0), section (1.0), page number (1.0), type of article (.96), other type(s) of trafficking (.91), age (.93), word/phrase to describe trafficked individual (.89), gender (.92), stateless (.92), minority and/or hill tribe (.88), international aspect of trafficking (.91), trafficking outside Bangkok (.84), Buddhism (.96), monarch (.93), dominant frame (.86), timeframe (.91), cite official source in Thailand (.92), cite official source outside of Thailand (.89), cite social

worker/advocate/advocacy group (.85), cite victim/survivor (.91), cite trafficker (or their spokespeople) (.90), cite witness/non-expert (.86), cite other news outlet/wire service (.92), cite other (.86), increase punishments for individual doing sex acts (.87), increase punishments for traffickers (.81), increase punishments for sex buyers (.94), policy change(s) (.85), creation of programs that advocate, care for and work on prevention or reintegration efforts (.86), other remedies (.82).

## **Phase 2: in-depth interviews**

While there are clearly advantageous reasons for using quantitative content analysis, there are also benefits to mixed methods of research. Mixed methods research is defined as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Research has shown that while using a single methodological paradigm may be sufficient for some research questions, sometimes one approach may not tell the complete story (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Given the aims of this dissertation, a single methodological approach would have been inadequate. Using multiple methods can enable for more nuanced understandings to be gained (Robinson & Mendelson, 2012) and has been referred to as an “intuitive way of doing research” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010, p.1). Though, despite the benefits, studies have shown that mixed methods research is rare in the mass communication field (Trumbo, 2004) with only 2% to 4% of articles using multiple methods (Lemus, 2005). This may be due to the difficulty of conducting mixed methods research or the suitability of one approach to answer the majority of research questions. However, that does not take away from the need for such research; therefore, given the benefits of mixed

methods research and the aims of this dissertation, this project used a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative, in-depth interviews.

Kvale (1983) defines the qualitative research interview as "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 174). In-depth interviews have been called "one of the most powerful methods" in qualitative research because they enable researchers to "step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). Face-to-face interviews have long been the dominant interview technique, but with the rise of the Internet and the creation of new communication technologies, interviews can now be successfully conducted over the phone, via e-mail or online chats (Opdenakker, 2006).

Given the value of in-depth interviews, this study utilized interviews with current sex workers, anti-trafficking survivors and anti-trafficking advocates and researchers, who provided unique insights into the realities of sex work and sex trafficking as well as ideas about how these individuals and groups view media coverage of the issue and what their experiences with journalists has been like. Additionally, in-depth interviews with journalists were conducted which enabled us to understand the challenges that reporters face when covering the topic of sex trafficking as well as how they obtain their information for the stories and what, if any, impact they believe their stories have. According to Besley and Roberts (2010), "journalists represent excellent candidates for qualitative interview projects" (p. 70) because, due to their profession, they should be able to articulate their experiences clearly and effectively (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Journalists have a long history of being interviewed for academic research projects (see,

for example, Besley & McComas, 2007; Gingras & Carrier, 1996; Tuchman, 1972). With the growth of blogs and social media, it can be difficult to distinguish who should be considered a “journalist.”

For the purposes of this study, a journalist was defined as someone who has had at least one article published in an established newspaper, either in print or online. Bloggers who maintain a self-run blog but do not also publish stories in recognized newspapers were excluded. Anti-trafficking advocates/researchers were defined as an individual that was employed by or volunteered with an organization working with any aspect of anti-trafficking efforts and/or an individual researching sex trafficking as his or her profession. Researchers often identified as anti-trafficking advocates and many anti-trafficking organization staff members believed they were doing research on the issue, so the two populations were combined into one group for this study. Sex workers were defined as an individual who currently works in the commercial sex industry and self-identifies as a consensual sex worker. Survivors were defined as individuals that self-identified as having been trafficked for sexual purposes. Often times journalists face a challenging situation with regard to vetting their sources when those sources claim to be victims of crimes, and this is especially so with a crime such as sex trafficking. The survivors included in this study have received the services of anti-trafficking organizations, so it was presumed that these organizations confirmed the stories of the individuals.

**Sampling Frame.** Initially, journalists were identified by first conducting a search in LexisNexis and each newspaper’s website using terms associated with sex trafficking: ‘sex trafficking,’ ‘human trafficking,’ ‘sex slavery,’ and ‘child prostitution’ to

retrieve articles about sex trafficking, in which the journalist that wrote the story was recorded. The search was limited to stories written since 2010 to try to ensure that journalists would have a clear recollection of their stories and any difficulties they faced when reporting on the topic. Journalists who had written sex trafficking news stories were contacted via email to see if he or she is willing to be interviewed for the study. After initial journalists were contacted, a snowball sample was used and the initial journalists were asked to suggest other journalists that had written about the topic and might be interested in being interviewed for the study. Both Thai journalists as well as foreign correspondents based in Thailand were contacted.

A Google search of anti-trafficking organizations provided an initial list of advocates to potentially interview, and then a snowball sample was used to determine the sampling frame of anti-trafficking advocates, researchers, survivors and consensual sex workers. Staff members of anti-trafficking organizations were first contacted via email and telephone, and through interviews with employees and researchers, additional advocates were suggested. The same method was used to find and contact organizations that work with sex workers and take a 'pro sex workers rights' stance as well as the sex workers associated with these organizations. For the purposes of this study, these individuals will still be classified as advocates even though they advocate for different changes to policy.

The sex trafficking survivors interviewed were associated with the anti-trafficking organizations (meaning, using the services of) and whom the anti-trafficking organizations identified as being interested in participating in this study. These survivors are aged 18 and up. The reason for excluding survivors under the age of 18 is that

questions were asked about impressions of media coverage and experience with journalists, and it is unlikely that children (under 18 years of age) would have had experience with journalists and/or deep knowledge of existing media coverage. Also, given a lack of parents/guardians in these children's lives, consent would have been difficult to obtain. However, it was crucial that the voices of victims be present in the study, making interviews with adult survivors central to the research. These are the only individuals with firsthand knowledge of what it is to be trafficked, and therefore, are the only ones who truly know what 'accurate' coverage would look like. While advocates were able to provide important insights, they were still speaking *for* the victims, which could re-victimize these individuals by silencing them. Additionally, interviewing victims can provide understandings about how journalists have spoken to/treated victims in the past, and ways that those interactions and relationships can be improved.

**Interviewing.** Thirty-seven in-depth interviews were conducted: 10 with journalists, 21 with advocates/researchers, 4 with consensual sex workers and 2 with survivors of sex trafficking. Each interview began with a summary of the study and an informed consent protocol, which was available in both English and Thai. It is worth noting, however, the difficulty of using IRB-required consent forms in a Thai context. Many in Thailand view the act of signing a document as a very formal and permanent practice. I noticed a clear change in tone and body language from multiple interviewees when I asked them to sign the document. I believe verbal consent would have been more culturally appropriate in this context, and would have served an adequate purpose of informing the participants about the risks and benefits while simultaneously allowing them to feel comfortable. I took other precautions, such as allowing them to select the

time and location of the meeting and carefully considering my tone, clothing choice and use of hand gestures, to ensure the comfort of the subjects, and the IRB-required consent forms hampered that. I discuss this further later in this dissertation, but I suggest using my experiences to continue a dialogue with IRBs around the United States and similar global institutions regarding alternative ways of protecting research subjects in international contexts.

Additionally, while 37 interviews were conducted, it is worth noting that not all individuals were willing to be interviewed for this study, and a specific population notably stood out as not being interested in participating: Thai journalists. Thai NGO employees and researchers, as well as non-Thai journalists were far more willing to speak with me than Thai journalists. While this could be due to a number of factors, including scheduling and language barriers, it is worthwhile to note that such a category of interviewee was minimally represented. Additionally, many respondents, especially journalists, would only speak to me on the condition that I withhold any identifying information about him or her, and those that did not initially request this confidentiality occasionally requested that parts of the interviews be ‘off the record.’ While it is not ideal to have numerous confidential sources in a study, given the sensitive nature of the topic we were discussing, coupled with an oppressive political landscape that actively discourages critical discussions, I agreed to conduct many of the interviews under a veil of obscurity. Moreover, given the request for namelessness, some of the interviews were conducted at night and/or at locations outside of main city meeting points. This silence and climate of fear, which will be discussed in detail in the findings section, likely contributed to who was willing to be interviewed and what they were willing to say.

All interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the interviewee. Most interviews took place at the office of the interviewee or a nearby coffee shop, but were determined at the discretion of the interviewee. Three interviews were conducted via Skype due to changing schedules of the interviewees, but the majority took place in-person in Bangkok, Pattaya and Chiang Mai, Thailand. It has been suggested that in-person or Skype interviews can be beneficial because they enable the researcher to “hear inflection and emphasis in the voices of participants, and in some cases, even to see the expressions on their faces” which can contribute to “richness” of descriptions captured (Clark, 2014, p. 55).

One interview required the use of a Thai-speaking translator, in which case the translator was trained in advance about the types of questions that were asked and the tone/manner in which the questions should be asked, especially in interviews with survivors. The translator used was affiliated with and one of the anti-trafficking organizations, so he was familiar with the subject matter. All but three interviews were audio recorded. The three that were not, two with survivors and one with an advocate, were not audio recorded, either, at the request of the interviewee or at my discretion in attempts to make the interviewees feel more comfortable (which I will discuss in detail later in this dissertation). Full transcriptions were created from the recordings.

The interviews were semistructured (Creswell, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2000) and consisted of open-ended questions as well as some demographic questions.

Semistructured interviews were selected because of the flexibility they allow with regard to allowing for new ideas to be brought up during the interview should worthwhile focuses surface, but are guided by a predetermined interview map (Leech, 2002; Poe,



2012). Journalists were asked to reflect on their own stories and talk about the challenges they faced as they wrote them. Anti-trafficking advocates and survivors were asked to reflect on their perceptions about existing coverage, what they would like the coverage to look like, whether they had had any experiences with journalists (and if so, what those experiences were like) and what they could provide to journalists to aid in improving coverage. In addition to journalists, survivors and anti-trafficking advocates provided unique insights into the realities of trafficking as well as an alternative viewpoint from those of the journalists.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, it was possible that interviews with survivors could bring about painful memories or elicit emotional responses or distress. When interviewing each of the survivors of sex trafficking, it was made clear from the beginning of the interview that her participation was completely optional, we could stop the interview at any time and she could skip any questions that she did not want to answer. The pace, flow and length of the interview was per her preference and control. As mentioned above, the survivors were also given the option to decide where the interview was conducted to ensure that it took place in the environment that she felt most comfortable. Further, the names of trafficking survivors were kept confidential, and pseudonyms are used in all discussions of findings. Additionally, contact information was available for professional medical and psychological services should the study process have become upsetting for any participants.

**Statement of positionality.** My role as the interviewer was to strike a balance between guiding each interview with a set of pre-established questions, while simultaneously allowing for enough elasticity for the interviewee to push the discussion

in directions that he or she felt most comfortable. However, my presence might have influenced how people responded to me. Given that I am a *farang* (the Thai word for foreigner), it is possible that people might have felt less comfortable talking to me than they would have a native Thai interviewer. On the flip side, individuals might have felt more comfortable talking to me because I am not Thai and therefore might have been less likely to have established opinions on varying aspects of Thai society. Additionally, me being an American, and Caucasian, might have further impacted how individuals responded to me due to current and past political and social relations between the countries. If I was a foreigner but was native to a nearby country, say Malaysia or Cambodia, people might view that differently -- for better or worse -- than they do an American asking the questions. Operating as an outsider likely has advantages and disadvantages depending on the situation.

Moreover, my gender might have influenced how people responded to me. The female survivors might have felt more comfortable talking to me than they would have a male interviewer, but others might not feel the same way. Given that gender inequalities exist in Thailand, like in most countries, some people might have responded to me differently or taken the study more or less seriously than they would have if a male were conducting the research.

Furthermore, my background includes work with anti-trafficking organizations in the United States and Thailand. Specifically, I worked with one anti-trafficking organization based in the U.S. that collaborates with organizations in Thailand. While doing this anti-trafficking work, I traveled to Thailand in 2010 and interacted with a number of Thai-run and foreign-run anti-trafficking organizations. One of the

organizations that I collaborated with in 2010 is Urban Light, which is still in existence today and two of my interview respondents for the present study are from Urban Light. My past work likely resulted in a strong bias toward protecting and promoting human rights and anti-trafficking efforts. When interviewing advocates, this could have resulted in some advocates considering me an insider who is able to relate to their work, whereas others may have viewed those beliefs as taking away from my objectivity as a researcher.

Moreover, given that sex trafficking is a contentious issue with beliefs ranging from 'all sex work is trafficking' to 'trafficking doesn't exist,' it is likely that my own beliefs about sex trafficking played into this research. My beliefs about sex trafficking fall in the middle of the spectrum, meaning, I believe that some men and women do indeed chose to be consensual sex workers in order to make a living for themselves and their families, and their decision should be respected. However, I also believe that there is exploitation in the sex industry and not all individuals have the ability to leave the situation (even if they agreed to it initially). I believe that is where a situation becomes sex trafficking. In other words, I believe that sex trafficking does exist and that an individual can be trafficked initially or can become trafficked at some point after initially consenting to work in the sex industry. Given that my beliefs counter those of some interviewees, it is possible that my viewpoints influenced how I asked questions or interpreted answers. "Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain world view that guides their inquires" (Creswell, 1998, p. 74), so therefore, despite all attempts at neutrality, my background and beliefs might seep into study-related questions and discussions.

**Analysis.** For the 37 interviews that were conducted, verbatim transcriptions were created from the audio recordings of the interviews or the detailed field notes for the three interviews not recorded, which generated 274 pages of transcripts. The shortest interview was 19 minutes and the longest was one hour and 40 minutes, with the average interview length being approximately 49 minutes. Upon completion of the transcriptions, I read each transcript and its accompanying field notes multiple times to pull out central themes, phrases, references or terminology in order to make meaning of the diverse perspectives. While reading and rereading the transcripts, I engaged in what Baxter and Babbie (2003) refer to as the “iterative cycle” of developing codes by “each time revising the coding categories until they capture all” of the relevant data (p. 367). Themes and trends were identified through this iterative process, which allowed for major emergent categories to be developed. When analyzing the interview data, some categories emerged based on existing literature, but efforts were also taken during readings of the transcripts to discover new issues or themes that materialized from the text (Besley & Roberts, 2010).

After an initial set of categories emerged which allowed the data to be organized in a logical and useful way, transcriptions of the interviews were imported as text files into Dedoose, a collaborative, cross-platform application for the management, integration, and analysis of qualitative data (Lieber & Weisner, 2013) to further analyze how frequently and in what capacities those themes, ideas and phrases were used. A combination of the data being analyzed by a real person and computer-supported analysis software enabled the interviews to be organized and categorized by themes and terminology used as well account for timing/spacing, tone and body language.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Phase 1: Analysis of News Article Findings**

This quantitative content analysis of news articles, the first phase of the study, focused on two main research questions: how often English-language newspapers in Thailand report on sex trafficking and how they frame the stories. The quantitative content analysis of the news stories provided a data-rich snapshot of the amount of coverage and how the terminology used to describe and identify victims, the sources cited and the key ideas presented in relation to sex trafficking all contributed to the framing of the article. In addition to the quantitative analysis, a close qualitative reading of all of the news stories revealed patterns and more detailed understandings of the coverage, which helped contextualize the quantitative results. In the following sections, I first provide a description of the findings, including the amount of news stories about sex trafficking in each newspaper over the 15-year time period. I then compare the framing of the issue across the newspapers, focusing on how the problem was defined and how remedies were suggested. Throughout these sections, I provide qualitative examples from the news articles to craft a more nuanced picture of the framing of the coverage.

Broadly, this study found that the majority of human trafficking-related articles were not focused on sex trafficking, but those that were, were primarily crime-centered news stories. This research also found evidence of inconsistent terminology, a focus on

children and female victims and a lack of discussions pertaining to risk factors, social status and racialization identifiers such as statelessness or membership in an ethnic minority community. Additionally, sex trafficking was largely reported in relation to other countries, but articles most frequently cited official sources from within Thailand. The majority of stories did not discuss solutions that might help bring an end to trafficking. The following sections will provide more detailed descriptions of these findings and how they contribute to the overall framing of the issue.

**Amount of news coverage.** In order to analyze how often Thai newspapers reported on sex trafficking, the stories were coded for whether or not the main focus of the article was on sex trafficking. After removing the articles that did not focus on sex trafficking, the number of articles in *The Nation* was reduced from 936 to 115, the number of articles in *Bangkok Post* was reduced from 1149 to 116, the number of articles in *Chiang Rai Times* was reduced from 86 to 33, the number of articles in *Pattaya Mail* was reduced from 106 to 35, and the number of articles in *Phuket Gazette* was reduced from 41 to 20. Out of 2,318 articles about human trafficking, only 13.76 percent of articles (319 articles) had sex trafficking as the main focus. Rather than focusing on sex trafficking, the majority of analyzed news articles reported on labor trafficking, specifically in the fishing industry, or used the phrase ‘human trafficking’ broadly without specifying the form of trafficking. Some of the other forms of exploitation that were discussed in the context of ‘human trafficking’ were cross-border smuggling and/or migration, men fathering babies via surrogates (referred to as ‘baby farms’ and ‘commercial surrogacy’), forced begging, involuntary domestic servitude and organ trafficking. These articles were set aside, and only the articles that focused explicitly on

sex trafficking were further analyzed to determine when the stories were published and how they were framed.

The amount of news coverage of sex trafficking in all five newspapers increased over time, with the largest increase in 2013. When peaks and valleys did occur in coverage, they were fairly similar across all of the newspapers. Figure 1 shows that *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* had slight increases from 2000-2004, but really escalated the amount of coverage starting in 2010. *Bangkok Post* had a sharp decrease in coverage in 2012, with only one sex trafficking-focused article, but then picked back up the following year with 35 stories in 2013. Across all five newspapers, 2013 was a big year for sex trafficking coverage with each newspaper featuring some of their highest amounts of sex trafficking stories.

While archives for the three regional papers are not comprehensive, this research found the first story about sex trafficking in *The Nation* newspaper in 1997. *Bangkok Post* followed suit two years later with its first story about sex trafficking in 1999; *Phuket Gazette* did so in 2002, *Pattaya Mail* in 2005 and *Chiang Rai Times* in 2011. There were no articles about the topic in any of the newspapers in 2008, which is ironic because in that year Thailand enacted its first comprehensive anti-trafficking law that criminally prohibited all forms of trafficking, including sex trafficking. It is possible that articles about this law did not focus specifically on sex trafficking and therefore were not included in this study or it took some time for the ramifications of the law to turn into newsworthy angles, as coverage began to pick back up the following year.

(Figure 1 about here)

**Framing techniques: Article type and terminology used to describe trafficked persons and traffickers.** A good place to start when analyzing how news media frame an issue is to consider the format of the information, or how the content is packaged (for example, a news story, a feature story, an editorial, etc.). A newspaper running feature stories or op-eds may offer a wider array of perspectives than are traditionally seen in news stories. When sex trafficking stories appeared in the Thai newspapers, they were mainly presented as news articles. In fact, *Pattaya Mail* ran *only* news stories about the issue. Table 1 indicates that as a whole, almost two-thirds of analyzed articles were news stories, followed by feature stories, which accounted for almost one-fifth of articles. Most of the newspapers during this time period did not carry editorials about sex trafficking. *The Nation* had the highest percentage of editorials out of the five newspapers, but still only with roughly 10 percent of articles.

In addition to the type of article, another element of a story that can contribute to understanding how the issue is presented to audiences is whether the article was framed episodically or thematically. Overall, slightly more articles discussed sex trafficking as a recurring problem (thematic framing), but still almost half suggested it as an isolated incident (episodic framing) (see Table 1). A closer look at the data, however, indicates between-newspaper differences. *Pattaya Mail* was the only newspaper with notable differences in episodic versus thematic framing: less than 15 percent of articles discussed sex trafficking as a recurring or ongoing problem and more than 85 percent portrayed it as an isolated or one-time incident. *Chiang Rai Times* also featured more articles portraying the issue as isolated; the other three newspapers all had more than half of stories exhibiting it as recurring.



(Table 1 about here)

How trafficking victims, traffickers and sex buyers are identified in news articles can also influence the framing of a news story. For example, the term(s) used to describe trafficked individuals may influence how audiences understand that person's level of responsibility. Figure 2 reveals a relatively consistent distribution among articles in all newspapers regarding the phrase or term used to describe the trafficked person. Overall, 26.3 percent of articles referred to trafficked individuals as 'victims,' 24.5 percent referred to trafficked individuals as 'prostitutes,' 21.6 percent of articles referred to trafficked individuals as some other word or phrase (such as 'the girls'), and 32.0 percent of articles wrote about sex trafficking broadly and did not mention a specific person. Interestingly, *Bangkok Post* featured the highest percentage of articles that referred to the trafficked individual as a victim as well as the highest percentage of articles that referred to the trafficked person as a prostitute, with 37.9 percent and 43.1 percent, respectively. *The Nation*, *Chiang Rai Times* and *Pattaya Mail* all featured more articles that did not mention a specific individual than any descriptive phrase. No article in any of the five newspapers described the trafficked individual as a survivor.

(Figure 2 about here)

In addition to the variation in diction used to identify a trafficked person, a vast array of words and phrases were used to describe the topic of sex trafficking. For example, sex trafficking was discussed using a variety of phrases from "human trafficking" (Chatree, 2010), to "human trade" (Bangkok Post, 2013b), to "human cargoes" (Bangkok Post, 2003), to "flesh trade" (Jinakul, 2004), to "sex trade" (Bangkok Post, 2013a), to "vice trade" (Hutasingsh, 2000), to "prostitution trade" (Assavanonda,

2004), to “schoolgirl prostitution” (Akkrabal, 2004), to “child prostitution” (Rojanaphruk, 2003).

Possibly as a result of these differing phrases, the news stories from each newspaper tended to not make a distinction between prostitution and sex trafficking, and the concepts were frequently used interchangeably in the same article. At times this made it difficult to tell if a story was about sex trafficking even though it had trafficking elements in it. These types of stories would commonly discuss an arrest by the human trafficking police, but give no further indication as to whether the individuals involved were actually trafficked individuals or consensual sex workers. In multiple other cases, articles would report on underage prostitution, but rarely identify it as sex trafficking. For example, “Chonburi Immigration Police arrested a Thai man and are seeking another for running a brothel that employed underage Laotian girls,” and, “During the raid, investigators found three underage Laotian girls, a ledger detailing the brothel’s operations and a book of rental coupons for the hotel 20 meters from the karaoke bar where officers were told to meet the girls” (Chatree, 2010a, para. 1 & 3). This positioning of underage sex workers as prostitutes as opposed to victims of trafficking was also seen in *The Nation* article, “Four of the prostitutes found on the premises were over the age 18, but three were under 18, and two were from Myanmar. Pol Col Napanwut said the shop opened without a licence and its owner has been charged with child prostitution” (The Nation, 2013, para. 3). Other journalists (see, for example, Suthathiwong, 2014; Chatree, 2010b) featured similar exemplars of ambiguity with labels. Further, a number of articles continued to fuel this confusion by specifying that *human trafficking police* arrested *prostitutes*, for example, “Human trafficking officers likewise charged Soho Bar owner

Pornsawan Iammala, 33, with operating illegal rooms upstairs. She and seven employees ages 18-32 were arrested and charged with prostitution-related offenses” (Chatree, 2010c, para. 4). This mixing of phrases makes it difficult to understand what sex trafficking is and who has put himself or herself in such a situation by choice.

Furthermore, the qualitative review of the articles revealed some interesting differences in framing regarding the trafficker or the sex buyer (sometimes referred to in articles as the ‘John’). Specifically, differences were seen in whether he or she was named in the stories or whether the name was withheld due to his or her level of prominence and/or police affiliation. While all five newspapers almost always withheld the name of the trafficked victim (with a few exceptions), differences were observed in how each newspaper identified these other players in the trafficking scenario.

*Bangkok Post* identified a trafficker or sex buyer by name if he or she was not a public official or prominent member of society, as can be seen in, “The [victim], whose name has been withheld, provided police with enough evidence to arrest and charge Jirapat Ramlee, 53, a senior teacher at Nong Bua Wittayayon School in Nong Bua Lam Phu province, with human trafficking and the determination of a person against their will” (Ngamkham, 2009, para. 2) and “Four men have been charged with involvement in sex trafficking between August 2003 and November 2004. Kam Tin Ho, 40, his brother Ho Kam Ho, 38, and Chee Fui Hoo, 42, face charges of possessing and intentionally using a slave” (Lillebuen, 2009, para. 6). However, the newspaper did not name a government official involved in a trafficking case when he was a prominent figure, but named other, less prominent, individuals in the same article: “One suspect, an unnamed former secretary to a Phichit MP, was arrested and released on bail on Tuesday night,

said Pol Col Santirak Intharakhao, head of the Muang district police station. Three other men who are also accused of having paid for sex with the two girls, aged 13 and 14, were identified as Sophon, 40, Pramote, 35, and Jet, 40...The former aide, Mr. Sophon and Mr. Jet have been released on bail” (Bangkok Post, 2010, para. 3-6).

Alternatively, the other four newspapers named all traffickers and sex buyers, including prominent figures, as can be seen in this 2006 *The Nation* article about a Thai military commander: “A retired Air Force commander was among three members of a human trafficking ring sentenced by the Criminal Court to the maximum of 18 years in prison for luring five Thai women into prostitution in Japan. Wing Commander Atchariya Wirojsiri, his wife Rungnapha and Thantawan Kato were each jailed for 18 years” (The Nation, 2006, para. 1-2).

Given that *Bangkok Post* is said to be the most widely read English-language newspaper in Thailand (Thai Newspapers, n.d.) and it withholds names of prominent individuals involved in trafficking cases, this has the potential to set the agenda for how audiences and policymakers understand the responsibility of traffickers who are prominent members of society. Additionally, this naming and lack of naming, in conjunction with the diversity of terms used to identify trafficked individuals and trafficking situations results in a lack of clarity regarding what trafficking is and who is responsible.

**Framing techniques: Age, gender and status of trafficked persons.** Another way to think about how responsibility is discussed and how the framing of a sex trafficking story defines the problem is to consider more specific identifying information. Who gets talked about in a sex trafficking story, in terms of age and gender, can paint a

picture for audiences about who this issue most directly impacts. However, likely even more important than such demographic descriptors is how the victims are labeled in terms of their social status and whether he or she *belongs* in society.

First, when analyzing the age of the victim(s) in the news reports, almost one-third of stories talked about the issue of sex trafficking generally without discussing a specific trafficked person. Of articles that did mention a trafficked individual, more articles (37.6 percent) discussed children than adults; however, 27.9 percent of articles did not mention a specific person, hence these differences were not statistically significant. Figure 3 illustrates that *Phuket Gazette* was the only newspaper to feature more articles that did not mention a specific person, in 40 percent of articles, than any specific age category – demonstrating the newspaper’s tendency to report on the issue broadly. The other four newspapers were similar in how they reported on the age of trafficked individuals: most commonly featured stories about only children, with each news source doing so in 30-45.7 percent of articles, followed by stories that did not mention a specific individual, in 27.6-40 percent of articles, then stories discussing both minors and adults, in 10-21.2 percent of stories, and lastly, stories that focused solely on adult victims, which were seen in 6.1-20 percent of articles.

(Figure 3 about here)

In addition to age, another way of understanding how stories discuss who gets trafficked is to consider the gender of the victim. Articles analyzed here overwhelmingly wrote about female-gendered sex trafficking victims. Statistically significant differences were found between the gender of the trafficked person discussed and the newspaper. Table 2 data reveal *Pattaya Mail* reported on male-gendered victims more frequently than

the other newspapers, but only in approximately one-tenth of stories. *Phuket Gazette*, on the other hand, did not report on male victims at all. Similar to discussions of age, *Phuket Gazette* commonly (in half of articles) did not mention a gender, rather, discussed the issue of sex trafficking more broadly. It was rare that sex-trafficking focused articles discussed transgendered individuals or ‘ladyboys,’ but the *Bangkok Post* did so the most frequently followed by the *Phuket Gazette*.

Bearing in mind the previous points about age and gender of trafficked persons, Table 2 data further illustrate the prevalence of other defining characteristics that contribute to how articles defined who is trafficked. Discussions of these traits, statelessness and membership in an ethnic minority or hill tribe community, can indicate the individual’s perceived status in society. As examined in the literature review, stateless persons are a highly discriminated against population in Thailand and commonly viewed as outsiders, making this an issue of racialization and resulting in these peoples being vulnerable to trafficking. A chi-square test revealed that the presence of discussions of statelessness or stateless individuals differed by newspaper. However, despite the prevalence of notions of stateless victims in the literature, none of the newspapers frequently discussed sex trafficking in that context or consistently identified trafficked individuals as being stateless. *Chiang Rai Times* did so most frequently, but only in approximately 12 percent of articles, followed by *Bangkok Post*, which had mentions of statelessness in fewer than 10 percent of stories. It is fitting that *Chiang Rai Times* would discuss these populations the most commonly given that Chiang Rai is geographically located near many of these groups. *The Nation* did so in less than two percent of articles

and both *Pattaya Mail* and *Phuket Gazette* never mentioned statelessness in any sex trafficking story analyzed.

Often times, stateless individuals are members of hill tribes and are ethnic minorities in the country. It is worth analyzing whether articles discussed these populations, which can further contribute to discussions of trafficked people's place in society. Sex trafficking was discussed in relation to hill tribes and/or ethnic minorities slightly more often than statelessness, but it was still relatively rare across most newspapers. Similar to statelessness, *Chiang Rai Times* discussed ethnic minorities and/or hill tribe communities most frequently, in a quarter of articles. *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* both discussed hill tribes and/or ethnic minorities in roughly 15 percent of sex trafficking related articles. *Pattaya Mail* did so in none of the analyzed articles.

(Table 2 about here)

**Framing techniques: What issues are identified as connected to trafficking.**

In addition to defining *who* is trafficked, considering how the stories frame the issue in conjunction with other ideas that audiences may be more familiar with can help us better understand how the topic is being presented to the public and policymakers.

One of these ideas is that trafficking happens in far away lands. Often times people tend to think about sex trafficking as happening 'over there,' meaning, it is a phenomenon that happens in communities outside of their own (De Chesnay, 2013). Figure 4 shows that such a notion could be seen in this analysis, as four of the five newspapers primarily discussed sex trafficking as an international issue or as taking place in other countries. *Pattaya Mail* was the only newspaper to discuss international aspects of trafficking in fewer than half of analyzed articles (31.4 percent). The other four

newspapers overwhelmingly reported on the issue internationally with *The Nation* and *Chiang Rai Times* each doing so in more than 63 percent of articles.

Furthermore, literature continually points to the prominence of the monarchy and Buddhism in Thailand – two of the three “pillars” of Thai society, along with notions of nationalism (Chongkittavorn, 2001). It could therefore be possible that sex trafficking could be in some way discussed or presented in relation to the monarchy and/or Buddhism due to the prevalence of both topics in Thai society. However, Figure 4 shows that sex trafficking was never discussed in relation to the monarchy in any of the newspapers, which is unsurprising given the strict lese majeste laws, and was very seldom discussed in the context of Buddhism (in only 0.6 percent of articles).

(Figure 4 about here)

Another way that sex trafficking could be tied to different ideas is by presenting it in the context of human trafficking forms that may be more familiar to audiences. Such a connection could be seen, for example, in a story about an individual forced to work against his will in the fishing industry and then later required to sell sexual services in a bar owned by the same individuals that run the fishing industry trafficking scheme. However, such ties were rare and sex trafficking was seldom discussed in relation to other forms of human trafficking. All five newspapers overwhelmingly discussed sex trafficking independent of any other form(s) of human trafficking. In the rare cases when another form of trafficking was presented in conjunction with sex trafficking, all newspapers primarily reported on labor trafficking in the fishing industry. Of the five newspapers, *Phuket Gazette* reported on labor trafficking in the fishing industry most frequently in 20 percent of stories, followed by the *Bangkok Post*, which did so in 15.5



percent of articles. The instances of sex trafficking being discussed in conjunction with other forms of trafficking are reflected in Figure 5.

(Figure 5 about here)

Another central aspect of understanding these stories and the issues offered is the dominant frame in which sex trafficking is presented as. As illustrated in Figure 6, each of the five newspapers predominantly reported on sex trafficking as a crime issue; overall, 47 percent of analyzed articles framed the topic as an issue relating to crime. *Pattaya Mail* featured crime-focused stories in the highest percentage (88.6) of articles and *Bangkok Post* did so in the lowest percentage (36.2), but still dominantly framed the issue as crime-related. After crime, a noteworthy number of stories were framed as human rights abuses and policy/legislation matters. Interestingly, *Pattaya Mail* did not feature any stories that framed the issue as relating primarily to human rights, and *Chiang Rai Times* and *Phuket Gazette* both featured notable levels of ‘call-to-action’ stories. The *Bangkok Post* appears to have the widest range of issues represented in its coverage in comparison to the other four newspapers. In all five newspapers, sex trafficking was very rarely reported on as a public health concern, a non-health related societal problem (such as an eyesore or a cause for increased pedestrian or car congestion on the roads) or a topic relating to morality or migration.

(Figure 6 about here)

Generally, when the five newspapers reported on these as crime stories, little if any attention was given to why trafficking happens or the scope of the problem. For example, a deeper reading of the articles found that in stories about police raids and rescues, which were very common, there was a notable lack of discussions regarding how

the individual(s) got in that situation to begin with or what happens to them after they are rescued.

Although such context can provide helpful background or depth to a story, in the rare case when an article did provide some context, many times the context appeared to blame the victim. For example, one article attempted to explain why young girls might end up as victims of trafficking and stated,

In most cases the girls decided to sell themselves in order to be able to afford luxuries like motorcycles, cell phones and nightlife activities...She also blamed sexual abuse by men close to the girls as a factor encouraging them to enter the flesh trade. After losing their virginity, she said, the decision becomes much easier. (Akkrabal, 2004, para. 6 & 7)

Similar instances of stories that featured context which could be understood as victim-blaming can be seen in articles throughout all five newspapers, including this article in *Pattaya Mail*, which states, “But even after victims are found and sent home, they often return, again lured into servitude by the prospect of big money for their families” (Makpol, 2011, para. 2). These ‘explanations’ for why the individual is in the situation can lead to confusing notions of choice and consent, and can leave audiences unclear about who is at fault for the trafficking occurring and/or enable readers to not feel concern about the issue or victim.

Broadening discussions of context in the stories, using statistics to tie the issue to bigger problems or other widespread social issues could be another attempt to relate sex trafficking to other topics in order to help audiences better understand the problem. However, there was a noticeable scarcity of statistics reported in the analyzed articles. An occasional article did present numbers representing the scope of the problem, yet little to no discussion about the speculative nature of the statistics was included. Examples of this

unquestioned use of statistics can be seen in the following two articles: “‘Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra should take action against human trafficking. Up to one million Thai women work in the flesh trade. Of them, about 100,000 are younger than 18 years old,’ Chuwit said” (The Nation, 2012, para. 4) and “Of about 200,000 people trafficked annually in the Mekong region, 24,700 are children and young people, and Thailand has the highest number of young victims at up to 6,000, the third Mekong Youth Forum on Human Trafficking and Migration was told last week” (The Nation, 2010, para. 7).

On one hand, this could be mirroring the lack of known statistics about the scope of the problem. However, this dichotomy between the use of no statistics and the apparent acceptance of vastly differing statistics presents challenges for audiences to understand the scope of the problem as well as how it compares to the prevalence of other social issues that they may be familiar with.

**Framing techniques: Sources cited.** In addition to using specific terms to label traffickers, sex buyers and victims, as well as identifying characteristics which define who gets trafficked and tying sex trafficking to other ideas, another important way that stories can frame the topic is through the use of specific sources and the enabling of some perspectives to be represented while omitting others. Not only did articles in this analysis rarely discuss victims’ stories by adding context or background to the story, but a notable similarity that emerged across all four newspapers was the clear absence of the voices of victims, even in crime stories about individuals being rescued.

Figure 7 shows that all five newspapers most commonly cited official sources from within Thailand, almost to the exclusion of all others. *Pattaya Mail* cited official sources from within Thailand in 94.3 percent of articles and *Phuket Gazette* did so in 80

percent of stories. The next most commonly cited type of source was advocates or social workers. *The Nation*, *Bangkok Post* and *Chiang Rai Times* all featured advocate sources in a notable percentage of articles (32.2, 33.6 and 42.4, respectively) as compared to *Pattaya Mail* and *Phuket Gazette* (8.6 and 4.1, respectively).

Official sources from outside of Thailand were never cited in *Phuket Gazette* but were occasionally referenced in the other four media outlets. The voices of victims were noticeably absent from most publications. The newspaper that cited victims most frequently was *Bangkok Post*, in 11.2 percent of stories, compared with *Phuket Gazette*, which did not cite a victim in any of the analyzed articles. When considering all articles as a whole, witnesses/non-experts were cited more commonly than victims. Interestingly, *Chiang Rai Times* stuck out as not citing sources very regularly in comparison to the other newspapers (in other words, there were numerous *Chiang Rai Times* articles that did not cite any sources), and when sources were cited, they were frequently other news outlets.

(Figure 7 about here)

When diving deeper into what these official sources were quoted as saying or doing, a hero police theme emerged. For example, an arguably unnecessarily heavy focus on police work can be seen in:

After hearing the victim's statements, the detective team investigated the madams. They collected evidence to file in the Southern Bangkok Criminal Court for approval of a warrant to arrest all the accused on charges of illegally holding three or more people for the purpose of human trafficking by finding benefit from prostitution.

The police then went to arrest the madams at room 1901 of the Omni Tower Hotel on Sukhumvit Road, Soi 4, Klongtoey.

At the scene, police discovered that Ms. Notira had just procured a Middle East customer to purchase services from the victim. The police also

found many other victims, and seized their passports to prevent them from escaping. (Chiang Rai Times, 2012, para. 9-11)

In a similar vein, more examples can be seen in articles that focus on the details of how police made arrests, such as:

Following the arrest of a woman wanted by authorities in Bangkok for human trafficking charges, Phuket Airport Immigration officers revealed how they caught the suspect before she could fly out of the country.

Phuket Airport Immigration officer Lt Col Wannee Songchaisanguan said that Snr Sgt Maj Wanchai Narin was on duty in the departure hall on September 14 when a woman approached his desk and handed him her Thai passport.

“Sgt Maj Wanchai scanned her passport and was immediately notified of an outstanding arrest warrant. He informed me and we escorted her to the office for questioning,” Col Wannee explained. (Khamlo, 2012, para. 1-3)

This ‘patting on the back,’ so to speak, of the police work being done to stop trafficking and the praising of the police officers’ keen powers of observation and quick thinking is fitting given the high numbers of crime stories that focus on the work of the police to conduct raids and make arrests. However, this high level of praise for the Thai police force’s anti-trafficking efforts is at odds with criticism that the police are not doing enough to stop sex trafficking and/or are enabling it to flourish due to corruption. Additionally, by focusing on details of the police work, attention is deflected away from victims and traffickers as well as the issue as a whole.

**Framing techniques: solutions or remedies suggested.** As the literature suggests, in the context of social issues, suggesting remedies is one of the most important functions of frames. However, in this study, a lack of solutions dominated most of the study period. Table 3 indicates that overall, almost two-thirds of articles analyzed did not suggest a remedy for curbing sex trafficking. *Bangkok Post* featured the highest percentage of stories that did discuss a remedy, with just under half of articles, and *Pattaya Mail* did so the least in just over 10 percent of articles.

Of the articles that did suggest a solution to bring an end to sex trafficking, the most common option was “other,” which ended up largely including campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of sex trafficking and to crack down on corruption among law enforcement. The second most commonly suggested remedy overall, as well as for each individual newspaper, was the need for policy changes. None of the 319 analyzed articles suggested increasing punishments for the individual doing the sex acts (the victim) or sex buyer. Table 3 shows that *Bangkok Post* was the only newspaper to ever suggest increased punishments for the trafficker as the needed remedy, and it only did so in less than two percent of articles. *Chiang Rai Times* most commonly, in almost a quarter of stories, suggested the creation or promotion of organizations and services that care for victims; *Pattaya Mail* did not make such a suggestion in any of the analyzed articles and *The Nation* only did so in less than one percent of articles.

(Table 3 about here)

**Overall.** Taken together, this analysis reveals that the majority of human trafficking articles do not focus on sex trafficking specifically, and those that do are typically crime-focused news stories that lack context and background, including discussions of ethnic minorities or stateless individuals. The sex trafficking articles lacked the voices of victims and presented a vast array of terminology, while focusing on sex trafficking internationally. Often times sex trafficking was discussed interchangeably with prostitution and while many articles focused on children, they were repeatedly described as underage prostitutes and not as trafficked individuals.

In a notable amount of articles, police were portrayed as heroes and the most commonly cited sources were officials from within Thailand. Frequently the news stories

identified the trafficker and/or sex buyer by name but there were instances where the name was withheld if the individual was a prominent member of society. Rarely were suggestions presented about bringing an end to sex trafficking. As a whole, these articles present confounding notions of choice and consent; in many articles it is unclear who is the victim and who is the criminal. This quantitative content analysis of the framing of the stories in English-language newspapers in Thailand provides validation of previous research, enhanced understandings of the complexities associated with sex trafficking and informs needed next steps.

## **Phase 2: In-depth Interview Findings**

As the content analysis showed, there were patterns in how the newspapers in Thailand framed sex trafficking. In this section, the interviews with journalists, anti-trafficking advocates/researchers, sex trafficking survivors and consensual sex workers provide insight into the practices and opinions of journalists and members of the anti-trafficking community. Specifically, the interviews provide information about how anti-trafficking advocates and sex trafficking survivors view the news media and understand their role in creating and shaping it, and how journalists make sense of their own reporting on sex trafficking, view themselves in relation to advocates and survivors, and comprehend the impact, if any, that their reporting has on reducing the prevalence of sex trafficking.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 37 participants. Table 4 provides a snapshot of who these interviewees were. Ten journalists, 21 advocates/researchers, 4 consensual sex workers and 2 survivors of sex trafficking were interviewed. Several respondents preferred that their identity be kept confidential. In the

interest of ensuring complete confidentiality, unless the respondent specifically stated otherwise, I have concealed all demographic information including gender, age, and race/ethnicity. If they allowed me to include the name of the organization that they are associated with, it is denoted in the table. The table indicates the category of interviewee (journalist, advocate/researcher, survivor, sex worker), the name of the individual or a pseudonym for those being kept confidential, and if possible, the name of the organization that he or she was associated with. The survivors allowed me to reveal their gender, so they were given pseudonyms. However, for many of the journalists and advocates that requested to remain confidential, revealing their gender may make them more likely to be identified, so I am referring to them as Journalist 1, Journalist 2, etc. and Advocate 1, Advocate 2, etc. As the table shows, I spoke with four sex workers who allowed me to reveal their gender and were therefore given pseudonyms. These four individuals self-identify as consensual sex workers and are associated with an organization that works to distinguish between trafficked individuals and consensual sex workers. They bring an important perspective to the trafficking conversation and will therefore be discussed in more depth later in this section.

(Table 4 about here)

As the methods section noted, verbatim transcriptions were created from the audio recordings of the interviews or the detailed field notes for the three interviews not recorded. This resulted in 274 pages of interview transcripts, which yielded 579 applications of 56 codes and subcodes in Dedoose. Table 5 shows the weight or frequency of each code. After analyzing the transcripts and the frequency of each code, three themes emerged. The first theme focused on how sex trafficking is understood and



written about. Subthemes included the sentiments that, (1) sex trafficking is a contentious issue, and (2) sex trafficking is a difficult topic to write about. The second theme emerged from respondent's sentiments about the relationship among the press, NGOs/IGOs and the Thai government/police and how those relationships complicate news coverage of sex trafficking. This theme included elements that (3) coverage is impacted by the relationship between NGOs/IGOs and the press, (4) coverage is further impacted by the relationship between the Thai police/government and the press. Finally, a third theme emerged that revealed that the interviewees felt that there was more variation needed in the type of sex trafficking stories, but they did not agree on how that should happen. Issues of press freedom are discussed in depth in theme two, but it is important to note that the lack of press freedom discussed in the literature review was prevalent throughout these interviews and therefore color a great deal of the findings.

(Table 5 about here)

Overall, these interviews revealed a great deal of contention among respondents regarding the definition of sex trafficking. I found that respondents' perspectives on choice and an individual's perceived level of decision-making and familial obligation strongly influenced the way he or she understood sex trafficking. This disagreement about what is trafficking and who is trafficked permeated much of the rest of the findings, which revealed that professional positions influenced how each respondent approached the issue of sex trafficking. Both advocates and journalists had comments about the operations of their jobs as well as the jobs of other respondents, but they see their own roles as being very different from the others, which resulted in a tense relationship between advocates and the press. Further, I found that aspects of Thai culture and the

ways in which both groups talk about sex trafficking played weighty roles in both shaping coverage as well as straining this already-complicated relationship. Additionally, these interviews revealed that an important role of the police/military is limiting what journalists can write about and how they can talk about sex trafficking. As a whole, these findings reveal the need for a wider array of sex trafficking stories and voices to be presented in coverage.

Many of the findings, especially the intense contestation of a definition of sex trafficking, really divided respondents by group (NGO/advocate or journalist). I found perspectives from respondents in one group to be diametrically opposed to views from the other group of interviewees, and the respondents expressed ideas that revealed that they viewed members of the other groups as obstructionists to getting the true story.

Because the findings from these interviews were intertwined with both of the research questions, they are presented thematically. Additionally, the final subsections within these interview findings focus on consensual sex workers and the trafficking survivors and gives special attention to their beliefs and suggestions, and how those relate to the three broader themes.

**Theme 1: How sex trafficking is understood and written about.** Two subthemes emerged that shed light on how sex trafficking is understood and written about. The first subtheme, that sex trafficking is a contentious issue, focuses on the debate surrounding what trafficking is, who should be considered a victim of trafficking and where the issue of choice and consent fits into these varying definitions. The second subtheme is that sex trafficking is a difficult topic to write about. This subtheme included issues like: the challenges of telling a compelling story without re-victimizing a

trafficked individual, issues of language and unclear terminology, the time-consuming nature of reporting on the topic and the opinion from journalists about NGOs/IGOs not being helpful or responsive to them. Taken together, these discussions paint a picture of a complicated and challenging issue to understand and write about.

***Sex trafficking is a contentious issue.*** What is clear from these interviews is that sex trafficking is a contentious issue, and that even among the anti-trafficking community, an array of beliefs exist regarding what sex trafficking is and if it exists as a category distinct from prostitution or consensual sex work, as well as best practices for curbing the issue. The respondents often demonstrated their own conflicting beliefs about what and who should be considered ‘trafficked.’ The conflict surrounding the notion of choice – the ambiguity regarding who is consenting to sex work and who is trafficked – was clear from the words the respondents used as well as the tone and pace in which they spoke. When asked to define sex trafficking, many spoke slowly with large pauses between phrases as if they were grappling with the complexities as they tried to formulate their definition. This lack of consensus among the anti-trafficking community about these topics may make reporting on the issue difficult.

***Varying definitions of sex trafficking.*** As described in the literature review of this dissertation, there largely exist two schools of thought on this topic, the pro-sex workers’ rights perspective versus the ‘all sex workers are trafficked’ belief. One researcher/advocate acknowledged the controversy and described these two conflicting narratives surrounding sex trafficking discourses:

I would start by saying there is a very contested definition of sex trafficking ... These two ideas are that on the one side is the radical feminist point of view that all sex workers are trafficked, and on the other side a pro-rights sort of agenda that actually some sex work is consensual and should be respected, and

sex workers should be given more rights rather than fewer freedoms and their work should be decriminalized. (E. Kamler, personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014)

There appears to be a dichotomy suggesting that all sex workers are trafficked versus the belief that rights and respect should be afforded to sex workers who consent to it. What concerns me here is how these apparently incompatible discursive regimes are entwined and feed upon each other. I shall attempt to shed light on their relation in the following sections.

My own assumption is that some sex trafficking does exist, meaning that some individuals are forced to work against their will. I do not intend to make the claim that all sex workers are trafficked, but merely suggest the possibility that some are, due to circumstances, and focus on those individuals. Other respondents used laws and protocols to define sex trafficking. Advocate 1 and Advocate 2, both staff members at UN agencies, suggested that when they conceptualize what sex trafficking is, they do so in accordance with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime – commonly referred to as the Palermo Protocol – as, "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation" (UN General Assembly, 2000). However, Advocate 1 explained that even looking to the UN definition for an understanding of sex trafficking, it is not always interpreted the same way, stating:

Going back on the definition you can also see, it depends on the interpretation of the words inside the definition, whether it's directly from the protocol itself or in the legislation that was produced by the national countries. For example, I've actually witnessed firsthand cases of child sex exploitation in which the prosecutor stretched the definition of human trafficking far enough to use, apply

on these specific cases. And so it's up to interpretation. (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014)

While some people responded to the question, "How would you define sex trafficking?" immediately, others were not as sure of their definition. Many individuals took some time to think about their responses. Some respondents appeared to understand sex trafficking as related to movement or transportation. For example, Brent Seely, a staff member at an anti-trafficking organization that works with young boys, defined sex trafficking as "the movement of a human being from point A to point B for the purposes of exploitation" (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014). Other respondents did not describe movement or transportation, but rather, forced sex work and/or sexual abuse, as is seen in this definition from a staff member at a different anti-trafficking organization: "Sex trafficking, in a sentence, you can easily say, it's a form of human trafficking, it involves prostitution of others, sexual exploitation such as abuse, rape and also forced labor for sexual purposes" (P. Pattanotai, personal communication, Dec. 7, 2014).

Others, however, focused on operationalizing sex trafficking in direct relation to a person's age. Several interviewees said that age was the determining factor in what constitutes sex trafficking. Mickey Choothesa, founder of Children of Southeast Asia (COSA) was clear in his understanding of what sex trafficking is: "Underage and the people forced against their will" (personal communication, Dec. 13, 2014). Other respondents also discussed the topic of age in relation to trafficking, for example, "I think that a person who is under 18 and is being forced in any way to use their bodies to survive for money or for food at the risk of their personal safety, that is sex trafficking" (T. Donchai, personal communication, Dec. 19, 2014) or "When it is forced sex work. If

you are there and it is your will, that is not forced, unless of course you are under 18” (Advocate 4, personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014).

However, even when considering an individual’s age, there is not unanimous agreement that someone under the age of 18 is trafficked. Prawit Thainiyom, a Thai researcher, demonstrated some of his own conflicting beliefs when describing sex trafficking as “Forced prostitution, I think that's a simple way to look at it. Women who are there without consent, women who were sold” but then slowing down his pace and saying, “the age thing is very blurry to me, I mean, I would like to just tell you, anyone under 18 should be considered victims of sex trafficking but in my work I have met people who are 15, 16, who are there by consent” (personal communication, Dec. 16, 2014).

Advocate 2, a UN worker, echoed similar conflicting beliefs about the interplay between age and consent:

I’ve met a lot of the girls who worked in sex work and some of them were underage, but they didn’t view themselves at all as victims and it was seen as a much better option than a lot of other alternatives that they had and therefore, I had difficulty, even though they were underage, I had difficulty saying they were trafficked. (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014)

Prawit Thainiyom, the researcher, further demonstrated another example of this internal conflict when he said, “Morally it is wrong but I'm just not sure if I'm in the place and position to say, ‘you can't do this.’ I mean, they're children, but who am I to say what is best for them? So I feel very conflicted about this issue” (personal communication, Dec. 16, 2014).

It is interesting to think about how age can become a way of defining sex trafficking, and respondents expressed conflicted ideas about whether age is a key

characteristic in a trafficking scenario. In countries around the world, including Thailand, adulthood “represents an achieved status – an age of reason, rights and responsibilities” (Schaffner, 2002, p. 201). In Thailand, the age of sexual consent is 15 years of age according to Thai law (Thailand Criminal Code. B.E. 2499, 1956). But to confuse matters, when it comes to commercial sex work, the age of consent is 18 (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551, 2008). Therefore the Thai anti-trafficking law and an array of definitions state that an individual under 18 years old working in the sex industry is trafficked (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551, 2008; UN General Assembly, 2000).

Some adolescent developmental psychologists state that consent laws protect children who do not yet have the mental capacity to understand the long-term ramifications of their actions (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1990; Polaris Project, 2013). Proponents of this view further say that not only are children who are trafficked exposed to diseases and sexual violence, they are also deprived of their opportunity to be children and to go to school (Silverman et. al., 2007; Willis & Levy, 2002). The result of this lack of opportunity and qualification could be a vicious cycle from which victims of child sex trafficking find it difficult to disentangle themselves – resulting in some becoming procurers and/or continuing to work in the industry. However, some of the points expressed by respondents about their reluctance to clearly define trafficking by age parallels what scholars have said: Critics argue that the issue is not so black-and-white, and defining trafficking by age overlooks the social and cultural factors that result in the individual being in the situation to begin with, as well as takes away a person’s agency

and ability to make his or her own decisions (Aoyama, 2009; Balos, 2004; Montgomery, 2011).

*Complicated notions of choice.* One thing that was clear from the interviewees' responses is that there exist very unclear notions of 'choice' involved in determining what is and what is not considered sex trafficking. This debate surrounding choice has been discussed by scholars largely in the context of prostitution, and whether women truly make the decision to be a prostitute. Anthony (2007) argues that while some women view prostitution as a career choice and a form of empowerment, it is easier to adopt that 'choice' viewpoint than to actually deal with the implications of prostitution on women. Anthony (2007) maintains that having been a prostitute herself, she understands the situation more fully than many scholars who write about prostitution as a choice, but have never experienced it themselves. She explains that when people promote this 'prostitution as a choice' message in the media, which are often male-dominated media systems that are eager to adopt such a viewpoint about prostitution, it is actually forcing years of "dehumanization and numbness" on other women (Anthony, 2007, p. 416).

Furthermore, this 'prostitution as a choice' narrative has been linked to sexual liberalism and is often largely shaped by either/or dichotomies – meaning that such prostitution ideologies discuss the issue as if it is entirely a woman's choice (Anthony, 2007). Anthony (2007) believes that this dualism reflects a traditional masculinist mode of analysis, and can be problematic as it leads to gross oversimplification of the problem. However, instead of creating a choice versus force binary, it is likely that sex trafficking could be understood as circumstance, which is informed by issues relating to racialization



such as statelessness and membership in hill tribe communities as well as societal and cultural obligations.

In addition to disagreement regarding what constitutes choice, respondents described a disconnect between notions of sex trafficking in the West and the reality of the issue in Thailand, which further conflates understandings of choice and decision-making and could lead to similar oversimplifications of the problem. Liz Hilton, an employee of an organization advocating for the rights of sex workers explained, “‘Trafficked’ is a foreign word and doesn’t exist in Thai. No sex worker will say ‘I’ve been trafficked’ on their own accord” (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). Hilton argues that it is Western anti-trafficking organizations and narratives that paint the picture of trafficked individuals working against their will, when the reality is that most sex workers in Thailand are doing so consensually. Some scholars have argued that Western depictions of ‘third world trafficking victims’ advance the interests of anti-prostitution feminists in developed countries, but do not necessarily represent those of the sex workers themselves (Doezema, 2001).

Similarly, respondents further stated that it is often difficult for Western audiences to understand that, due to a number of cultural, political and economic factors, an individual might make the decision to work in the sex industry because they need the money. If an individual makes this decision, amongst very poor options or no other option, compelling arguments could likely be made on both sides of the aisle regarding whether this is trafficking. On one hand, if the individual does not want to be doing it and is only in the situation because of external factors, some would argue that this is trafficking. On the other hand, if the individual made the decision to do this and can walk

away at any time, others would argue that this is not trafficking, rather, his or her choice. Given debates about age of consent and familial obligation, the notion of *choice* is highly contested both in the literature and in discussions with respondents.

One aspect of Thai society that may lead an individual to seek less than ideal ways of making money is a deep duty to care for one's family. Brent Seely, a staff member at Urban Light, an anti-trafficking organization in Chiang Mai, explained,

In Thailand, there's a cultural expectation that you give money back to your parents to help support the family. In the U.S. it's the opposite. Oftentimes kids get a weekly allowance, but that is not the case here. Parents having kids is seen as a financial benefit. When a kid gets to the age where he or she can work, they are expected to. There's such an intense pressure from family to send back money, and send back enough money, so it isn't really their choice. (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014)

Mickey Choothesa, founder of COSA, reiterated similar sentiments: "Girls don't make the decision [to enter the sex industry] by themselves; they are influenced by their friends and family. Cultural obligation is the way of life here" (personal communication, Dec. 13, 2014). This emphasis on filial duty has been a constant theme in scholarship focused on sex work in Thailand (Kelly, 2008; Montgomery, 2001; 2011; Muecke, 1992). Patrick Winn, a Bangkok-based correspondent for *Global Post*, further explained,

Sex trafficking is very poorly understood in the West. All I mean by that is that it's inflated with notions that the whole industry is just running on that [trafficking], when it's not really. I think the fact that so many women here *do* make the decision to go into sex work, demonstrates that the economy is not what it should be and educational opportunities aren't what they could be because, presented with better options, I think 99% of women would take the better option. (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2014)

Examples of the challenges associated with ideas about choice were again seen when Alezandra Russel, founder of Urban Light, spoke about her work with young boys in the commercial sex industry,

We have found when sharing our story with the public is that a lot of people still have the ‘free yourself’ or ‘pull yourself up from your bootstraps’ mentality. And what they don’t realize is that’s really not a metaphor that can be used in a country like Thailand or in the situations of our boys. So really, having the global community understand that this isn’t just something that the boys are choosing to do, but it really feels like, to them, their only option is survival sex. (personal communication, Nov. 26, 2014)

Another staff member at Urban Light, Brent Seely, had similar thoughts about notions of choice:

I struggle with that word - choice - because it isn’t really their choice. It’s something that they have to do, culturally, for their families. That is something that’s really hard for people from the West to understand. [Westerners] come here and say to me, ‘but why are they choosing to do this?’ (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014)

David Feingold, the Bangkok-based anthropologist and the former head of UNESCO’s regional anti-trafficking project furthered the debate about choice by explaining that most of the trafficking in this part of the world is “migration gone terribly wrong” and that “most people are not trafficked, they *become* trafficked because trafficking is a process not an event, and this is something that a lot of people don’t understand” (personal communication, Dec 8, 2014). Feingold argues that for a very long time the construction of trafficking was:

Little Atu was sold by her dad, who was a heroin user, into a brothel where she was rescued by a *60 Minutes* type NGO. Then she’s sent to nuns or missionaries who teach her how to sew, which she already knows how to do but can’t earn a living that way anyhow, and then there’s the compulsory interview with the academic from some place who said that Asians don’t care about their daughters. (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014)

Many of the respondents expressed these types of views regarding how poorly sex trafficking in Thailand is understood in the West, and that Western individuals often come to Thailand to *rescue* trafficked people without understanding the societal and cultural complexities surrounding the situation. These sentiments from the interviewees

regarding Western notions of how sex trafficking works in Thailand are reminiscent of white-savior narratives and in some sense can be understood as notions of Western power and ‘saving the other.’ These ideas could also serve to reinforce a “self-versus-other” binary based on ideas about the Orient and the West.

The respondents’ sentiments are reminiscent of post-colonial cultural theories such as orientalism (Said, 1977; 1979) and othering (Barkawi & Laffey, 2002; Blaney & Inayatullah, 2004), which can shed light on the impacts of such narratives. Said (1977; 1979) coined the term “orientalism” to represent a constellation of false assumptions underlying Western attitudes toward non-Western cultures. The theory reasons that there exists a "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture," which derives from false images in Western discourses that essentialize the Orient and serve as justifications of the colonial and imperial ambitions of these Western nations (Said, 1979). It is possible that the respondents’ remarks about Western views of trafficking in Thailand are examples of these false images that Said (1979) warns are problematic justifications of imperialism.

Respondents’ comments about Western misunderstandings of trafficking in Thailand could be similarly interpreted under the guise of “othering.” Blaney and Inayatullah (2004) articulated that Christian ideologies provided the base of understanding for colonizers of the New World, and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian Europeans viewed “difference” as being analogous to “a fall from God’s grace” by the “other,” who rightfully belonged in a “lower rung” in the totem pole of human evolution (p. 49). Such colonial narratives have echoes in the respondents’ beliefs about

Western anti-trafficking discourses, which have the potential to evoke similar notions of difference between Western countries and Thailand.

**Sex trafficking is a difficult topic to write about.** The lack of consensus about who is trafficked and what constitutes a trafficking scenario discussed in the previous section creates a situation that leads to the topic being difficult for journalists to write about, which was the second subtheme to emerge from the interviews. This subtheme is largely a press issue, as journalists talked about a number of factors that make sex trafficking an arduous topic for them to report on. Several journalists spoke about the difficulty inherent in telling a compelling story without re-victimizing a trafficked person and the challenge in knowing what language or terminology to use. Others talked about the length of time it takes to research a sex trafficking article and how they often do not feel they can dedicate the necessary time to the story. Another oft-discussed challenge that journalists noted was the changing media landscape or, moreover, shifting consumption patterns and consumers' desire for shorter stories. Additionally, many journalists touched on what they perceived to be an unwillingness of anti-trafficking organizations to be of assistance when they reached out for information or sources. However, a few of these topics are not unique to journalists, as a few advocates also had difficulty navigating language barriers and unclear terminology, as well as requiring a great deal of time to learn about the issue. When advocates faced similar challenges, those discussions are also included.

*The challenge of telling the story without re-victimizing.* Journalists regularly referenced the need for an “angle” in a sex trafficking story, meaning, the specific theme or the point of the article he or she is trying to write. One idea that several journalists

commonly touched on was the difficulty in telling a captivating story – and getting “the angle” – without a name and a face. Yet in stories about sex trafficking victims, those elements have the potential to re-victimize or re-traumatize the victim. Indeed, advocates and researchers were quick to condemn journalists for treating their interview subjects in insensitive ways and/or using words or images that could traumatize or harm victims. For example, Chiang Mai-based trafficking researcher Erin Kamler said “I think that journalists, sometimes very well-meaning journalists, wanting to report on trafficking, end up telling stories, using names, sometimes using faces of the women and so forth, in ways that are problematic” (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014).

However, it was clear from the journalists that I interviewed that this criticism is something many are well aware of, and they try to be as cautious and respectful as possible when interacting with or writing about victims of sex trafficking. Casey Hynes, a reporter for *Asian Correspondent* whose articles were regularly picked up by the *Chiang Rai Times*, nicely summed up the challenge for many reporters as they cover a topic that can take a personal toll on them as journalists:

You want to go after the story and capture that heart-breaking hook, because that is what draws people in and will make people pay attention to the story, but at the same time, you have to be aware that these are real peoples’ lives that you are talking about so you have to take a step back and be a person before being a journalist. (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014)

Another reporter, Journalist 1 from the *Bangkok Post*, explained that when writing an article that included information and quotes from a victim about sex trafficking, this journalist took extra precautions to protect the identity of the victim. “I was very careful though to delete all the traces of figuring out who this could be. I needed him to know

that he was protected, so I changed names and any little thing that we thought could have been identifying” (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014).

However, journalists explained that it is not always easy to get the quotes and the angle for your story while taking so many precautions. Casey Hynes described the challenges she had trying to get the story angle she was hoping for during an experience working with Urban Light and trying to interview a victim of sex trafficking,

They were very careful; they did not want the boys to be featured anywhere; they did not want their names to be featured, they did not want them to be taken advantage of or be put in a position where they could be hurt by doing an interview...I wanted to hear their stories but the organization was very clear that the boys’ safety came first, so that was a little difficult in trying to get that angle in my interview. (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014)

*Issues of language.* Examples of the difficulty that journalists face when reporting on the topic of sex trafficking were also seen in respondents’ discussions of language and terminology. Language barriers between journalists and the populations they want to talk to about the problem as well as misunderstandings about proper terminology were common issues discussed by respondents.

For example, Journalist 4, a Burmese-speaking reporter based in Bangkok and working for a large international media organization, explained the benefits that come with speaking the language of the population you are writing about,

If you speak the language you can just reach out to, let us say, a woman who works in the sex industry, and she is bound to have friends and some of her friends might be willing to speak about the issue. I have heard stories through a few of my own Burmese friends that I have turned into a story. (personal communication, Dec. 17, 2014)

However, this is not an issue that was discussed solely by journalists. Another example can be seen in a story told by Advocate 1, a Thai staff member at a UN agency

based in Bangkok, who discussed how things get lost in translation due to language barriers:

I was interviewed by *Bangkok Post* years ago and I thought, OK, it's going to be an English interview so I don't have to plan any special vocab, and then a Thai person shows up who can't speak English. I asked "You're *Bangkok Post*?" I watched her take notes in Thai and I wondered, "OK, if this is what I have to explain in Thai, how is it going to look when it's put into English?" Whereas, if you interviewed me straight in English, I could have given you the language to use. In the end, I saw my article and it made me sound like a five-year-old child, the way they wrote my quotes. I don't speak like that. (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014)

In addition to language barriers, the content analysis exposed the varied uses in terminology when describing trafficked persons, which were also seen in respondents' comments. The interviews revealed that there is a great deal of confusion when considering what terminology to use to describe a trafficked person or a trafficking situation. Not only did respondents use an array of terms when talking to me, when advocates were asked their opinion about existing coverage of sex trafficking many revealed frustration with the terminology used. Respondents frequently gave the example of journalists mixing up trafficking and smuggling. Advocate 2, a UN staffer, said,

[News media] report it as a big trafficking case and I say 'You don't know that they were trafficked yet. They were vulnerable to being trafficked but this is a case of smuggling right now' But they'll say trafficking and that will be the big headline. (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014)

Scholars have also noted this confusion between trafficking and smuggling and have attempted to clarify that they are, in fact, two distinct practices. Some have attempted to make a clear distinction in that "smuggling is transportation-based and trafficking is exploitation based" but even that has its problems as "issues of 'consent,'



‘agency’ and the ambiguity of ‘exploitation’ – among other issues – often complicate an already empirically complex picture” (Feingold, 2013, pp. 57).

Additionally, Liz Hilton from Empower noted another problem with the language used in coverage when she explained that often times coverage will say, “Fifteen girls rescued” but “even if they’re not girls, [news stories will] say ‘girls’ because ‘women’ is too strong” (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014), demonstrating her belief that the language used in news stories can position the subject of the story as passive or lacking agency.

However, advocates did not necessarily view themselves as passive when it comes to dictating the terminology used as some had definite opinions about the role they have in shaping coverage. For example, Aanas Ali, a staff member of the International Labor Organization (ILO) explained that the ILO is working on “behavioral change among journalists and that starts with language” because the “patterns in reporting reflect the attitudes of the journalists” (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014). One of the efforts that the ILO has taken to educate journalists is to directly address this problem of language incongruities.

Ali explained that the ILO previously did a campaign to change the vocabulary that journalists use with regard to all forms of trafficking. They sent a press release with detailed explanations and examples of proper terminology to the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand and asked them to distribute it amongst their members. Effectiveness of the campaign has not been quantified, but Ali thinks that it made a difference in the terms that journalists used (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014). However, such efforts by

the ILO were rare among NGOs and IGOs – many reported that they were not reaching out to journalists in any way.

*Reporting on sex trafficking can be time-consuming.* Another challenge that both journalists and advocate respondents reported was navigating the fact that writing about sex trafficking can be time-intensive. Many anti-trafficking organization staff members described a situation where they feel that journalists did not take the time necessary to understand the issue. Similarly, journalists noted that due to the nature of their jobs and multiple demands on their time, they often did not have enough time to dedicate weeks or months to researching the topic for a story.

Respondents from anti-trafficking organizations wanted journalists to spend more time learning about what sex trafficking is and why it happens before they write about it. Mickey Choothesa from COSA stated, “Some journalists come for two weeks and then write a book” (personal communication, Dec. 13, 2014). Choothesa elaborated on that and demonstrated some frustration with coverage he has seen about the issue when he said, “I’ve been here 15 years and I still haven’t solved the issues. So they write one story and think they will solve it” (personal communication, Dec. 13, 2014).

Brent Seely from Urban Light had similar frustrations with the lack of time spent:

Another thing that journalists miss is the *in-action*. They just try to talk to the boy and get that quick story and the quick quotes, but if they spent time in the red light district and spent time in the bars, they would get to feel some of those feelings. They would get a much better sense and appreciation of what it is like. (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014)

However, it is unlikely that the lack of time spent by journalists when covering sex trafficking stories is something they are doing by choice. Rather, it is a result of the time, financial and personal constraints that they are working within. It is well

documented that media landscapes all over the world are rapidly changing due to technological advancements and consumption patterns, and as a result, many news organizations are being forced to cut costs, which often happens at the expense of investigative journalism (see, for example, Casero-Ripollés & Izquierdo-Castillo, 2013; Coronel, 2013; Dekavalla, 2015;). In other words, research has shown that investigative journalism is both costly and timely, so it is becoming obsolete at many news outlets. In order to stay afloat financially, journalists are having to do more work in less time, making it difficult to spend the necessary time learning about and investigating an issue like sex trafficking (Nasi & Rasanen, 2013; Waldman, 2011; Walton, 2010). In other words, it is uncommon for journalists to have a great deal of time available to dedicate to researching one specific story.

A journalist at *Prachathai*, a Thai media outlet, told me a story about an article that she wanted to write about the difference between sex trafficking and consensual sex work that nicely illustrates the time constraints that journalists face. She contacted an NGO that works with these populations and then,

The head of this NGO replied to me and said ‘you should go into a bar and drink beer with them for few weeks to get to know them and interview them and talk with them as a friend.’ Yes, its good advice, but I mean, it’s not so helpful at all...I can’t spend weeks away from my other work during the day and my family at night. Also, I don’t drink, so I have to go there every night and drink beer with them? That’s not my life. So I did not do that story. (T. Kummetha, personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014)

Journalists also conveyed other challenges when trying to write about sex trafficking due to changing media landscapes. The rise of the Internet and the increase in consumers reading news on their mobile devices has led to people eschewing long stories, according to some reporters interviewed. Thaweeporn Kummetha, the reporter at

*Prachathai*, stated, “People read very short stories; they tend to spend only a few minutes on the stories, like myself. In January of this year we tried to write, like, 2000 words per story, but it doesn't get much readership” (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014).

Similarly, Journalist 5, a foreign correspondent based in Bangkok, explained that the organization this journalist works for rarely runs long feature stories about a topic like sex trafficking, because “people don't have that much time to read anymore, they're reading on their phones and they read a lot less than they used to, maybe, or a lot less in depth than they used to. I think the attention span is shortened” (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014). However, it is not just changing media landscapes that added to the challenges for journalists; some anti-trafficking organizations contributed to the difficulty, as well.

*Journalists report that NGOs are not helpful.* Research question four aimed to investigate the perceptions that journalists have about their work in relation to advocates and survivors. In doing so, some journalists reported that human rights NGOs and IGOs have been helpful in providing information to them. For example, Patrick Winn from *Global Post* stated that Thai advocacy organizations are “very open, because someone's paying attention to their cause” (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2014). However, as the story above about the *Prachathai* journalist demonstrated, the majority of journalists described a situation where they did not find NGOs and IGOs helpful or responsive to their requests for information or interviews, which added to the challenge of writing about the topic. The *Prachathai* journalist explained that she and her colleagues,

Write about an issue because we have the expertise in that issue, so now we don't have anyone who have expertise in [sex trafficking]. Like, me, myself, I want to learn more, yes I do want to learn more, but I have found that it's very difficult to

write about the issue because the local NGOs don't help much. (T. Kummetha, personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014)

Journalist 1, the *Bangkok Post* reporter, related an anecdote that similarly demonstrated the ways that journalists are sometimes frustrated with attempts to work with NGOs.

I had a meeting with a guy who worked in orphanages in the northern part of Thailand. We talked a lot about the trafficking side of things there, so I thought I would do a story about children being trafficked across the border from Burma. We talked a lot about that, and he told me some stories and I decided what I wanted to do. But in the end, he withdrew. From what I could gather from him, the community out there is very small and I think people were very mistrustful, so he didn't want to upset all the work that he had done. So that was difficult. And then he put me in touch with someone else up in Chiang Mai, but they were not willing to talk to me. You are frequently being, kind of, blocked at every step. I know it's a sensitive issue, and for NGOs, it's a small world here, and from my experience, they didn't want anyone to find out they were working with journalists. I am not sure exactly why, though. (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014)

The challenge in getting NGOs to work with journalists was reiterated by a number of other respondents who expressed frustration with NGOs being unresponsive or unwilling to assist. Casey Hynes said it is one of her biggest challenges:

When you try to reach out to different organizations to talk to certain experts or NGO workers, it is really hard to get them to respond to you. This is obviously challenging because you do not want to just make assumptions; you want to do your research and find out what is actually happening on the ground. (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014)

Both journalists and advocates talked about challenges related to access to victims as sources. Mickey Choothesa, founder of COSA, spoke about the issue in the context of time spent building relationships: “[Journalists] don’t have access to victims because they can only get that with time” (personal communication, Dec. 13, 2014). However, similar to the previous discussion about being cautious as to not re-victimize survivors in news

reports, many journalists discussed the precautions they have taken or would take when interviewing a survivor of sex trafficking and some of the benefits that might come to survivors from such an experience.

Journalist 2, who works at an international media organization and is based in Bangkok, said that when interviewing victims, the safety of the victim is “the number one issue” (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014). In addition to the journalists, a staff member at an international NGO that works with the media, Advocate 3, explained the precautions they take when working with news media and victims, “We never use their names. We are offering survivors an opportunity to transform something that was really awful for them into something good” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014).

However, other staff members at NGOs who do not work with the media (or not as regularly) expressed skepticism about allowing journalists to speak to any of the individuals that they work with. Several advocates were insistent that journalists go through NGOs or advocacy groups to contact and interview survivors. And most were still hesitant, such as Krista Coutts, a staff member at Nighlight, a Bangkok-based NGO, who said she might be willing to allow a journalist to talk to a woman that they work with, but she thinks, “It’s safer to have journalists go through the NGOs, because the women are going to be re-traumatized by telling their story” (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014). Brent Seely from Urban Light expressed similar hesitation about allowing journalists to speak with the trafficked victims that he works with,

It’s a case-by-case basis. We would think about how the boys probably wouldn’t open up [to a journalist], so we would probably tell the story ourselves to the journalist. If [the boy] wanted to do it himself and say ‘this is part of my past,’ then I’d be all for it. I think not talking about it is giving power to that past, but I just don’t think they would want to (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014).

Tawee Donchai from the Sold Project explained that his reluctance to allow journalists to talk to victims comes from past incidents. “We have learned from several years of experience that we have to make sure that [journalists] state the truth in their writing, but we cannot control that. What we *can* control is the information we are going to give and how much they get” (personal communication, Dec. 19, 2014).

The opinions expressed by the NGOs being hesitant to allow journalists access to survivors is well supported by scholars from an array of disciplines who have researched traumatized and victimized populations and noted the unique role that social workers and NGOs have in working with these individuals (Durand, Lattuada, Tzvetkova & Plakantonaki, 2001; Edwards & Hulme, 1992; Herman, 1994). Specifically in the context of sex trafficking, research has demonstrated that NGOs are well positioned to work with trafficked individuals and that NGO staff members often have special relationships with survivors (Tzvetkova, 2002). This can lend credibility to beliefs that it is best for NGOs to protect victims and to the suggestions that journalists should go through these organizations when trying to interview survivors. These NGOs are also well situated to provide training and resources to journalists, which, as discussed in the literature review section of this dissertation, many larger NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have done (Bogert, 2011).

On the other hand, Alcoff (1991–1992) has warned that speaking for others can create a hierarchical power relationship, and this can be especially so when it is an international organization speaking on behalf of an underprivileged individual, thereby reinforcing essentialized notions of third world victims (Mohanty, 1991). Therefore there is a caution here and NGOs should be vigilant to ensure that by speaking on behalf of

trafficking individuals, they are not silencing the survivor and replacing his or her voice with a hierarchical relationship that could perpetuate the hegemony of large (often Western), international NGOs.

In another sense, this situation can be understood as NGOs acting as protectors of this information or these sources. Previous research has established human rights NGOs and IGOs as guards of knowledge and support for awareness raising and policy advocacy, meaning that in order to have an issue be classified as a human rights abuse, and policy crafted accordingly, related NGOs need to be supportive in order for that to be successful (Bob, 2009; Long & Lorinczi, 2009; Shawki, 2014). However, Beckett (2009) found NGOs to be reluctant to work with media organizations and that “underlying some NGOs’ ambivalence about participating in the media may be a deeper desire to exercise caution in exposing themselves to critical debate about development issues in the public sphere” (p.11).

In the context of this study, this action of the NGOs could be thought of as efforts to direct the attention and dictate where journalists go in terms of focusing their focus and, in turn, their stories. It is possible that what we are seeing is attempts by NGOs to frame the issue by limiting what information and sources journalists are permitted to access. In a sense, these organizations appear to be trying to protect the sources (even if their efforts ultimately do the opposite) and control what information comes out about the issue or the individual sources because of the potential harm it may cause. While this is not gatekeeping in the traditional sense of the word as a function in the mass media process, it has similar elements that are likely intended to protect victims and serve a



public relations function. Therefore, I will call this phenomenon ‘protective attention directing.’

Much in the same way that journalists in my study did, I experienced this ‘protective attention directing’ by NGOs when trying to conduct my interviews. Many of the organizations were reluctant to allow me to talk to victims. Brent Seely from Urban Light said of the boys that his organization works with, “They wouldn’t understand your questions. They are street boys and they don’t have access to the media. They haven’t seen any of it, so they don’t know what it’s like. It probably isn’t something that they have ever thought about” (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014). Krista Coutts from Nightlight said similar things when she declined my request to speak with one of the women they work with. She said, “[the women] don’t know much about the media side of this. They’re not paying attention to see how the media is covering it. They know the stories because they’ve already lived it; they don’t need to read it in the news” (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014).

Given that these staff members work with survivors everyday, it is likely that they know well what they are talking about and certainly have the best interests of the victims in mind. However, both of the survivors that I spoke with stated that they had not had any interactions with journalists, but that they would be open to the possibility of speaking with a journalist if one approached them. It appears as if the voices of survivors may not be factored into NGO considerations regarding who speaks with journalists.

In sum, theme one revealed a great deal of contention among respondents regarding what sex trafficking is and who should be considered trafficked. As a result of this disagreement as well as challenges inherent in telling a compelling story without

revictimizing trafficked individuals and difficulties that journalists reported facing when seeking help from NGOs, it became clear just how arduous of a topic sex trafficking can be to write about. This challenge is likely amplified by the relationships that journalists have with NGOs/IGOs and the Thai government/police, which emerged as theme number two.

**Theme 2: The relationships among the press, NGOs/IGOs and government/police and how they complicate coverage of sex trafficking.** Theme two materialized from two subthemes concerning the relationships that journalists in Thailand have with NGOs as well as the Thai police/government. These relationships both appear to be tense and have strong implications for how journalists gain information about sex trafficking as well as write their stories on the issue.

*Coverage is impacted by the relationship between NGOs and the press.* The previous section discussed the challenges in defining and writing about sex trafficking. Some of those challenges likely created or impacted by the relationship between NGOs and the press. Many respondents shared information that demonstrates a rather tense relationship between NGOs and the press, which ties in closely with both research questions. Four subthemes emerged which all largely relate to both NGOs and the press and underscore this taut NGO-press relationship. First, advocates and journalists talked about how media are necessary for getting information about sex trafficking to the public and policymakers but have associated risks. Next, advocates conveyed that many of them are skeptical of media and journalists' intentions. Additionally, conversations with NGO staff members and journalists revealed that NGOs are, for the most part, not reaching out to media to initiate relationships or coverage. Respondents' discussions of what they do

and what they would like the other group to do revealed, overall, a substantial disconnect between NGOs and journalists.

Liz Hilton runs an organization in Chiang Mai that advocates for the rights of sex workers. She told me a short story that I think is indicative of this strained NGO-press relationship: “A journalist text messaged me that she wanted a Burmese sex worker, with kids, dying of AIDS to interview on Saturday. I replied, ‘Do you want fries with that?’” (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014).

*Media are necessary but have associated risks.* On one hand, NGOs frequently described the challenges inherent in getting their story told to the general public and policymakers, and the value of the news media in filling that hole. For example, Advocate 1, a UN staffer, explained the strong impact that news media have had on increasing public discussions of human trafficking:

I think [media coverage] strongly influences public perceptions. Before, human trafficking wasn’t in the media so people didn’t talk about it; it wasn’t a big issue. But once the media grabbed ahold of it, suddenly everybody was talking about it and it’s not like it didn’t exist before. (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014)

Advocate 2, another employee at a UN agency conveyed similar sentiments regarding the importance of the media, saying, “I think everyone relies on media to a certain extent to gain information. I mean, you always know that it could be slanted or biased, but it’s still a valuable source of information nonetheless” (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014). Several NGOs or advocates were very aware of the role of media in bringing the issue to light, and believed that “media can certainly be helpful for us shining a light on the trafficking conversation” (Erin Kamler, personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014).

Several advocates, such as Phunyanuch Pattanotai, a staff member from a Thai anti-trafficking organization called Alliance Against Traffic, acknowledged that the public was dependent on media for information. Pattanotai responded to the question of where the public gets their information about sex trafficking with four words: “definitely from the media” (personal communication, Dec. 7, 2014). Tawee Donchai from The Sold Project, an anti-trafficking organization, articulated similar opinions about the power of the media, and explained, “The media has a big impact on the kids’ lives and society and the government” (personal communication, Dec. 19, 2014). These findings are consistent with previous literature on the topic, which demonstrates the power of the media (see, for example, Hughes, 2000, in Johnston et al., 2012).

As discussed in the literature review, research has shown that there exists a belief among some journalists that their coverage of human rights abuses has an impact on lessening the human rights violation (McPherson, 2012). Several journalists in this study echoed similar beliefs – that their reporting on the issue is having an impact on diminishing the problem, at least to some extent. In response to whether journalists believed their work reduced the prevalence of human rights abuses, Casey Hynes said that it “really does make a difference” (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014) and Journalist 6 from one of the international media organizations was less enthusiastic but still largely in agreement about coverage having an impact on the problem:

I think that it has helped a bit. I mean, just the fact that in Thailand, they are trying to get people registered, you know, the Burmese workers registered. They are trying to get some sort of minimum standard. That is a huge change from 10 years ago. I mean, things have shifted a lot for Burmese workers here in Thailand, and I think just reporting on issues, like making Thailand look bad for, let us say, child sex trafficking; that has pushed it. (personal communication, Dec. 17, 2014)

However, it is important to note that not all journalists that I spoke with believed that reporting on the issue has an impact on mitigating the problem. Patrick Winn from *Global Post* responded to the same ‘does your coverage make a difference’ question by saying,

I'm going to give you the unpopular answer: No, not really. I write about human rights pieces all the time. In Burma last year I met with this videographer [for] what I thought was a very compelling, highly watchable for an American audience, look at child labor and abuses in the mining industry and all this awful stuff, and I don't think that helped anyone. A few people wrote and said, "Oh, this particular kid in your story who's had a very difficult life, I'm interested in sponsoring them," and I did what I could to connect them with people that could make that happen. So yeah, maybe it helps like a kid or two, something I'm personally happy about – but on a wider scale, as far as like shifting policy, it's really hard to move the needle...I don't like to pretend like I'm a crusader that gets results. It's kind of depressing, but I'm not sure that it does [have an impact]. (Personal communication, Dec. 11, 2014)

*Advocates skeptical of media.* While many journalists believed their work had an impact on lessening the problem, at least to some extent, and several advocates acknowledged the value of the media, every advocate that I spoke with (and some journalists) talked about the sensationalist nature of reporting on the topic. Many seemed to express a deep distrust of the media industry. Examples of this intense skepticism of the media were seen in a number of ways.

First, respondents commonly said that media in Thailand do not write about human rights abuses broadly, and sex trafficking specifically. Thaweeporn Kummetha, the journalist who writes for *Prachathai*, an alternative news source in Bangkok, was critical of mainstream news outlets in Thailand, “In general, most of the time, in Thai media, they don’t care about human rights. Only very few media care about human rights and marginalized people. [Mainstream media] focus on the power, people in power” (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014). One of the survivors that I spoke with also

reiterated this point about news outlets largely overlooking human rights abuses when she said, “newspapers only write about these topics when the police are involved and they make an arrest or they pass a new law. Otherwise, it is not something that media care to report about” (Noon, personal communication, Dec. 14, 2014).

Furthermore, some respondents shared beliefs that journalists write about the topic for their own self-glorification. Mickey Choothesa from COSA said, “It seems like the core of the interviewing was secondary and the journalists are doing it for self-promoting reasons. They write about the topic for their resume” (personal communication, Dec. 13, 2014). Erin Kamler, the Chiang Mai-based researcher had similar thoughts when discussing Nicholas Kristof’s reporting on sex trafficking in Southeast Asia, saying, “He has done very little good for women and done a lot for promoting himself as very masculine and macho” (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014). Likewise, Tawee Donchai from the Sold Project said, “The media has a big impact on the kids’ lives and society and the government. They have so much input. But I think they serve money more than their duty” (personal communication, Dec. 19, 2014).

The most commonly discussed criticism of the Thai media’s coverage of sex trafficking, which likely contributes a great deal to the tension in the relationship between NGOs and the press, is that the coverage is sensationalized and does not accurately reflect what the issue looks like in the eyes of these anti-trafficking organizations. “They sensationalize it” was a phrase that I heard repeatedly during the interviews. Alezandra Russel, founder of Urban Light, told me about the pressure she felt when she was approached by CNN to do a story about the sex trafficked boys that her organization works with, explaining that “[The CNN crew] really wanted to sensationalize something

and there was a lot of pressure for us to almost invent this kind of dark, dingy, situation” (personal communication, Nov. 26, 2014). Likewise, Liz Hilton from Empower also echoed beliefs about unsatisfactory media representations. She said, “There is shallow journalism around the trafficking issue. There is no checking of facts” (L. Hilton, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). Lani Hollander, Program Director at COSA, suggested the conventions that journalists adhere to result in sensationalized coverage about trafficking:

Painting a really heart-wrenching story that pulls you in, that makes you think, ‘Oh, this is such a travesty! This is so unjust!’ Which it is, but [coverage] is also emotionally charged, like emotional porn. I think a lot of journalists do that; they paint this heart-wrenching picture of this girl who has just been completely demoralized and exploited beyond what a human being should be put through. (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2014)

Some NGO staffers even went as far as to link the sensationalized media coverage with the compassion fatigue that the general public feels (and the reason why there are not more resources given to their organization or the cause). Scholars have studied compassion fatigue for decades and it is, arguably, the most well-known explanation for why audiences do not act when they read about human rights abuses. The compassion fatigue argument holds that the more suffering that audiences see, the less likely they are to feel (and in turn, act) (Borer, 2012a). In other words, audiences become so used to seeing suffering that they stop noticing it (Tester, 2001). Some scholars have specifically tied compassion fatigue to media repetitiveness, explaining that, “Compassion fatigue is a consequence of rote journalism, and looking-over-your-shoulder reporting...Newspapers, news magazine and television don’t want to get beat by the competition -- either in the stories they cover or in the packaging they come in. As a result, much of the media looks alike” (Moeller, 1999, p. 32). Notions of media repetitiveness and sensationalized

reporting on the issue were seen in comments from respondents like Brent Seely from Urban Light:

People have seen too much [media coverage] and they're tired of it. There are also false stories about sex trafficking raids and arrests, which don't actually happen or do any good, but they are just intended to make the government look good and make the international organizations happy. Those false stories hurt us because we're in the same field. (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014)

In fact, some advocates that I spoke to were so skeptical of the media industry that they did not encourage more coverage of the issue. The majority of advocates that I spoke with desired media coverage, but Advocates 1 and 2, employees at UN agencies, spoke about the sensationalized coverage doing more harm than good, and therefore no coverage might be preferred. Advocate 2 said,

I strongly caution against reporting on it because it is still so highly stigmatized, and the way that it's currently written about only perpetuates that. I know a lot of people don't want stories written about them. Like, if a sex trafficking victim does get back into their family, she isn't going to want everybody in her society to have read about it in the newspaper.... also, talking about them moving on, publishing a story in the newspaper is like evidence. That means they don't get to erase that part of their past. They can't just forget about it, because it's now in a format that's on the Internet for the rest of Internet life. (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014)

Advocate 1 conveyed analogous ideas, explaining that “because Thailand is under pressure from other countries to show the work that they're doing against human trafficking, sometimes the police and the media might stretch a case and label it sex trafficking just to show ‘Hey, look! Here's another case!’ and that sensationalized version doesn't do anyone any good” (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014).

In addition to illustrating how coverage may contribute to compassion fatigue, this potential for news media to do harm that respondents spoke about parallels Hodge and Lietz's (2007) discussions of media's ability to present romanticized depictions of a



better life, which helps trafficking flourish by enabling traffickers to pose as people who can help vulnerable, underprivileged individuals. These problematic depictions discussed in the literature and the interviews likely contribute to why advocates are skeptical of news media.

*NGOs not reaching out to media.* However, when thinking about this relationship between human rights organizations and the press, I found it interesting that most anti-trafficking organization respondents with whom I spoke stated that while they are unhappy with existing coverage, they are not reaching out to the media in any way. For example, Brent Seely, Thailand Director of Urban Light said he was not aware of any efforts the organization took to contact journalists or news outlets and Radchada Chomjinda, Thailand Director at Human Help Network said, “We have not reached out to journalists to try to get them to write about our work, but we have had many journalists contact us at various times” (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014). Additionally, Alezandra Russel from Urban Light elaborated by saying, “we don’t have a media person and we don’t have PR people; it’s really just when [journalists] find us, we kind of just run with it” (personal communication, Nov. 26, 2014).

However, anti-trafficking organizations did say that while they are not currently reaching out to news outlets, they could provide a number of resources to journalists to make it easier for them to write about the issue. Phunyanuch Pattanotai at Alliance Against Traffic (AAT) said that staff are willing to proofread or edit news stories for accuracy (personal communication, Dec. 7, 2014). Mickey Choothesa at COSA offered, “If journalists wanted to come for a long time, they can stay with me, we have an open house and then can stay as long as they want and we’ll help as much as we can” (personal

communication, Dec. 13, 2014). Alejandra Russel from Urban Light said they could provide “an expertise in what we’re seeing on the ground, especially since we are working with boys and so few people and NGOs are tackling the issue with young males” (personal communication, Nov. 26, 2014).

*Disconnect between NGOs/IGOs and journalists.* Overall, what is clear from the respondents is that most NGOs/IGOs do not understand the limitations that journalists work within (for example, many NGOs said that journalists need to come for a long time, yet that is often not possible due to time and resource constraints on reporters), and some even explicitly said they do not know anything about the media. Many seem resigned to the fact that coverage will be sensationalized. However, there appears to be a further disconnect in understanding in that anti-trafficking organizations say they can offer all this help and resources, yet many journalists say that such organizations are unresponsive to their requests for information. It is certainly possible that the journalists were speaking about organizations that I did not talk to, but as a whole, there is a gap in understanding that likely results in a apprehensive relationship.

This tense relationship has been noted in popular press sources and blogs. For example, a *Nieman Reports* article explained,

Humanitarian workers have a growing skepticism towards journalists, especially those who ‘parachute’ in to do one story and then leave. These aid workers often perceive journalists as being obsessed with finding ‘good angles’ rather than reporting in-depth stories. This is because a few journalists who specialize in covering crises can be ruthless in focusing only on the shortcomings of some aid operations. (Avril, 2004, para. 8)

Additionally, previous scholarly research has analyzed other aspects of these relationships between NGOs and media systems, including the growth of media assistance programs intended to have journalists play a part in democracy building

around the world (Howard, 2003; Miller, 2006; 2009) as well as demonstrating that reputation and trust in NGOs is strengthened by independent media systems that allow individuals to gain information about the actions of other individuals and/or institutions (Lee, Johnson & Prakash, 2012).

***Coverage is further impacted by the relationship between the Thai police/government and the press.*** When trying to understand why journalists write about sex trafficking in the ways that they do, the in-depth interviews revealed another important relationship that plays a role in shaping coverage: the relationship between the Thai police/military and the press.

As mentioned in the literature review of this paper, the Royal Thai Armed Forces, led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha, Commander of the Royal Thai Army, staged a coup d'état on May 22, 2014, against the caretaker government of Thailand. The military established a junta called the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) to rule the country, and imposed martial law. The review of literature regarding the freedom of Thailand's press revealed a long standing tradition of censored media; however, given that at the time of this study a military junta was in power and martial law in order, a new layer of complexity and censorship has been added to the Thai media landscape. Given that the military were in power at the time that these interviews were conducted and findings were written, the police and government will commonly be referred to as one unit (government/police) in this paper.

This section will discuss four smaller themes that emerged from the interviews that help explain this difficult relationship between the Thai police/government and the press. First, there is a great deal of government corruption that impacts both NGOs and

journalists. This corruption can be seen in the context of police turning a blind eye in order to financially benefit from trafficking as well as police requiring (and sometimes bribing) journalists to write about certain issues and not write about others. This rampant government corruption leads to the next subthemes: 2) a lack of press freedom (via lese majeste laws, pressure from the junta and self-censorship) and 3) information flowing directly from the police, both of which severely restrict journalists. Those three smaller themes could be argued to be the result of the fourth theme, which again impacts both journalists and NGOs, 4) attempts to save face in the country.

*Government corruption.* One aspect of the complex relationship between the government/police and the press is corruption, which impacts the work of both journalists and NGOs. Several journalists commented on the impact of police corruption on their day-to-day work. Journalist 7, a reporter at one of the largest Thai-language daily newspapers in Bangkok explained how crucial of a role police play in dictating what gets reported:

In mainstream Thai media, most of the news that we report comes from a stringer, which comes from the police. Now what about things that the police or authorities don't want you to report? Now we have several cases in my memory of local stringers actually hiding news from us because their local police or local military forces don't want us to know. (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

Journalist 1 from the *Bangkok Post* elaborated on this idea by explaining that the corruption may play a role in coverage of sex trafficking, specifically describing that, "There's a lot of bribery and corruption that goes on here, so that could be one of the reasons why we don't report on [sex trafficking] more. I don't know if it's because the sex work is just so common here, or if it's because of the people involved, I'm not sure" (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014). Additionally, the journalist (7) from the Thai

daily directly told me, “I personally know some of my colleagues who, for certain, accept bribes from police and PR firms -- Many people that I know personally. And this is considered normal, this is considered common” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014).

This government corruption also impacts the work of anti-trafficking organizations, which influences the type of media coverage the groups want as well as how they want that coverage to look. What I mean by this is that due to the government corruption, one anti-trafficking organization told me that they want press coverage in Western countries but not in Thailand because they do not want to draw attention from Thai authorities. This NGO worker who requested this phrase not be attributed to him or her stated,

[The police] make their monthly rounds to the brothels and bars and collect bribes. They pocket the money and then tell the establishment that they’re OK for the next month; that they aren’t going to arrest anyone. Then they come back a month later and repeat the same thing. Corruption just runs so deep in this country, and not to sound depressing, but it’s not going to change in my lifetime. (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014)

This advocate went on to explain that “[In countries like the U.S.] we want to get all of the press coverage that we can get” but “we’re viewed unfavorably by authorities here [in Thailand] because we’re taking money away from them, so putting our name on a press release and getting our name out could also bring us attention that we don’t want” (personal communication, Dec. 15, 2014). There was no sign outside the office of this NGO, which further demonstrates their attempts to fly under the radar.

*Press freedom.* Another theme that came up over and over again during the interviews with journalists was the challenges faced by reporters to write freely and without military interference or intimidation. A number of aspects of press control

contribute to a very tightly controlled media environment, such as lese majeste laws, defamation laws, and pressure or threats from the government/junta. These elements combine together and result in an ecosystem of intense self-censorship by journalists.

A Thai reporter at a daily newspaper in Bangkok, Journalist 7, told me, “I think the number one thing you have to understand about mainstream Thai media is that we are part of the establishment; we are part of the...you can call the Thai police, the Thai military and the Thai authorities a mafia, and the Thai media is part of that mafia” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014). This notion of *media as a mafia* sets the stage for the following subsections about various forms of press control.

*Lese majeste and defamation laws.* One recurring discussion that respondents kept touching on with regard to their ability to write freely was lese majeste laws, the crime of negatively portraying the monarchy or any member of the royal family, and, in the words of one journalist, the “draconian” nature of such laws. While there may not be a direct connection between ‘the institution’ (that being, the royal family) and sex trafficking, journalists are not allowed to publicly question whether there *is* a linkage or encourage the monarchy to get involved in anti-trafficking efforts. In fact, every journalist that I interviewed, both foreign and Thai, mentioned that anything relating to the palace that could even remotely be construed as negative is a definitive no-go area. Thaweeporn Kummetha at *Prachathai* explained that the royal family is “a very taboo topic for Thai media...the king issue is super, super sensitive and people don't dare question it” (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014). Journalist 7 said, “You wouldn’t touch the ultimate taboo, the monarchy, for your own safety because you wouldn’t know the things that they would do to you” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014). Casey Hynes, the

reporter from *Asian Correspondent*, said she was “careful not to write about the monarchy because that is definitely a no-go area” and she “always had to be quite careful to make sure that no matter what [she] was writing about, that subject did not get in the mix” (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014).

Western media organizations can escape some of the censorship, but not all of it. Journalist 3, a Bangkok-based foreign correspondent for a global news outlet outlined some of the differences in what foreign versus local media organizations can report on,

International media do write a little bit more about the monarchy than the Thai media but it’s legally impossible to do it in as much detail as it ought to be done and that is a major problem reporting on Thailand, probably the biggest problem of all, that you have this really powerful institution but you really can’t cover it with the depth and the scope that it needs. (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014)

When I asked how this reporter handles that, the journalist explained, “You just have to work around it, suggest things in careful ways, signal to readers that there are these restrictions which make it difficult to tell the whole story” (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014).

Another foreign correspondent, Journalist 2, spoke similarly about how this journalist’s organization works within the lese majeste laws, explaining:

I think we need to have an editor's note attached to all stories saying, ‘Under these strict lese majeste laws, we’re prohibited from reporting fully.’ I don't think that's always disclosed so clearly for whatever reason but everybody does self-censorship. It would be a very colorful story if you could fully report it, but you just can't, not from here. The people who have tried to, like Andrew Marshall, a former Reuters reporter, if he stepped foot in this country they would throw him in jail. (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014)

Wishing for the ability to write critically about the royal family and question the involvement or complacency of the monarchy with regard to trafficking issues seemed to

be a common theme among journalists. Casey Hynes reiterated that desire to question the monarchy but being unable to, saying,

I think that as a Westerner I was not at as much risk as a Thai would be for being critical of the monarchy, or saying anything that could be perceived as critical. But I still felt that pressure to avoid that topic entirely, which I think I would not have done if I was not in Thailand. I think I would have delved more into that and looked at how the monarchy was involved [in trafficking stories], and what was going to happen when the king dies, which you cannot even talk about at all. (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014)

An online news outlet that operates in Thai and English, *Prachathai*, focuses on social problems and human rights abuses. One journalist there explained that they try to push the limit of what a Thai news organization is allowed to write about. She believes that the reason that can get away with writing about controversial topics is because they are funded by several international aid organizations, including USAID. She thinks that such a connection to international organizations and diplomatic groups enables them to push the boundaries a little bit more than a traditional newspaper funded by advertising revenue. However, that is not to say that they have freedom to write about whatever they want. The editor of *Prachathai* was recently arrested because users posted comments on a *Prachathai* web forum that contained content that violated lese majeste laws and the comments were not deleted by the editor fast enough (Asian Correspondent, 2010; Kummetha, personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014).

In addition to the lese majeste laws, respondents noted that defamation laws are very wide reaching. As mentioned in the literature review of this paper, defamation laws in Thailand can be initiated and filed by anyone, regardless of the truth of the statement. Even during some of the interviews, journalists revealed feelings about what could be



said in public and what needed to be kept off the record. This was seen, for example, in a conversation with Patrick Winn from the *Global Post* said,

There's huge limits [on what you can write about] and if the recorder wasn't on I'd go into more detail but the monarchy is absolutely off limits to an extreme degree, I would say; any portrayal that is not glowing risks negative attention and perhaps charges so that is the most sensitive issue in the country by a landslide. Second would be, implicating people by name, that's huge. For example, in a sex slavery story, if I were to say, 'This particular type businessman or this particular type of police officer is complicit or enabling human trafficking' I would probably be looking at a defamation lawsuit no matter how true what I wrote was. There are no protections like there are in the U.S. (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2014)

*Pressure from junta.* In addition to the lese majeste and defamation laws, the junta issued an order stating that media outlets are not to criticize the junta in any way.

Journalist 7, the reporter from the Thai daily, put it bluntly when this journalist said, "I will say that before the coup, in a sense, you could try to slightly push the limit, but after the coup, that's the nail in your coffin" (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014).

Several respondents noted that the time in which I was conducting this study was particularly interesting, and difficult, due to the political atmosphere. For example, Journalist 2 described the impact of the current political climate,

There's two different kinds of censorship, there's the censorship of anything having to do with the palace which is very intense self-censorship and then there's also a censorship now just about the general situation, all of it is kind of related; and by situation I'm talking about the country being under military rule. (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014)

This martial law that the reporter is talking about created a very strong climate of fear that was noticeable among many respondents and might explain why some people declined to be interviewed. Thaweeporn Kummetha at *Prachathai* explained:

Because of the coup d'état, the coup has suppressed the media a lot in the last six months, like inviting the editor to have a meeting and threaten them not to criticize the coup, to report about only positive things and to not criticize

anything, so, you see that most of [mainstream Thai media] don't talk about politics or serious issues anymore. (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014)

Journalist 7 shared similar sentiments when I asked how this journalist's job had changed after the coup:

Drastically. I would say drastically. I mean, as if we didn't have enough censorship in the past, we sure do now. In the past we had a deal with the police, the authorities, mafias, and all these different interest groups, the businesses, the big surnames, and now we have a bloody junta to deal with and things get even more risky because if you criticize the authorities right now, you would be seen as a direct threat on national security. (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

Similar to other elements of press censorship, ability to report critically on the junta varies between local and foreign media. A Bangkok-based foreign correspondent, Journalist 5, explained some of the differences and challenges that varying types of media organizations face with regard to criticizing the junta:

Since the coup, the junta has issued this order that nobody should criticize them, more or less... It's more difficult for the local media, some of the TV stations were taken off air, as you probably know, and as for the papers, at the start they were very cautious, as time's gone on and they've gotten more used to a situation, got more confident. We've started to see some limited criticisms but what you don't see is op-eds denouncing the coup and calling for these guys to be arrested. You will never see that in the mainstream media. There are some media organizations here, particularly on the Internet, who generally push the boundaries a bit more and will often report quite bravely and there are real risks for that and they do get arrested from time to time. (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014)

Multiple journalists touched on this notion that local media in Thailand are more negatively impacted by pressure from the junta than foreign media. Journalist 3 explained the control from the junta in the context of nationalism, shedding light on the rationale from the ruling party regarding why the censorship is necessary:

Especially for the local media, it's become much more difficult since the coup, to publish critical material. The atmosphere is increasingly nationalistic and the loyalists have been gaining sway. More and more people have been arrested for allegedly insulting the monarchy so certainly there's been a big and negative

impact on the freedom of expression since the coup. (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014)

However, even though the local media are disproportionality impacted but the restrictions imposed by the junta, Journalist 1 from *Bangkok Post* explained that such an oppressive environment may not be noticeable to most people. “It looks normal [on the streets of Bangkok] but its not, as it is incredibly repressive. People are getting locked up for saying anything that could be considered critical of the new government. Lese majeste cases have gone up a lot since then” she said (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014). Journalist 2 also explained the problematic nature of Thai society appearing, on the surface, to be functioning normally but in reality operating under intense control by the military regime:

Everything looks normal here; it wouldn't have looked any different two years ago compared to today walking around town, but the thing is, you cannot speak out. There are restrictions on that so in some ways there isn't a lot to report on because there's no serious vocal opposition to the coup. That's kind of a problem. (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014)

Additionally, multiple respondents, including Thaweepon Kummetha at *Prachathai* explained that there has been a “surge” in lese majeste cases since the May 2014 coup (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014). The *Bangkok Post* reporter, Journalist 1, speculated that more Thai journalists were not willing to speak to me, even on the condition that I guarantee his or her confidentiality, because they are likely “distrustful” and understandably fearful of the risks – risks that were very real to this respondent and to others I interviewed:

I mean, for what I just told you [about police corruption and oppressive censorship], I could go to jail for that. So I think its very sensitive...any kind of pointing the finger at anyone higher than you, especially now because we are under martial law, so every thing gets military court trial, no right to appeal, no

lawyer, death penalty, you know? [The journalists] are scared. (Journalist 1, personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014)

*Self-censorship.* Even though some respondents said that foreign news outlets have a bit more protection than local Thai media, Journalist 2, one of the foreign correspondents, told me that lese majeste and laws against criticizing the junta “are laws that apply to everybody. I mean, there is no international news organization inside Thailand that does not self-censor itself; these are laws that if you break them you will go to jail – end of story” (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014). The *Bangkok Post* reporter, Journalist 1, said, “The media here is quite censored in a lot of ways, for example with the coup you’re not allowed to protest in any way or criticize in any way” (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014).

The reporter from the Thai daily, Journalist 7, detailed three main groups of people that the newspaper would censor information about, aside from the royal family: 1) “the big surname,” meaning, a prominent member of society or well-known politician or businessman, 2) someone that is related to the editorial staff at the newspaper, and 3) the police/military. The journalist (7) said that in the case of any of these types of people, “We may report the first name and not the last name, or we may just not tell who they are or we may not name the person” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014). This withholding of names was seen in the content analysis portion of the study. While this censorship is likely a result of outside forces such as harassment or intimidation, respondents painted the picture of a widespread culture of self-censorship in the Thai media industry.

Other journalists also mentioned the inability to report on certain types of people and the accompanying self-censorship. However, Casey Hynes revealed an understanding

of this required self-censorship but a discontent due to journalistic ideals, saying that she “would have been very interested in, for example, how the King’s death was going to affect politics and society and the potential upheaval, but I just completely stayed away from that as a topic. However, this is what I do not want to do as a journalist; I do not want to have these no-fly zones, but in Thailand, it just was not worth the risk” (personal communication, Dec. 10, 2014). Further, as a result of this common self-censorship, Journalist 7 said,

I can’t remember a single case where the police actually put a lawsuit against us. They would never go that far because we would never have gone that far in the first place. Our structure is so fused with the police already, if they don’t like something...like [an article] is really stepping the line, they would tell us right away, mostly indirectly through their contacts and we will get the message and just stop there. I don’t even know if you can call it censorship, it seems it is all fused together, it is almost like, if you work for a PR magazine and then you [have] this person as your cover, then of course you’re going to have that same person read it and if that person says ‘oh, I don’t like that’...then you would just take it out. Is that censorship, because you guys work together? (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

Journalist 7, the reporter from the prominent Thai daily newspaper, further explained that his or her newspaper reports on isolated cases of trafficking when there is a raid but they “can never go deeper to, like, who runs this whole thing, who is in charge, who brought this girl to Thailand...that type of thing, like that, is off limits. We report about what goes on but not what *really* goes on” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014). However, this reporter admitted, “To be honest with you, though, it takes two to tango. On one hand, we are afraid of all of this intimidation by the police, but as I say, we also don’t want to, kind of, push the envelope” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014).

***Information comes from the police.*** In addition to the formal mechanisms of media control like lese majeste laws, some respondents shared that much of the

information they use in their sex trafficking stories (and articles about many other topics) comes straight from the police, who play a key role in impacting how journalists do their jobs. Additionally, information that emerged in this category helped contextualize the content analysis findings regarding the prevalence of official sources cited in sex trafficking focused news stories.

Advocate 1, a UN staff member, said that often times the police prepare a press release about a sex trafficking related brothel raid and give that press release to journalists. This advocate then said that frequently the local Thai media run “a straight translation of that press release” in their newspaper without any additional investigations of their own (Advocate 1, personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014). Thaweepon Kummetha at *Prachathai* also noted that mainstream Thai media typically only write about sex trafficking when the police tell journalists about a raid or a new law. Thus, confirming the sentiments of Advocate 1 regarding many journalists at mainstream Thai media outlets not doing their own investigating or reporting on the issue, but rather, relying on information that flows from police officials (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2014).

This one-way stream of information from the police to the press was also seen when Journalist 7 explained the system in which reporters at this journalist’s newspaper receive information about sex trafficking. This journalist detailed the sequence of events that take place between the police and journalists when a sex trafficking related event occurs. This reporter said that the first step would be for the police to announce that a press conference would be occurring and then,

We would then send a reporter to the press conference, and then the police would say what has gone on. When we get there, we will jot down everything; well, if

you are diligent you jot down everything. If you are too lazy, you ask for a copy of the press conference news. Then the police officer in charge will be there and will present these women who are trafficked, of course wearing this kind of mask, like covering her face with sunglasses, and then she will speak about her experience, and we can ask her questions as well. Sometimes the police will do the talking and these rescued women will be sitting right next to them and that is how it works. That's it. We would write whatever they tell us. No more digging, no more investigation. That is it. We are not the one who pushes them to arrest anyone. Any detail at all, like the name of the suspect, everything, is supplied by the police to us. (Journalist 7, personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

That newsperson, Journalist 7, elaborated on this notion that “everything is supplied by the police to us” by explaining an ideology in which it is not the job of a journalist to criticize the police, because that police-to-journalist flow of information is crucial to obtaining the necessary story details,

We never really ask any questions regarding what the police told us at the press conference, or before the raid or whatever. We work with police... we are not holding them accountable for anything because they were the ones that took us to the raid, after all. And you can imagine what it is like; it is really hard to be critical or to dig because you work together. (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

When I asked the reporter if he/she used NGOs as sources for sex trafficking-related stories, this journalist explained,

You could imagine that NGO and the police are not the best pair in the world, so sometimes the police would prefer it if you kind of not to talk to people or if we record what they said then we might get in trouble with the police. Of course sometimes it can happen but they can be kind of argumentative and but we don't really like them to argue on our pages. (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

*Saving face.* Some of this information flow and censorship is likely the result of attempts to save face, both of individuals as well as the nation. This means protecting the reputation, social standing and honor of a person or of institutions (political, social, religious, etc.) (Kim & Nam, 1998). Interviewees frequently mentioned referenced this cultural practice of saving face, which impacts the operations of both anti-trafficking

organizations and the press. As part of the attempts to save face of the nation, some respondents shared that, in their opinion, the Thai public does not tend to care about human rights abuses, and in fact, caring about such issues is frequently viewed as anti-monarchy or anti-establishment. The *Bangkok Post* reporter, Journalist 1, said that many journalists in the country are cautious of “the issue of saving face because if you embarrass someone, then you might get some heavy backlash for that” (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014). Similarly, when I asked Journalist 7, the reporter at a mainstream Thai daily, if this journalist’s reporting on sex trafficking had any impact on reducing instances of sex trafficking, this reporter tied it back to issues of saving face of the Thai police force:

Our coverage is actually designed not to do that kind of thing. Like I said, we want this thing to just be PR for the police...this is what the police want and it is what we want to do – help the police. Like I said, the whole narrative is about police being the savior, it is about going in and rescuing women, chasing these bad guys. The people who are the heroes in the story is the police and I don’t think anyone who reads this kind of news would think, ‘Oh my god I want to be this crusader against human trafficking’ or whatever. It is not about telling you to do that...it is about ‘don’t worry, we and the police do this for you so you are safe and protected.’ I don’t think it is inspirational at all and I don’t think it was designed to be inspirational in the first place. (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

This desire of certain members of the community to save face combined with the previously discussed high levels of self-censorship appear to result in certain (often prominent) people not being reported on in a negative light. Journalist 7, from the mainstream Thai-language daily paper, described in more detail how this reporter’s newspaper navigates around reporting on these prominent members of society:

We usually call [public officials] the ‘people of color’ because the police officers in Thailand wear gray, army officers wear green, and navy wear blue, so all these people are people of color. So if [a story] involves people of color, we usually



stay away. The public can say, like, there is a rumor that people of color are involved in this controversy or whatever, but unless they are publicly denounced first by a prominent source, we would never touch that. (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

This ecosystem of saving face and self-censorship can result in the news reports seeming like government propaganda. For decades research has analyzed media propaganda and established the necessity of a free press (Jang, 2013; Lasswell, 1948; Rartshorne, 1941; Schultz, 1998). In some Western countries, the media is often called the fourth branch of government (or "fourth estate") because it monitors the political process in order to ensure that political players do not abuse the democratic process and enables news media to act as a discrete institution in the public sphere (Burrowes, 2011; Whitten-Woodring & James, 2012). It is argued that media should be independent from the state and serve as a watchdog over the government (Schultz, 1998). This is not just a Western ideal, though; scholars from across the globe have written about the need for press freedom in varying countries with unique geopolitical landscapes (Mellado, Moreira, Lagos & Hernández, 2012; Raj & Sreekumar, 2012; Voorhoof & Cannie, 2010; Wasserman, 2010) and especially so in countries with military dictatorships (Edge, 2014; Gilbert, 1988; Ogbondah, 2004; Sakr, 2010) – suggesting that such an argument could be made for the need for less media censorship in Thailand. However, future research would need to dive deeper into these notions.

Journalist 7, who described the police-to-journalist flow of information in detail, may hold comparable beliefs to these press freedom scholars, as this journalist appeared to be fully aware that this system might be problematic. Yet, this reporter simultaneously seemed resigned to the fact that because of the nation's attempt to save

face of both the country and military/police officials, the issue of sex trafficking is not talked about in society and therefore, not reported on:

The problem with the Thai media or Thailand in general is that we turn a blind eye to most of the things that go on in the sex industry. I am aware that Thailand has one of the most vibrant sex industries in the all of Southeast Asia, but you would barely see anything about that in the mainstream media or official statements, we usually like keep it under the rug. We don't talk about it in the open. That's the only one obstacle. Since we don't talk about it and we pretend it doesn't exist, we report on it very infrequently compared with how frequent abuse goes on in the sex industry and all these people that were trafficked. (Journalist 7, personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

The same reporter, Journalist 7 from the Thai-language newspaper in Bangkok, elaborated on the functions of journalism in the content of the role of a journalist in society, stating that, "In the West, like, I think in America, the media is seen as people who challenge establishment, or people who challenge the narrative... people will call bullshit, basically, but in Thailand, mainstream media is very subservient in nature" (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014).

As previously mentioned, most of the journalists that I spoke with asked that I not reveal their identities. This climate of trepidation or fear that there would be repercussions if anyone found out who they were illustrated Thailand's climate at the time that I did the interviews. Given that most journalists would only speak to me on the condition that I keep their identity confidential illuminates the context and the political landscape; a climate of apprehension perpetuates all of these fields. The Thai journalist at a mainstream Thai daily, Journalist 7, said, "In Thailand, we don't have this kind of whistleblower culture. In my case I talk to you because my name isn't on the paper, but I don't think most journalists will want to put their neck on the line" (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014). However, despite the news culture in Thailand of saving

face as opposed to serving a watchdog function, many respondents spoke about the need for changes in the types of stories and images used in sex trafficking coverage.

**Theme 3: Need for more variation in the type of sex trafficking related stories and images.** The findings discussed in the previous sections have dissected the existing sex trafficking coverage and the challenges that journalists and advocates face. This has led us to the idea that such existing coverage is inadequate and therefore, there is a need for more variation in the format and substance of sex trafficking news reports. Respondents noted that there is a strong need for different types of sex trafficking-focused news stories as well as a need to pay attention to the images used, as they are often highly problematic. Both of these notions are largely issues that journalists (or editors/producers) must deal with, but were also mentioned by advocates and survivors.

*The need for more variety of sex-trafficking stories.* One of the recurring complaints and suggestions that respondents had about coverage was that journalists need to report on a wider variety of sex trafficking stories. The story *angle* has been a recurring theme throughout this study. Respondents commonly mentioned that they want to see these new angles have more of a focus on empowerment (not just doom and gloom), follow-up stories and articles about the structural issues that lead to individuals or communities to being vulnerable to trafficking. For example, Liz Hilton from Empower said, “There’s a strong pattern of coverage: poor, backwards, stupid girls (not women) are being tricked and they need someone to save them. We rarely meet a journalist that wants to do a new angle” (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014).

A possible ‘new angle’ that Hilton said she rarely sees could be one suggested by Advocate 1, a UN employee, who said, “It would be nice if instead of just focusing on the

arrest, [journalists] looked at the whole criminal justice process. Let's see if it actually gets to prosecution" (Advocate 1, personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014). Another possible new angle could relate to Advocate 2's suggestion that journalists "look at what else can make the news, like empowering stories rather than just 'Victims caught!' That's cool, but follow-up on that. What happened to the victims? Is it a success story there? Or the good things that are happening, too, rather than just the negatives" (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014).

Alezandra Russel from Urban Light shared another possible new angle that reporters could consider. She explained that she would like journalists to "journey along" with the sex-trafficked boys that her organization aims to help in order to better understand the realities of their lives, both in the past and present:

Really, just remark what they've gone through, as far as a chronology or a timeline, to really show that the innocence was there. And one thing that we are trying to really replicate and represent for our boys is despite smoking and drug use and alcohol use and tattoos, you know, our boys are extremely resilient and extremely kind and extremely vulnerable. And just because they have these details about them doesn't exclude them from deserving services. And so I think a storyline about our boys would be so incredible...Just have them see their life, not just inside the bar and all of that gore but see them when they go to play soccer or when they go to visit their families and what that is like, and just to show really the injustices and the little opportunity that there is. (personal communication, Nov. 26, 2014)

Journalists could also think about writing a sex trafficking-related story with the new angle being that of a policy-focus that can lead to potential solutions, as Lani Hollander, Program Director at COSA, would like to see:

What I would really like to see that does not happen often enough...is policy. So what can we actually do about [sex trafficking], policy-wise; from a political perspective, from a social perspective, from an economic perspective, from a humanitarian perspective? What are avenues that we can explore? What are solutions to the problem? Do not just leave me with this 'doom and gloom'

article. Include some kind of glimmer of hope at the end. (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2014)

Other advocates discussed this desire for a ‘glimmer of hope’ in stories as well. Alezandra Russel from Urban Light shared that she feels as though “a lot of journalists really want the really gory details, rather than the hopeful outlook” (personal communication, Nov. 26, 2014). This desire for more positive and encouraging stories could be a viable new angle for journalists, especially taken in conjunction with other more specific suggestions.

Several respondents offered some specific ideas for possible stories. Interestingly, however, it was not just advocates that discussed the need for more variation in story type; journalists had similar thoughts and some suggested the need to move beyond raid-focused stories and some specific ways to do so. The reporter at the Thai-language daily, Journalist 7, proposed that stories could focus more on the background of the trafficking, such as, “How do they get all these girls? Where do they get these women? Who else is in the ring? What happens after that?” or a focus on the victims, asking questions such as “What happens to these woman? Do they get deported? Do they get help? Any coverage of sex trafficking is just single cases and it is not connected together... we don’t see them as a theme or like a big thing happening continuously” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014).

While numerous respondents agreed that there is a need for more variation in story type and many of the suggested story topics are good ones for journalists to consider, continually coming up with new angles can be easier said than done. This is especially so given the time and financial constraints that journalists often work within. Journalist 4, a foreign correspondent working for a large international news organization

echoed this concern, stating that, “one of the biggest challenges is finding a fresh angle – you do not want to report the same thing that everyone else is reporting – so it is how to find the fresh new angle that is not just a report or not just information that someone is feeding you” (personal communication, Dec. 17, 2014). It appears as if journalists want to write about the issue of sex trafficking, but struggle to do so.

Respondents further conveyed feelings that sex trafficking is an issue that many journalists care about and believe is important to publicly discuss. However, “There are not many angles that you can write; you can do a feature on an anti-trafficking organization or tie it into a report or research or a news event, but it’s hard to write a story to raise awareness if it’s solely for that purpose” said Journalist 1 (personal communication, Dec. 8, 2014). So while most respondents are in agreement that there is a need for more variety in sex trafficking stories, realistic suggestions must be made that take into account the limitations that many journalists work within.

***Pictures are problematic.*** In addition to the need for new angles or different story topics, numerous respondents expressed dismay about the types of images that are used in sex trafficking-related news stories, suggesting that they are problematic and should be reconsidered. For example, Mickey Choothesa, Founder of COSA, told me a story about an experience he had with a journalist. This reporter came and interviewed him and wrote a story about the shelter he runs in a rural area outside of Chiang Mai. When the story came out in the newspaper, “The picture they put next to my story was of a girl in the red light district in Bangkok, not about what we do here” (personal communication, Dec. 13, 2014).

Concerns from respondents regarding the pictures featured in news reports about trafficking are similar to those of problematic images used in war reporting. Previous research has found that graphic images of distant conflicts often invoke “compassion and concern” but can also be a tool for political purposes, specifically legitimizing the need for war (Parry, 2011, p. 1188). It is possible to draw comparisons between these findings and the following comments from Journalist 7 about the role of the police, in the sense that maybe these images are serving dual purposes of invoking compassion and/or pity for trafficking victims as well as reinforcing the strength of the police force and the value of their work:

Reporters can actually go with police, like the moment the raid happened, and photographers are also allowed to go and take photos. The police want us to do that. Now of course, we wouldn't use photos that show their face, but they can still see the victims...normally they cover their face with their hands or their hair or whatever, but we don't have this kind of mentality of privacy or common decency...we want that shot, we want that shot to say, 'Oh, look at these poor women being rescued'. (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014)

However, in addition to these photos being a severe ethical concern, they are also illegal. Section 56 of Thailand's Anti-Trafficking Law refers to privacy and media, and it prohibits “taking a picture, circulating a picture, printing a picture, recording or airing voice of any person, at any stage, which may lead to the identification of the trafficked person; publishing or disseminating the content, picture or voice, through whatever type of information communication media, disclosing history, place of living, place of work or place of education of the trafficked person” (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551, 2008).

Possibly as a result of Section 56's attempt to ensure the privacy of victims or for ethical reasons, some news outlets attempt to cover the faces of victims in pictures. Some

of the images that newspapers feature with sex trafficking articles show the victims at the press conference with the police, and they have a black bar covering their eyes in attempts to conceal their identities. One of the UN staffers, Advocate 1, noted that this attempt at confidentiality is unsatisfactory because it still enables conclusions to be drawn and the individual's identity. "The features in Thailand to distinguish a face are not even the eyes so much. It's more by the nose that you can tell what part of the country a person is from" (Advocate 1, personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014).

Another UN employee, Advocate 2, suggested that using problematic images is not just an issue for journalists, but something that advocates are also guilty of doing:

Stop using images to further promote the very root causes that make women vulnerable. For example, I know of a woman who created awareness-raising posters, but more than 80% of them featured women that were scantily clad or naked and bound in some way. I don't know how many times I have seen this happen where the journalists used some random photos. I hate that! (personal communication, Dec. 3, 2014)

While using images of scantily clad women on awareness-raising posters is not illegal, it can perpetuate negative stereotypes that serve to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes.

**Not all sex workers are trafficked.** However, it is important to note that those images (and accompanying texts) can perpetuate a number of negative stereotypes. Sometimes images of scantily clad women, which are often intended to depict sex workers or sex trafficked individuals, can make an audience member think that the woman in the picture is a victim that needs to be saved, when in reality, it is possible that she has chosen to work in the commercial sex industry and does not want to be viewed as a victim. This brings us back to earlier discussions about the complicated notion of choice when defining who is trafficked. While some people working in the sex industry



are trafficked and forced against his or her will, it is important to make it clear: not all are.

I spent an evening interviewing four consensual sex workers at a bar in Chiang Mai called Can Do Bar. All four of them work at the bar and make their living working in the commercial sex industry. These four women self-identify as willing sex workers and take issue with anti-trafficking narratives that paint all sex workers as victims. It was a slow night at the bar, but each woman would talk to me for a few minutes and then go do some work before returning back to me and repeating the cycle. I am using pseudonyms to protect their identity, so I will refer to them as Jutharat, Pim, Charunee, and Supaporn, all common female names in Thailand.

The bar that they work at, Can Do Bar, was created in 2006 by a group of sex workers, and with the help of an organization called Empower Foundation, is owned and operated by sex workers (Empower Foundation, n.d.). The bar is intended to provide a safe and respectful place for sex workers to work. Can Do Bar operates under Thai labor laws, meaning that all of the sex workers employed there are paid at or above minimum wage, receive paid vacation, paid sick days, and are allowed to take breaks in clean bathrooms used only by the employees (which is uncommon in many bars and other sex work establishments) (Pim, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). Staff are also allowed paid time off to attend meetings, courses or trainings (Empower Foundation, n.d.). The bar is intended to be an example of how sex workers rights can be respected both in bars as well as by the public and policymakers (Charunee, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014).

These women all conveyed beliefs that anti-trafficking efforts and narratives negatively impact them because it gives the impression that their work needs to be stopped and they need to be rescued. For example, Pim demonstrated this belief about her work not needing to be stopped when she said bluntly: “We don’t need to be rescued. We don’t want to be rescued. We want to do this” (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). It is interesting that even when one of the women was speaking to me without the others around, like was the case with Pim, she said “we” as if she was speaking on behalf of the group.

The women went on to explain that anti-trafficking raids are done on establishments where consenting sex workers operate, which disables these women from making their living as well as removes their agency to decide whether they continue this work. Supaporn credits the harmful anti-trafficking efforts to the United States, saying that the largest numbers of raids happen during January and February each year, which she called “raid season, because local country reports for the TIP report are due in March” (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). These raids are a component of anti-trafficking efforts “created based on misunderstandings” explained Charunee (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). The women conveyed that these misunderstandings are likely, at least in part, the result of media representations of sex workers.

After I arrived at the bar for the meeting with the women, Jutharat went into a separate room and came back with a binder full of news clippings. She flipped through what were likely hundreds of news articles ripped out of newspapers about sex trafficking and sex work. Similar to many of the sentiments expressed by other interviewees, Jutharat would stop periodically and point out the problematic images used in the

trafficking related news stories. She said that “There are only two kinds of sex workers: bad women or pity women,” and continually pointed to images that depicted women as either criminals or victims (Jutharat, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). Pim and Supaporn also conveyed thoughts about the dichotomy in beliefs about sex workers as either criminals needing to be punished or victims needing to be saved (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014).

The beliefs of these women run parallel to what some scholars argue, such as Doezema (1999), who believes that feminist anti-trafficking advocates have stereotyped migrant sex workers as ‘victims’ and ‘forced’ when neither are the reality. Additionally, it is argued that current anti-trafficking discourses have embraced many of the strategies used by advocates of the “white slavery myth” such as “innocence deceived” and “youthful virginity despoiled” (Doezema, 1999). Doezema (1999) further states that while some instances of sex trafficking are real, the notion of sex trafficked women is commonly a myth intended to control “loose women” as opposed to protecting women.

This dichotomy that Pim, Supaporn and Jutharat mentioned is similar to a “virgin-whore” or “good girl-bad girl” separation that violence against women researchers have argued is utilized by news media in order to separate women into categories based on their perceived level of responsibility and culpability, as opposed to focusing on the guilt or innocence of their assailants (Meyers, 1997). Furthermore, when women attempt to fight back against male violence being committed against them, they are judged on the basis of what society believes are appropriate female behaviors (Meyers, 1997). However, the reality is that the behaviors in which society deems acceptable for women are often at odds with what would protect them from male violence; meaning that these

societal rules continually reinforce traditional gender roles and force women into subordinate situations (Meyers, 1997).

While these four women gave no indication that they view themselves as “loose women” or “whores,” they did each suggest that the stigma attached to sex work negatively impacts their work and their wellbeing, and such stigma frequently prohibits them from being protected. All four women independently conveyed the belief that it is the images used in news articles that drives this stigma (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). Pim told me about an art exhibit that she and some of the others helped create in which “all the art showed people with bags over their heads, because that’s what a lot of the images in the media look like,” and that this was “an attempt to push back on the media” and begin to tackle the stereotypes about sex workers (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014).

However, much like some of the advocates that I spoke with, these women appeared to be resigned to the fact that coverage was going to continue to look the way(s) that it currently does, possibly due to editors rather than journalists. “We know that news sells and journalists have requirements from their editors,” explained Charunee (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). Jutharat told me that she attended a “media and society meeting” approximately five months back in which “journalists said they had to write like that because of their editors, but they didn’t want to” (personal communication, Dec. 12, 2014). This suggests that while there is a need for new angles for journalists to write about, efforts are also likely needed to help change the minds and practices of editors to begin to reduce the stigma attached to sex work. However, even with attempts to reduce stigma and provide rights to sex workers, we also need to keep in mind that some

individuals working in the commercial sex industry are forced to do so against his or her will.

**A focus on survivors.** As has been a common theme running through this dissertation, while some individuals are consensual sex workers, some people are forced to do so against his or her will; in other words, some people are trafficked. Findings from this dissertation have revealed that the voices of these trafficked individuals are commonly omitted from news stories. Scholars have suggested that when crafting policy about violence against women, an inclusionary approach should be taken – that being, one that positions the needs of the most vulnerable women at the center of the policy analysis rather than at the periphery (Smith, 2005). In attempts to take an inclusionary approach to this research and not speak for others, as Alcoff (1991–1992) warns against, this section will focus specifically on the survivors that were interviewed and how their perspectives relate to the previously discussed themes.

I believe that the opinions and responses of the survivors are of utmost importance as they are the only people that truly know what sex trafficking looks like and feels like. The issues surrounding choice, cultural obligation, victimization, etc., are aspects that journalists and advocates talked about, but these individuals lived them. Comments from survivors were interspersed throughout this study when relevant, but this section will talk more in detail about the two interviews with survivors. This section can also further shed light on the complexities of interviewing survivors, as discussions of access to survivors and the sensitivities needed when talking to them are highly relevant to the themes of this study.

Although only two survivors were interviewed, they represent vulnerable populations and important voices about how best to respect all trafficking survivors. Applying Smith's (2005) notions regarding an inclusionary approach to constructing policy about violence against women that positions the needs of the most vulnerable women at the center of debates, these interviews are my attempt to add to the literature on media and trafficking as well as discussions of policy without excluding these individuals or consigning them to the periphery.

Both survivors that I interviewed were females in their 20s. Both women self-identify as having been trafficked as children or teenagers and are now affiliated with anti-trafficking organizations. Both of the women currently utilize the services and/or resources of the anti-trafficking organization that they are affiliated with. I promised these two women confidentiality, so I am withholding the names of the organizations that they are associated with and will refer to them by pseudonyms, Noon and Pang, names selected to honor their Thai heritage, in order to ensure their complete privacy.

On the days that I knew I was meeting with a survivor, I found myself nervous for the interviews. While I certainly wanted to treat all interviewees with respect and kindness, I wanted to ensure that I was treating these individuals with the utmost reverence. I was very concerned about creating a respectful, open, comfortable environment. I tried to display as warm, trusting, unthreatening and transparent relationship as possible. I did this by paying added attention to my clothes, my mannerisms, my words and my tone. I tried to tailor all of these things to be as neutral as possible; I wanted to do my best not to stick out or come across as boisterous or intimidating. Before, during and after the interviews with these two survivors, I found

myself feeling in awe of these women and profoundly grateful for their willingness to speak to me about their private lives.

The interview with Noon was conducted entirely in English, and the interview with Pang was conducted partially in English and partially in Thai with the use of a translator. This male translator works with the anti-trafficking organization that Pang is affiliated with. Pang is currently taking English classes and the translator/advocate told me that she was excited to practice her English but that he was there to assist (and, as previously discussed in the context of “protective attention directing,” presumably, make sure the conversation did not move in a harmful direction). I explained to the translator that I was interested in as close a translation as possible to the specific words that Pang used – meaning, I was most interested in how she described things. So I asked the translator not to try to interpret what Pang was saying in a way that he thinks would be easier for a *farang* (foreigner) to understand, but rather, translate as close to verbatim as possible. He agreed. It is possible, however, that specific word choice, ideas and/or tone got lost in translation. It is also possible that this translator being male and working for the organization from which Pang receives services, may have impacted what she said and/or how she said it. There were many instances in which Pang spoke to me in English, so I have included direct quotes from her as well as the translator.

The first interview was with Noon and took place within the facilities of the organization she is affiliated with. We nicely greeted each other, however, the ambiance immediately changed when I discussed the IRB-required consent form. I had it in English and Thai, and for victims, they are only asked to provide their age and date – not their name. However, signing a form – any form – is not prevalent in Thai culture, and

especially in these women's lives. I did my best to calmly and clearly explain why I was presenting the form, but she seemed skeptical and the mood changed when I asked her to sign it. In my request for an interview I had explained what I am doing and what I intend to do with the information, but the physical act of signing the form was problematic. I immediately noticed a change in both her body language and her tone. She sat up straighter in her chair and there was a pause in the communication. I could feel a tension in the air. As I saw her anxiety rise, so did mine. I was trying to process how she was feeling as well as how I was feeling and how best to react.

After me explaining a bit more, she signed it, but seemed very hesitant. I felt exceedingly uncomfortable and somewhat ashamed for having needed to ask her to sign the form. I did not ask if audio recording would be appropriate because I was concerned it would make her even more uncomfortable, so I did not use the recorder and instead took detailed notes in attempts to try to make her as comfortable as I could. I had a moral dilemma and very much considered punting on the consent form, however, my decision to not record this session seemed essential given her obvious hesitancy. Ultimately, signing the IRB-required consent form took us back a number of steps of comfort level with each other. After all the work that we both had put into even getting to this point, the IRB inhibited it. I felt that pulling out the audio recorder might have stopped the interview from beginning.

Once I put the signed consent form back in my bag, Noon, along with two staff members, toured me around the grounds. Noon knew a great deal about the facilities, the resources available and the people utilizing the services. After walking around the grounds for about 15 minutes, Noon and I sat down around a small table in an



administrative office to chat further. The two staff members remained in the room, but were not sitting at the table with us. It was clear to me that they were monitoring our conversation, and on two occasions one of them chimed-in to add her perspective about how their organization helps survivors or what the trafficking landscape looks like in Thailand – this could likely be “protective attention directing” in action. I was, admittedly, less interested in their added commentary than I was the ideas from Noon.

After I told her the specific aims of this research and my focus on media coverage of the issue, she shyly told me that she was not overly familiar with how the media report on the issue, saying “I do not see much news stories about the topic” (personal communication, Dec. 6, 2014), which is consistent with what several of the advocates stated as well. She elaborated on that idea, explaining that, “[Media] don’t report on street children unless they’re trafficked. They don’t write about vulnerable kids, only when there’s a crime that the police are involved in” (personal communication, Dec. 6, 2014). As we talked further, Noon seemed to display some similar notions as other advocates had about human rights, and specifically sex trafficking, not being high on the Thai public’s conscience. Similar to beliefs by advocates and journalists regarding the Thai public’s lack of concern about these issues, Noon said she thinks the general public in Thailand is “too busy to worry about the poor street kids” and therefore they are not interested in reading about, or, consequently, volunteering/donating to anti-trafficking causes. The way that she spoke about herself and the anti-trafficking organization she was associated with felt as if she viewed it as an “us-versus-them” situation, meaning that it was she and the advocates against the world. Unsurprisingly, given that the consensual

sex workers used commonly the phrase “we,” it appears that both groups were creating circles around them of likeminded individuals with whom they feel comfortable.

The second interview took place in a coffee shop with a survivor that I am using the pseudonym Pang to refer to, in order to ensure her confidentiality. She arrived with the translator/advocate at the coffee shop of their choosing and the first thing the translator told me was that she does not have much time, only about 15-20 minutes. I said that was no problem, but wondered if it was more about protecting her -- making sure we did not get into anything too deep. This is likely another example of “protective attention directing,” and although it did set the scene for a rather controlled environment, the atmosphere was pleasant. In a situation such as this, “protective attention directing” does not need to be negative; it can occur within a pleasant environment where useful information is exchanged. We met in the middle of the afternoon when it was sunny and warm outside, and not too crowded in the coffee shop so it was quiet enough to hear each other easily even while speaking gently. Given my experience with the IRB consent form with Noon, I was anxious about presenting it, but Pang signed it and did not express the same level of discomfort with it. Prior to this interview and my experience with Noon, I opted not to even bring up the audio recorder in attempts to maintain as comfortable an atmosphere as possible.

Neither Noon nor Pang ever referred to themselves or other trafficked individuals by any label – victim, survivor, etc. Pang elaborated on this idea and said, “I’m just me and I don't think any other things [labels] describe me” (personal communication, Dec. 14, 2014). It seemed clear that she had very much accepted that as part of her life, but does not know any different so did not think that it is what defines her.

Similar to Noon and other respondents, Pang expressed a belief that sex trafficking is not an issue that journalists and/or the general public care widely about. She said, “No media has ever come to talk to me. I think they don’t much care about my story. But I am not unique. There are so many [women] just like me. I think I don’t have a special case” (personal communication, Dec. 14, 2014).

Pang did appear to have seen some news coverage of the issue. She described much of coverage as crime-focused and representative of business transactions. The translator said she does not think that those types of articles are about someone like her. “It sounds like a business transaction that has gone wrong and resulted in someone getting arrested” she said, adding that they often “do not talk at all about the women involved and who they are as people. It does not show that they are people” (personal communication, Dec. 14, 2014). The message that she seemed to be conveying was similar to findings about articles lacking context, but took that idea further to touch on notions of really knowing the person that the story is about and knowing that this is part of who she is; it is about a human, not an item or a business deal.

As previously mentioned, both survivors discussed their willingness to be interviewed by journalists should one have approached them. Certainly these women are not representative of all survivors, especially given that they were willing to talk to me. However, this willingness of survivors to be interviewed may be important for some advocates to consider, given the experience I had with advocates not agreeing to connect me with survivors.

It is important to note that while Pang told me that she would be willing to speak to a journalist, she does not want her “face or body” shown in any images (personal

communication, Dec. 14, 2014). While Noon expressed that she had not seen much coverage on the issue, she touched on the topic of images as well. She said she sees the pictures but often does not read the stories. She reiterated sentiments from other respondents about the images being problematic and often taken without consent or against the will of the survivor. She said, “[Media] show pictures that make the girls feel embarrassed and make the girls be criminals” (personal communication, Dec. 6, 2014).

She went on to further explain, “[Coverage] only has pictures of women with police officers. The women do not want picture. They cover faces. I cover my face, too” (personal communication, Dec. 6, 2014). She said the last part of that statement, about covering her face, with a laugh, but it is a serious matter. I interpreted these comments from Noon and Pang to be indicative of their bodies having been so violated before, that they do not want them violated again by showing them to the world. This could be understood as another part of each woman’s identity and she does not want it to be desecrated.

When I asked Noon what she would want a journalist writing a story about sex trafficking to focus on, she paused for a moment and thought about it. She then told me, with a small giggle and hint of embarrassment, that she was not sure. I reassured her that it was no problem, and moved on to the next question. When I asked Pang the same question she explained, “I think he should say I’m a nice girl. I’m not mean to do anything wrong. I should not be in jail” (personal communication, Dec. 14, 2014). She then elaborated on that in Thai and the translator relayed that she said,

Often times sex workers are treated like criminals, when the reality is that they do not want to be doing what they are doing. She does not want to be treated like a criminal because she says she is not one. She says she was just doing what she had to do and wants people to know that and not treat her like a criminal or a bad person. (personal communication, Dec. 14, 2014)

I found all of these comments interesting. First, it is noteworthy that Pang automatically assumed the hypothetical journalist was male without me specifying a gender. Second, these quotes seem to further relate to the issue of the individual's identity and how someone writing a story does not know her and therefore should not form judgments about her conduct, particularly whether or not it is criminal.

Both the answers that Noon and Pang gave me as well as the areas in which they did not have answers indicate that, to them, their trafficking experiences are such a part of who they are, that it does not seem abnormal. It is all that they have known, so it can be difficult to pinpoint what aspects should or should not be highlighted in coverage.

While only two survivors were interviewed, they represent vulnerable populations and important voices about how best to respect all trafficking survivors. As Smith (2005) said, these messages must be at the center of both media coverage as well as policy changes. However, that can be easier said than done, so advocates likely also need to plan for this approach to ensure that they do not stand in the way of that inclusion.

**Summary of interview results.** In sum, these interviews revealed a great deal of dissidence among respondents regarding what sex trafficking is and who is trafficked, largely because of varying understandings of choice. This disagreement, coupled with misunderstandings about the professional positions and practices by and about advocates and journalists, leads to an inimical relationship between the groups that impacts how journalists write about the issue. Advocates and journalists expressed sentiments that made it clear there is a large gap in understanding regarding how both groups do their jobs.

Additionally, a tense political landscape leads to stronger than normal media censorship in Thailand, meaning that all journalists, but especially local Thai journalists, must practice a degree of self-censorship. Furthermore, the relationship between the police/military and the press results in a one-way flow of information about sex trafficking, moving from the police to journalists with little to no opportunity for feedback, additional investigation or criticism. This relationship results in much of the sex trafficking coverage being reminiscent of public relations materials for the Royal Thai Police and the junta.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This analysis addressed four research questions about how journalists and the anti-trafficking community view news coverage of sex trafficking as well as their relationships with each other. By using a mixed methods approach, this study was able to quantify the framing of news coverage and contextualize those results with qualitative examples of the text as well as learn more about why the coverage look the way(s) that it does via in-depth interviews. This final chapter summarizes the quantitative content analysis of news stories and qualitative in-depth interview findings, and discusses the implications of those results. It then provides recommendations for anti-trafficking organizations and journalists moving forward as well as identifies directions for future research.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The first set of research questions aimed to understand how frequently English-language newspapers in Thailand reported on sex trafficking as well as how those stories were framed, with a specific focus on how the problem was defined and how solutions were discussed. This analysis found that the majority of human trafficking articles did not focus on sex trafficking, but those that did, were crime-related news stories that lacked context and background. This phase of the dissertation, the content analysis, also demonstrated that sex trafficking was largely reported on in relation to other countries,

yet primarily cited official sources from within Thailand. Victims' voices and stories were largely absent. Inclusion of remedies that might help bring an end to trafficking was uncommon, but when stories did describe a solution, awareness raising campaigns, crackdowns on corruption, and policy changes were most frequently discussed.

Additionally, stories primarily reported on children and female victims. Specifically, the content analysis found a lack of news stories reporting on sex trafficked boys. It is possible that more male trafficking victims were not reported on due to traditional notions of sexuality and gender. While some people believe that there exist fewer male sex trafficking victims than female victims (see, for example, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2014), and therefore coverage would merely be a reflection of the actual trafficking landscape, it could also be seen as problematic due to conventional notions of sexuality and gender. Scholars have argued that men and boys are regularly left out of discussions of the global sex trade (Dennis, 2008).

Men and boys are portrayed as having more agency and knowledge of what they are doing, and are therefore regularly depicted as being the victimizer rather than the victimized (Dennis, 2008). This ideology has been credited to the discomfort among heterosexual scholars that comes not with the notion that men and boys are having sex for money, but rather, that men/boys are having sex with men/boys (Dennis, 2008). As a result, there have been calls for "a re-evaluation of scholarly preconceptions about male and female bodies, about objectification, and about the inevitability of heterosexual identity and about the impossibility of same-sex desire" (Dennis, 2008, p. 22), and such a call may be needed in the context of media coverage of sex trafficked boys, as well.



In addition to the lack of boys discussed in the news stories, articles were found to omit discussions of risk factors or other racialization identifiers such as statelessness or membership in an ethnic minority community – elements of the story that can describe the social status of the individual and whether he or she “belongs” in Thai society. The United Nations Economic and Social Council has explicitly stated, “the lack of citizenship status for some hill tribe women and children was a strong risk factor for becoming victims of trafficking” (U.S. Department of State, 2006, para. 195) and The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has noted, “a significant number of children residing in Thailand remain stateless . . . which renders them vulnerable to abuse, trafficking and exploitation” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, para. 33), making it surprising that such discussions were not more prevalent in trafficking coverage. One, admittedly speculative, reason for this could be due to these populations being a highly discriminated against group and not being considered worthy of media attention, though future research would be needed to confirm this.

Further, despite more than 300 laws and international agreements written about human slavery since 1815, none have defined it in exactly the same way (Bales, 2000); one scholar, for example, noted more than 20 unique definitions of human trafficking (Lee, 2007). This lack of consensus on terminology and definitions discussed by scholars was observed in this analysis, as wide arrays of phrases were seen in descriptions of trafficked individuals and sex trafficking was discussed interchangeably with prostitution. Wallanger (2010) explained that while the issue of trafficking has gained attention in recent years, there still remains a lack of cohesion of understanding on the topic, with

notions of migration, sex work, sexuality, gender, victim, consent, coercion all mixed together – which was further demonstrated in this study.

Broadly speaking, this lack of consensus regarding what sex trafficking is permeated these findings and impacts the work of both journalists and advocates. Under leniently enforced, often malleable and inconstant laws, coupled with cultural and societal obligations, age of consent has become a highly contested topic that blurs the line regarding what is an individual's choice and what is forced. However, what is more likely than clearly delineated lines between choice and force is that all of these sex workers are in such a position as a result of circumstance – and such circumstance is impacted by elements such as statelessness, familial obligation and racialization. Further, these findings demonstrated how age has become a way of defining the issue of sex trafficking since the notion of choice is so sharply disputed. However, the cultural milieu that promotes familial responsibility does not necessarily imply that children's bodies should be sold for sex. Essentially, the previous research just discussed combined with these findings make it clear that there is a strong need for streamlined discussions of what trafficking is, who is trafficked and what terms should be used to describe these people.

As a whole, this analysis found coverage that did not clearly delineate a victim from a criminal, which has been seen in earlier research on violence against women. There is a gap in scholarship regarding media coverage of violence against women in Thailand, but it is possible that findings from other countries could apply in similar ways. For example, in the context of violence against women in the U.S., research has demonstrated that it is framed by the news in a way that supports, sustains, and reproduces ideologies and systems of male supremacy (Meyers, 1997). Because news

coverage is rooted in cultural myths and stereotypes about women, men, and violence, there are hidden or disguised links between sexist violence, social structures, and gendered patterns of domination and control. Many such social structures exist in Thailand (as well as all over the world), which may allow news coverage in the country to fall into a similar pattern of using ‘disguised links’ to represent ‘gendered patterns’ of control. These ‘disguised links’ allow the patterns of domination and control to continue (Meyers, 1997), which, in the case of this research, could strengthen social structures that perpetuate the cycle of vulnerability that leads to trafficking.

Scholars have further written about the potential for female victims of male violence to be portrayed in news media as responsible for their own abuse, in turn, making news media “part of the problem” (Meyers, 1997, p. 117). Given the lack of victims’ voices and perspectives present in the sex trafficking coverage, similar notions could apply to sex trafficking victims who are not given a chance to speak for themselves and tell their own story.

Furthermore, given the problematic elements found in the news coverage, the second set of research questions asked how anti-trafficking advocates and survivors viewed the news media and how they understood their role in shaping such coverage, as well as how journalists make sense of their reporting on the topic and what challenges they face when doing so. These interviews further revealed a deep disagreement among respondents regarding the definition of sex trafficking and very unclear notions of choice and consent based on facets of Thai culture, most notably a financial familial obligation. This debate surrounding who should be considered trafficking, which is again consistent with what previous research has found regarding the array of terms and definitions (see,

for example, Bales, 2000; Lee, 2007; Wallanger, 2010), permeated much of the findings and coupled with a distrust of the media by NGOs/IGOs, resulted in a tense relationship between reporters and NGOs.

Interviews further revealed that aspects of how NGOs/IGOs and journalists do their respective jobs played important roles in shaping coverage as well as straining this already-stiff relationship between advocates and the press. It became clear that advocates largely do not understand the limitations that many journalists work within, as they commonly spoke about the lack of time that reporters take to understand the issue and write a story about it. Possibly as a result of the lack of time taken by journalists, or maybe the catalyst of that lack of time, is what I have termed ‘protective attention directing.’ That being, the efforts taken by advocates to control what information and what sources journalists have access to. These efforts by human rights organizations to direct a journalist’s attention in a certain way is likely to protect victims as well as serve a public relations function of allowing the NGO staff members to influence the conversations surrounding the issue and their work. However, it is important to consider that reporting on the issue is regionally situated and based on different definitions and understandings of human rights, which is constructed as a different concept in many Western countries than it is in Thailand and likely impacts how foreign and local NGOs and journalists recognize the topic.

Additionally, these interviews revealed a strong role of the police/military is limiting how journalists can report on sex trafficking. Given Thailand’s current political climate, respondents were (understandably) reluctant to speak openly and therefore censored themselves a great deal in both what they said to me, as well as what they wrote

about. There is a clearly defined one-way flow of information from the Thai police/military to Thai journalists, which creates a system in which coverage of sex trafficking resembles police public relations materials: content that primarily cites official sources, largely reports on crime-related events and conveys a ‘hero police’ narrative. The climate of fear, and accompanying threats and intimidation that some journalists received, results in minimal independent journalistic investigations of trafficking issues by Thai journalists. Foreign reporters have slightly more ability to do so and to ask difficult questions, but they still described definitive no-go topics.

Despite Thailand being notoriously a destination for carnal gratification, results from both the content analysis and the interviews reveal that such notoriety, and the cultural and economic causes of such, appears to be something Thai media often overlook. As a whole, the data yielded by this study provide convincing evidence that a wider array of sex trafficking stories and voices should be presented in coverage as well as improved communication between advocates and journalists. Additionally, results from this dissertation point to the need for domestic and international pressure to be placed on the current military regime to promote a free press. Such findings have a number of both theoretical and practical implications.

### **Implications of Findings**

Some of the findings discussed are unique to the press, some are unique to advocates/researchers, and others are relevant to both groups, yet all have implications for how coverage of sex trafficking is created and understood by all involved parties. For example, some that are unique to NGOs are the desire to protect trafficked individuals, the want to define the topic carefully, the desire for it to be discussed as more than just a

crime issue. Some that are unique to journalists are time constraints, newsworthy angles, and issues of press freedom such as pressure from the junta, lese majeste and defamation laws. Issues such as culture and choice come into play for everyone. When all of these aspects come together and are revealed, a great deal of contestation results. When thinking about how to report on human rights abuses, all of these come into play, resulting in these findings having implications for both academics and practitioners.

**Theoretical implications.** Many of the content analysis findings lend support to previous framing research regarding journalistic conventions influencing story topic and sources cited (Iyengar, 1994). First, this study found a notable amount of stories that featured episodic framing. Episodic frames focus on the immediate event or incident and give little or no context about underlying issues (Iyengar, 1993). Thematic frames focus on the big picture, for instance, by providing statistics, expert analysis or other information to help the public view the issue in a broader context (Iyengar, 1993). This study revealed a need for more thematic and contextualized reporting on sex trafficking.

In addition to the episodic framing, this study found that the news stories largely relied on official sources at the expense of the voices of victims, suggested few remedies and concentrated on crime-focused stories. All of which are consistent with previous research of sex trafficking coverage, suggesting that framing of the issue is similar in the Thailand and Western countries (Johnston, Friedman & Shafer, 2012; Johnston, Friedman & Sobel, 2015).

Moreover, these findings taken in conjunction with framing studies of other human rights abuses such as female genital cutting (Sobel, 2015), interethnic conflict (Lai Fong & Ishak, 2012) and humanitarian intervention (Parry, 2011) could begin to shed

light on the understudied area of how human rights journalism is framed: largely episodic, regularly cites official sources, lacks victims voices (and sometimes depicts victims as weak or passive), and focuses on a crime or conflict frame.

These findings also contribute to our understandings of the role of the media in Thailand. Many Western nations view journalists as watchdogs and the role of the media as that of the ‘fourth estate.’ In such a perspective, it could be argued that by excluding traditionally marginalized and rural groups from the dialogue, the media are fundamentally unable to act as a public conscience. However, in this research, I did not see this Western relationship with the press, signifying that the news media are doing something different in Thailand. Scholars have, for decades, noted the crucial role that mass media play in national development, specifically in developing countries and countries with developing political systems (Lerner, 1958; Neurath, 1962; Rao, 1963; Rogers, 1976; Schramm, 1964). Given that Thailand is in a “developmental state” (Leftwich, 2007), it could be argued that at this juncture in Thailand’s political development, media are serving a modernization or development function as opposed to Western conceptualizations of the role of journalists.

In addition to the purpose of media on a broader scale, the specific role of sources in framing is another important topic in this analysis as well as of previous scholars (see, for example, Andsager & Powers, 1999; Nacos, 1994; Colby & Cook, 1991). A study of AIDS reporting in nightly news coverage in the U.S., which certainly may incongruously apply in Thailand, found that when cited, government officials were more likely to provide a sense of reassurance as opposed to sensationalized stories (Colby & Cook, 1991). Such research could explain the ‘hero police’ narrative that emerged from the

content analysis in the sense that the police were showing how much they are doing to take care of the problem and that the public need not worry about the issue as well as the interview findings regarding the coverage not being an attempt to mobilize citizens to act.

Also, much research has analyzed journalist-source relationships. Some scholars depict the relationship in symbiotic terms, where each party is engaged in mutually beneficial exchanges of information and influence (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; Sigal, 1973). Others, especially when focusing on political sources, describe the relationship as adversarial, similar to a chess-game (Ansolabehere, Behr & Iyengar, 1993), a wrestling match (Linsky, 1983), a harsh negotiation (Cook, 1998) or a love-hate relationship (Hess, 1981). Findings from this study could lend support to a number of these scholars, suggesting that a similarly adversarial relationship exists between NGO sources and the press. However, this relationship is dynamic and can change over time – at times adversarial and at other times mutually beneficial.

Lastly, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) explained five factors that may influence how journalists frame an issue: social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalistic routines, and ideological or political orientations of journalists. Given how those five influential factors come into play in Thailand at the time of this study, the relationships revealed between NGOs and the press as well as journalists and the Thai military/police become crucial in understanding why the stories are framed in the ways that they are. These relationships are surely impacted by all five of Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) framing factors.



**Practical implications.** In addition to contributing to literature on the topics of media framing, journalist-source relationships and human rights reporting, the findings of this study have a number of practical implications.

On one hand, these findings could be conceptualized as representing the tense relationship between the press and NGOs. In other words, the facets of sex trafficking coverage and the challenges that journalists and advocates described, could be understood as demonstrating a larger problem that exists among coverage of a number of human rights abuses and the accompanying NGOs or IGOs. Beckett (2009) found “a strong instrumentalist bias on the part of NGOs toward communications and mediation processes” (p. 4). Sex trafficking is likely just one issue of many in which this bias/tense relationship exists, and it can create and perpetuate a cycle: the poor relationship impacts how the issues are reported on, which can impact policy (Gilboa, 2003; Harp, Loke & Bachmann, 2010; Piers, 2002; Wiley, 1997), which then impacts the work that the NGOs and IGOs do.

On the other hand, these findings simultaneously demonstrate the relationship between the police and the media. Meaning, sex trafficking could be seen as a case study demonstrating how the police/military control the media in Thailand. Given this tightly controlled environment and a one-way information flow from the police to the press, it makes sense that the majority of sources cited in the coverage would be official sources from within Thailand. When thinking about how human rights organizations can act as media advocates to push coverage in new directions, understanding this government-press relationship is crucial. Sagan (1996) suggested that anyone can separate verifiable truth from mere claim using what he called “the fine art of baloney detection” to identify

fallacies within an assertion and separate them from fact (p. 209). It is possible that reporters need to hone their ‘baloney detection’ skills when attending police press conferences and reviewing news releases. However, what is more likely, is that journalists fully understand the level of baloney they are being served, and we are dealing with a much larger, systemic problem that will require pressure from inside and outside of Thailand to push for policy changes regarding free expression.

When thinking particularly about the news coverage and its possible impacts, reporting superficially on the constant public relations efforts of Thailand’s human trafficking police does not mobilize public support for anti-trafficking efforts; it may numb people to it. Additionally, by self-censoring, accepting the climate of corruption and bowing to political pressure, the media are not objectively recording the abuses occurring around them. However, factors such as threats of physical violence, self-censorship, politicization, finances, prestige and most importantly, mindset, must all be addressed in order to have a healthy, professional, independent and trustworthy media.

In addition to the lack of a free press and minimal coverage of marginalized groups, other problems were seen in the news stories that have practical implications for how sex trafficking is understood. For example, coverage did not clearly describe who was a victim and who was a criminal, which could be seen as victim blaming or, alternately, as further illustrations of a murky anti-trafficking landscape in which no clear definitions exist. Some argue that media coverage should be a mirror of society and reflect its realities and values (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008), so it is possible that this sex trafficking coverage is a reflection of the flawed consensus in the field. That is to say,

there exists inadequate definitions and terminology use among advocates and that translates into inconsistent terminology use in coverage.

However, the point of this dissertation is not to argue a position regarding which definition is correct so much as to clarify the issues and the varying standpoints. While terminology is certainly important, we need to be careful not to get lost in the jargon and focus on establishing a more concrete understanding of what sex trafficking is and how best to help these individuals. Thailand has ratified ILO (1999) Convention No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, as well as ILO (1973) Convention No. 138, which mandates that ratifying states pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labor, so while I certainly acknowledge the gray area, I think that children stand out as trafficked. Ultimately, I argue that a focus needs to be on capacity building and infrastructure creation that can enable all children in Thailand, regardless of citizenship, to attend primary and secondary school.

Overall, it is clear from the findings that reporting on sex trafficking and the accompanying relationships between journalists, NGOs/IGOs and the police result in a sticky situation. NGOs are understandably protective, as they should be. Yet, NGOs believe that we need accurate media coverage of the issue to inform the public and policymakers. I believe that there are ways that we can protect and respect survivors while still getting a compelling, humanizing message out to the general public. A growing number of resources are readily available to journalists who are interested in honing their skills and learning more about best practices when interviewing and writing about victims. While not all of these apply in Thailand, many of the ideas conveyed could likely be adapted in various cultural and political contexts. The Dart Center for

Journalism and Trauma offers continually updated suggestions for journalists about how to interview victims of crimes (Interviewing Victims, n.d.) as well as investigating and reporting on sexual violence (Sexual violence, n.d.). The Irina Project provides training and resources to journalists to promote more accurate representations of sex trafficking (The Irina Project, n.d.). Also, efforts such as the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN-GIFT) provide “do’s” and “don’ts” for journalists writing about various forms of human trafficking (“How the media reports on Human Trafficking,” n.d.). Additionally, advocates and journalists could improve coverage as well as their relationship with one another by adapting some of the following recommendations.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Journalistic Practices**

This research has informed the following possible recommendations. If news media are to copiously fulfill their role as documenters of society as opposed to public relations practitioners for the Thai police force, changes are needed with regard to the quantity and scope of coverage on the topic. However, given the confines that journalists must work within, NGOs need to step up and assist journalists if they want to increase public awareness about the issue. And while doing this, we need to keep the voices of the survivors at the forefront, not on the periphery, and continually ensure that we do so in a respectful way. However, my experiences with the interviewees demonstrated that journalists want people to know how repressive the environment is, but they cannot be the ones to say it. The journalist at a mainstream Thai-language daily newspaper, Journalist 7, said, “You know, everything I said today...I feel redeemed. I feel redemption. Nobody has asked me these questions and I like to have the chance to talk

about it. I feel vindicated. Please get this thing published!” (Anonymous, personal communication, Dec. 18, 2014), which further demonstrates the importance of these issues and possible recommendations. However, I acknowledge that many of these suggestions for journalists will have to come from foreign correspondents because of the nature of the Thai-language media landscape right now, but could be adapted by local journalists to whatever extent possible.

- First, reporters should add more context as well as write about a wider variety of angles in sex trafficking related stories. Journalists could do this by discussing the most recently available statistics regarding the scope of the problem, and include a dialogue about the collection and accuracy of those numbers.
- Another way that reporters could achieve these aims would be to describe family obligations in more detail or more explicitly discuss some of the societal factors that would give readers an understanding of the root causes of the problem.
- Alternatively, journalists could write about sex-trafficked boys or what happens to victims after a raid. However, reporters must always refrain from blaming the victim when adding context or writing about new angles.
- However, given that adding context and finding news angles to write about can be time consuming as both require more research and/or investigation, it is possible that in order to do this, we might need to seek a new funding model. Some organizations have begun to do this. For

example, the Thai news outlet *Prachathai* is funded in part by USAID, which gives reporters more flexibility in what they write about and how they do so. Also, Amnesty International was considering giving grants to journalists to do investigative work surrounding human rights abuses, which could greatly help reporters wishing to investigate a sex trafficking related story. However such a grant for investigative reporting on the issue is likely limited to foreign journalists until the political climate changes and censorship eases (and may even be difficult for foreign journalists, currently).

- Other, more grassroots efforts could also be taken to improve coverage and the relationship between journalists and the anti-trafficking community. The Foreign Correspondents Association of Thailand could occasionally invite NGOs to their events to help build ties.
- Alternatively, when NGOs are aiming to act as media advocates to push coverage in new directions, the anti-trafficking organization could offer to hold training sessions at the Foreign Correspondents Association. It is integral that key media personnel — not just journalists but also editors and publishers — be included in these training sessions.
- NGOs could also more regularly reach out to journalists. Even if these organizations do not have dedicated media staff members or public relations teams, they could still begin building relationships by inviting journalists to their facilities or awareness-raising events to help journalists better understand what they do.

- It is also possible that NGOs could periodically send fact sheets or updated 'state of the field' notes to journalists and/or the Foreign Correspondents Associate. These could be small 'how-do' handbooks for journalists reporting on the issue. A 'best practices' type of manual has been proven effective in other contexts. Previous research found that after an anti-violence group collaborated with journalists to create a handbook of best practices for reporting domestic violence murders, news coverage improved and reporters demonstrated greater understanding of the issue (Ryan, Anastario & DaCunha (2006). It could reasonably be argued that analogous improvements are possible with coverage of sex trafficking.
- Further, NGOs should talk to the trafficked individuals that they work with in order to see if any current or former clients are willing to speak to the media, and keep those people in mind so they can be more forthcoming and rapid with helping journalists find sources for stories within tight deadlines.
- Additionally, NGOs and IGOs may need to reconsider their protective attention directing techniques in order to not limit the amount and scope of coverage that is produced due to overprotective efforts by NGO staff members.
- Alternatively, The Sphere Project (<http://www.sphereproject.org>) outlines standards for humanitarian aid operations and sets minimum standards about an aid worker having knowledge of the disaster-affected

population's culture and customs. A similar standard could also apply to journalists. It could be beneficial for anti-trafficking organizations to work with The Sphere Project to assist in conducting a similar training program with the goal of helping journalists learn more about the intricacies of the sex trafficking issue.

- Lastly, and this is a bigger recommendation, international pressure must continue to be placed on the Thai government to promote freedom of expression. Until a more free press is achieved, it is unlikely that coverage of sex trafficking, or any other human rights abuse, will receive the proper attention needed and deserved. Encouraging foreign governments to levy economic sanctions on Thailand or publicly denounce/shame the junta could help achieve this. Also, individuals can support international organizations that work to promote free press landscapes around the world, such as Free Press ([www.freepress.org](http://www.freepress.org)), Reporters Without Borders (<http://en.rsf.org>) or Committee to Protect Journalists ([www.cpj.org](http://www.cpj.org)).

## **Limitations**

While this research revealed unique findings with theoretical and practical implications, this study has several limitations. Its internal validity could be undermined by several factors: first, only newspapers in English were analyzed. It can be argued that these English-language newspapers are worthwhile to examine because, among other readership demographics, they present the issue to decision-makers in the country. However, it is certainly possible that the use of only English-language articles could give



a skewed impression of how the issue under study was represented and discussed, and by whom. Thai-language publications might give less attention to sex trafficking altogether because of their appeal to a different readership compared to English-language publications; English news sources might be more likely to cover sex trafficking given the policy focus of the issue and the international pressure Thailand has recently received.

Furthermore, I only looked at five English-language papers. While these are arguably the most prominent English newspapers in Thailand, the findings cannot be generalized to all English-language news sources in Thailand or in other countries.

Similarly, the facts that I am a *farang* and I do not speak Thai are likely limitations, though in some instances such traits may have been advantageous. It is possible that these characteristics contributed to individuals being less likely to speak with me or being more reserved if/when they did speak with me. It is also possible that my status as a non-Thai person led to misunderstandings of the news articles, interview discussions or other elements or conversations that occurred around me during my time in Thailand.

Another limitation of this study is that few Thai journalists were willing to be interviewed. Given the political landscape and the finding that Thai journalists work within a more tightly controlled environment than foreign reporters is an explanation for that, but simultaneously bolsters an argument for their inclusion in this study.

Similarly, this study may also encounter threats to external validity because while the timing of the study and the resulting political landscape provided a unique opportunity to analyze these issues under the veil of martial law, that could also be a limitation – the climate of fear could have kept some important findings out. Also,

examining the issue during such a particular time and sociopolitical context might limit the applicability of the findings to other time periods in Thailand or to situations in other countries. Within those bounds, however, the findings of this dissertation do shed light on the portrayal of sex trafficking in newspaper coverage in Thailand as well as the challenges that journalists face when reporting on the topic, including the relationship with anti-trafficking organizations, in a time that is necessary of scholarly attention.

Another significant limitation of this dissertation is that it was set in the perspective of Western-centric scholarship both with the theoretical framework and much of the literature. By including voices of Thai survivors, Thai journalists and Thai advocates/researchers and Thai sex workers, I am able to mitigate this shortcoming to some extent, but there is no denying this dissertation's dependence on hegemonic scholarship. International communication and comparative journalism researchers have noted this fissure in non-Western scholarship.

The book *Global Journalist* is a seminal piece of work in the area of comparative journalism. However, it lacks any chapter about a Southeast Asian country. This shortcoming is consistent throughout comparative media research, and was notably called out in a piece by Hanitzsch et al. (2012). "Journalism researchers often focused on Western countries at the expense of other world regions, most notably Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia," wrote the authors. "Concepts and theories that underpinned much of the research primarily originated from the West and were not necessarily suited to non-Western contexts" (p. 473). Even when studies are done by researchers in multiple countries, much of the existing research has included or been facilitated by Western researchers, which can result in the presence of a cultural bias. Hanitzsch et al. (2011)

explain that, “even in a collaborative research project it is sometimes hard to escape from Western ways of thinking that still dominate much of the journalism and communication literature” (p. 288). These researchers warn that these Western ways of thinking “might have introduced a certain cultural bias in the concepts and measures used in this study, rendering our conclusions somewhat self-fulfilling” (p. 288) and similar concerns could apply to this dissertation. While this dissertation was an attempt to begin to fill the void in mass communication scholarship analyzing Southeast Asian environments, it still utilized Western ways of thinking. This inadequacy is one that I will continually seek to address in ongoing work about understudied media landscapes as well as vulnerable populations.

Some of these limitations demonstrate possible inhibitors to why more research has not been done in this area, but do not diminish the need for such work. These limitations are matters that international communication researchers, scholars from other disciplines, as well as government and civil society organizations, could work together to begin to address.

### **Directions for Further Research**

While this dissertation offers an introductory investigation into the English-language Thai media landscape and how such coverage frames the issue of sex trafficking, more research is needed. It would be worthwhile to analyze print news coverage in different languages, broadcast news coverage and social media narratives surrounding sex trafficking. In that same vein, it is necessary to analyze media representations of an array of other human rights abuses both in Thailand and abroad, as

well. This study offers opportunities for comparisons of media landscapes and human rights reporting in other countries.

The work on understanding how human rights abuses are portrayed in the media has barely begun. This project looked only at sex trafficking coverage in Thailand. But how are other abuses covered in Thailand? What role does the government play in shaping these representations during less tense political times? How do these findings compare to similar studies from media in other countries? These are all important questions that remain to be answered. Additionally, the Thai media landscape is a staggeringly complicated system and further examinations of all aspects need to be pursued.

Additionally, future research could look into journalism education and training as well as pay structures of the profession in order to better understand the industry in Thailand. This was outside of the scope of the present study but worthwhile for fully understanding why media in Thailand function the way that they do. Furthermore, future research could do an experiment to measure the effects of trafficking coverage on the Thai public sphere.

Moreover, when considering the restrictions on press freedom, a great deal of further research could analyze the operations and impacts of such constraints as well as if/how people are working around the controls. While the Internet is by no means a level playing field in terms of giving all voices equal attention, further research could look at how censorship and discussions of human rights have changed in Thailand with the rise of the Internet and social media, and the ability for individuals to have computers – what Rosen (2006) called “a little First Amendment machine.”

Additionally, future research could analyze issues surrounding identity formation among sex trafficked individuals or victims of other human rights abuses. Papadopoulos (1999) coined the phrase “storied community” through his work with refugees, which provides victims with “coherent narratives which are essential ingredients of resilience and offers a transitional space which can act as a secure base” (pp. 330). In the context of shunning and school bullying in Japan, Tanaka (2001) found that the idea of a “storied community” allowed victims an alternative way of maintaining his or her identity by developing their own “inner story” and by “locating herself (on her own, in her fantasy) to a collective and shared set of narratives which could give meaning to the state that she had been put in” (pp. 470). This concept seems to have useful applicability in the context of sex trafficking in that victims could offer themselves refuge by creating or joining a storied community that does not view them as criminals. News media could play a role in creating or altering this space. It would be worthwhile for further research to dive into this interplay between sex trafficking, news media, and identity creation.

Additionally, when analyzing the articles, it was found that across all five newspapers, traffickers or bar/brothel owners were commonly identified as female (also known as “mamasans”). Articles featured stories about one woman helping to move other women into trafficking, such as, “Nat is now being convinced to move for a job by Fon\*, her older friend who left the village many years ago after she was sold to a businessman in Chiang Rai, presumably to work in the sex trade. Fon recently returned to Mae Lao and has established herself as a mamasan (manager of sex workers)” (Pisuthipan, 2013, para. 3 & 4) and “After questioning by the Anti-Human Trafficking Division (AHTD) she was charged with facilitating the trafficking of a least two women, and conspiring

with three accomplices to lure women into prostitution” (Khamlo & Chad Luek, 2012, para. 3). It is a common misconception among the general public that traffickers are typically male (UNODC, 2014) so it would be worthwhile for future research to explore the gender of the trafficker(s) and how news media represent those people.

## **Closing**

As was reiterated by the respondents, this is an important line of research and despite the limitations and possible areas for future research, this dissertation is a set of two introductory enquiries that provide a better understanding of how English-language newspapers frame the topic of sex trafficking in Thailand and how journalists do and do not interact with anti-trafficking organizations and the Thai police/military.

In sum, this study used a mixed methods approach to examine how news media in Thailand reported on sex trafficking as well as how the role of anti-trafficking advocates, trafficking survivors and the military/police played into such media coverage. It used sex trafficking as a window into how English-language news media in Thailand represent human rights abuses and frame social problems. It revealed a number of issues with existing coverage and challenges that journalists face when working with NGOs and the military/police. However, reporting on sex trafficking is not a static phenomenon; rather, it is fluid and can be continually molded and shaped. Through the efforts of all parties, starting with some of the recommendations listed above, it can be possible to see news coverage of sex trafficking created within the time and financial limitations that journalists work within but that is simultaneously respectful to victims and representative of the complexities of the problem.

## TABLES

**Table 1**

Differences in type of article and episodic vs. thematic framing, by publication.

	BP	Nation	CR Times	PM	PG	Total
	N = 116	N = 115	N = 33	N = 35	N = 20	N=319
Differences in type of article by publication. Number of articles (%).						
News story	81 (69.8)	73 (63.5)	22 (66.7)	35 (100)	16 (80.0)	227 (71.2)
Editorial	7 (6.0)	11 (9.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	19 (6.0)
Review	0 (0.0)	6 (5.2)	2 (6.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	9 (2.8)
News brief	0 (0.0)	6 (5.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (1.9)
Feature	28 (24.1)	18 (15.7)	7 (21.2)	0 (0.0)	2 (10.0)	55 (17.2)
Differences in presence of episodic vs. thematic framing, by publication (%).						
Thematic	68 (58.6)	63 (54.8)	14 (42.4)	5 (14.3)	11 (55.0)	161 (50.5)
Episodic	48 (41.4)	52 (45.2)	19 (57.6)	30 (85.7)	9 (45.0)	158 (49.5)

**Table 2**

Differences in gender, statelessness and hill tribe mentions, by publication.

	BP	Nation	CR Times	PM	PG	Total
	N = 116	N = 115	N = 33	N = 35	N = 20	N=319
Differences in gender of trafficked person, by publication (%).						
Male	3 (2.6)	1 (0.9)	1 (3.0)	4 (11.4)	0 (0.0)	9 (2.8)
Female	69 (59.5)	56 (48.7)	18 (54.5)	24 (68.6)	9 (45.0)	176 (55.2)
Other (i.e., “ladyboy”)	9 (7.8)	4 (3.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	14 (4.4)
Both	3 (2.6)	7 (6.1)	6 (18.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	16 (5.0)
No gender ment.	32 (27.6)	47 (40.9)	8 (24.2)	7 (20.0)	10 (50.0)	104 (32.6)
Differences in presence of stateless mentioned, by publication (%).						
$\chi^2 = 12.16, 4 \text{ d.f.}, p < .05$						
Presence	10 (8.6)	2 (1.7)	4 (12.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	16 (5.0)
Differences in presence of hill tribe/ethnic minority mentioned, by publication (%).						
$\chi^2 = 10.37, 4 \text{ d.f.}, p < .05$						
Presence	16 (13.8)	15 (13.0)	8 (24.2)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	40 (12.5)



**Table 3**

Differences in presence of remedies, by publication.

BP N = 116	Nation N = 115	CR Times N = 33	PM N = 35	PG N = 20	Total N=319
Differences in presence of punish individual remedy, by publication (%).					
0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Differences in presence of punish trafficker remedy, by publication (%). $X^2 = 3.52$ , 4 d.f., <i>n.s.</i>					
2 (1.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.6)
Differences in presence of punish sex buyer remedy, by publication (%).					
0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Differences in presence of policy change remedy, by publication (%). $X^2 = 4.42$ , 4 d.f., <i>n.s.</i>					
17 (14.7)	19 (16.5)	4 (12.1)	1 (2.9)	3 (15.0)	44 (13.8)
Differences in presence of creation of advocacy and care programs, by publication (%). $X^2 = 26.86$ , 4 d.f., $p < .01$					
13 (11.2)	1 (0.9)	8 (24.2)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	23 (7.2)
Differences in presence of other remedy, by publication (%). $X^2 = 4.27$ , 4 d.f., <i>n.s.</i>					
31 (26.7)	24 (20.9)	6 (18.2)	4 (11.4)	5 (25.0)	70 (21.9)
Differences in presence of no remedy suggested, by publication (%). $X^2 = 16.77$ , 4 d.f., $p < .01$					
59 (50.9)	73 (63.5)	21 (63.6)	31 (88.6)	13 (65.0)	197 (61.8)

**Table 4**

Descriptive information about interviewees.

<b>Category of individual</b>	<b>Name of individual</b>	<b>Organization name</b>	<b>Title</b>
Journalist	Journalist 1	Bangkok Post	Confidential
Journalist	Journalist 2	Confidential	Foreign correspondent
Journalist	Journalist 3	Confidential	Foreign correspondent
Journalist	Journalist 4	Confidential international media outlet	Confidential
Journalist	Journalist 5	Confidential international media outlet	Confidential
Journalist	Journalist 6	Confidential international media outlet	Confidential
Journalist	Journalist 7	Confidential Thai daily newspaper	Confidential
Journalist	Thaweepon Kummetha (Am)	Prachathai	Reporter
Journalist	Casey Hynes	Asia Correspondent	Reporter
Journalist	Patrick Winn	Global Post	Foreign correspondent
Advocate/researcher	Advocate 1	Confidential UN agency	Confidential
Advocate/researcher	Advocate 2	Confidential UN agency	Confidential
Advocate/researcher	Advocate 3	Confidential UN agency	Confidential
Advocate/researcher	Advocate 4	Confidential UN agency	Confidential
Advocate/researcher	Advocate 5	Confidential UN agency	National Project Officer
Advocate/researcher	Alezandra Russel	Urban Light	Founder and President
Advocate/researcher	Brent Seely	Urban Light	Thailand Director
Advocate/researcher	Aanas Ali	International Labor Organization	Consultant
Advocate/researcher	Katharina Quaiser	Human Help Network	Volunteer
Advocate/researcher	Sarah Hansen	Human Help Network	Volunteer outreach worker/nurse
Advocate/researcher	David Feingold	Independent researcher	Anthropologist; former head of UNESCO's regional anti-trafficking project

Advocate/researcher	Krista Coutts	Nightlight International	Volunteer
Advocate/researcher	Lani Hollander	Children of Southeast Asia (COSA)	Program Director
Advocate/researcher	Liz Hilton	Empower Foundation	Coordinator
Advocate/researcher	Mickey Choothesa	Children of Southeast Asia (COSA)	Founder and President
Advocate/researcher	Erin Kamler	U. Chiang Mai and U. Southern California	Affiliated Researcher
Advocate/researcher	Radchada Chomjinda (Toy)	Human Help Network	Thailand Director
Advocate/researcher	Prawit Thainiyom (Wit)	U. Southern California	Researcher
Advocate/researcher	Nicola Mai	London Metropolitan University	Professor and documentary filmmaker
Advocate/researcher	Tawee Donchai	Sold Project	Thailand Director
Advocate/researcher	Phunyanuch Pattanotai (Aom)	Alliance Anti Traffic (AAT)	Coordinator
Survivor	Noon (Pseudonym)	Confidential	Confidential
Survivor	Pang (Pseudonym)	Confidential	Confidential
Sex worker	Jutharat (Pseudonym)	Empower Foundation	N/A
Sex worker	Pim (Pseudonym)	Empower Foundation	N/A
Sex worker	Charunee (Pseudonym)	Empower Foundation	N/A
Sex worker	Supaporn (Pseudonym)	Empower Foundation	N/A

**Table 5**

Applications of each code by type of interviewee.

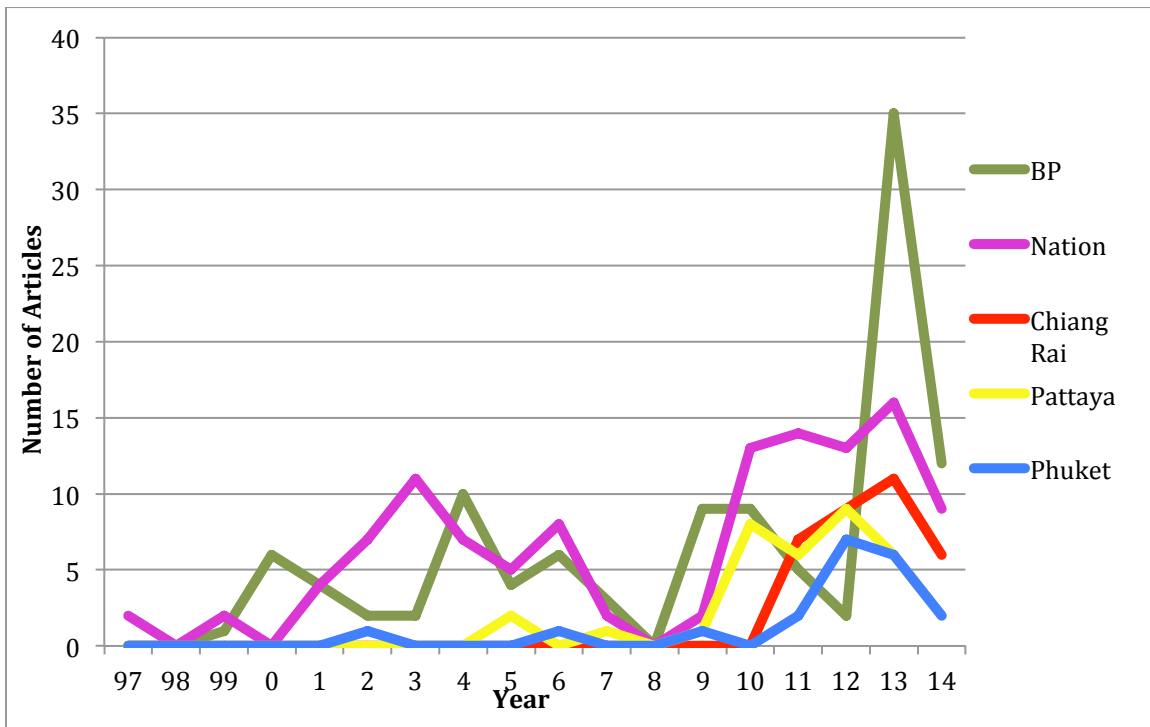
<b>Code</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Advocate</b>	<b>Journo</b>	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Total</b>
"They sensationalize it"	5	29	5	0	39
Bad/good time to be doing this study	3	0	5	0	8
Check numbers/statistics	1	4	5	0	10
Debate about what sex trafficking is and if it exists	7	6	0	0	13
Confusing notions of choice	8	19	2	0	29
Define sex trafficking	5	13	1	0	19
Ethics of Thai journalism	0	1	22	0	23
Government Corruption	2	5	6	0	13
HR is anti-monarchy or anti-establishment	0	0	2	0	2
Hard for NGOs to get message out	0	2	0	0	2
Topic is hard to write about	3	1	23	0	27
Changing media landscape/Journo practices	0	0	3	0	3
How journos talk to victims	0	0	5	0	5
How to tell story without re-victimizing	1	0	5	0	6
Issues of language	0	7	5	0	12
Journalists mix up trafficking and smuggling	0	2	0	0	2
Journos don't take the time	0	4	0	0	4
Journos don't understand issue	2	3	1	0	6
We need journos that cover for a long time	0	2	1	0	3
Journalists should approach NGOs to interview victims	1	7	0	0	8
Journos asking me Qs about trafficking	0	0	3	0	3
Journos doing for self-promotion	2	4	0	0	6
Mainstream media is Bangkok-centric	0	0	2	0	2
Media don't write about human rights	0	0	2	1	3
Media are morality expert/ethical authority	0	0	1	0	1
Media are valuable	1	16	6	0	23

Media ownership leads to partisan reporting	0	1	1	0	2
NGO does not encourage more coverage	0	2	0	0	2
NGO doesn't know much about Journo	0	2	1	0	3
NGO not helpful to journo	0	2	12	0	14
NGO not comfortable with journo	0	7	1	0	8
NGO not reaching out to media	0	6	0	0	6
NGOs make issue bigger than it is for profits	3	1	0	0	4
NGOs provide to journos	0	4	0	0	4
NGOs understand journos have a job to do	1	9	0	0	10
Need for variation in stories	0	9	2	0	11
Need for empowering stories	0	3	0	1	4
The need for follow-up stories	0	6	1	1	8
The need for stories about structural issues	1	10	1	1	13
Pictures are problematic	2	13	2	3	20
Info comes from police	0	2	13	1	16
Press freedom	0	0	3	0	3
Defamation laws harmful	2	1	5	0	8
English media more free	0	0	6	0	6
Harassment or intimidation	0	0	10	0	10
Lese majeste	0	0	27	0	27
Pressure from coup/junta	0	0	23	0	23
Self-censorship	1	0	20	0	21
Problem is editors	2	2	2	0	6
Save face	1	5	7	0	13
Shift to focus on labor trafficking	1	2	0	0	3
Suggestions for journos from NGOs	1	10	0	0	11
Thai public doesn't care about HR issues	3	3	4	0	10
Victim experience with media	0	0	0	4	4
Victims don't know about media	0	2	0	1	3
Western ideas about femininity and virginity	7	0	0	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>552</b>

## FIGURES

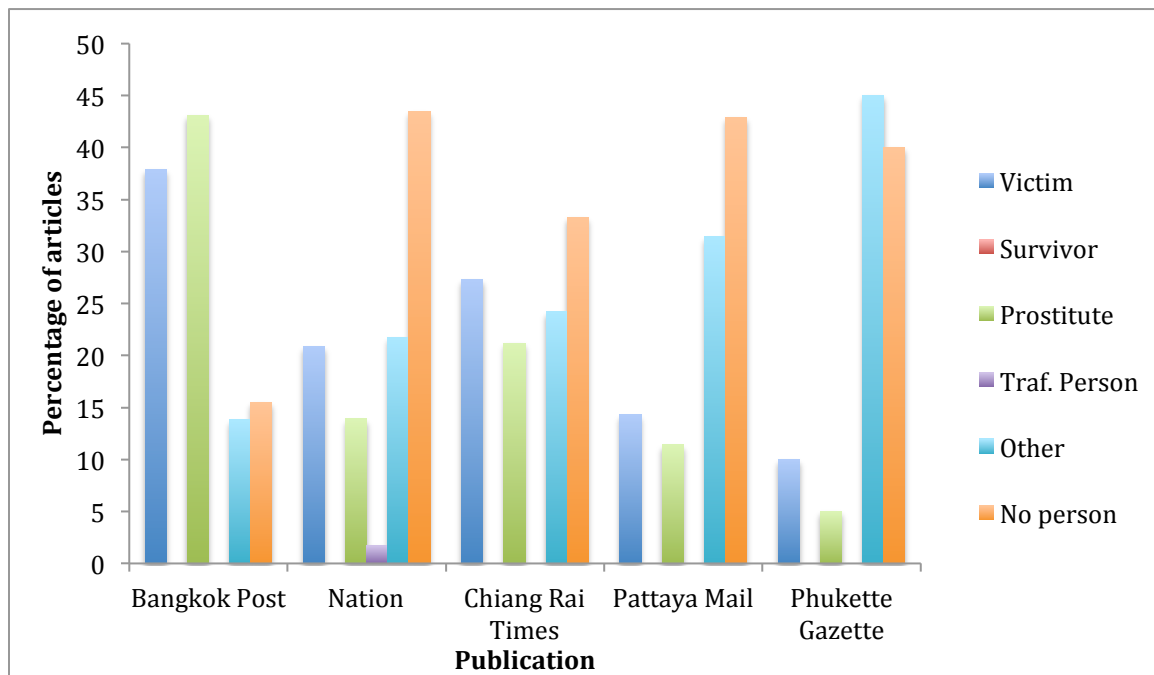
**Figure 1**

Difference in number of articles over time, by publication.



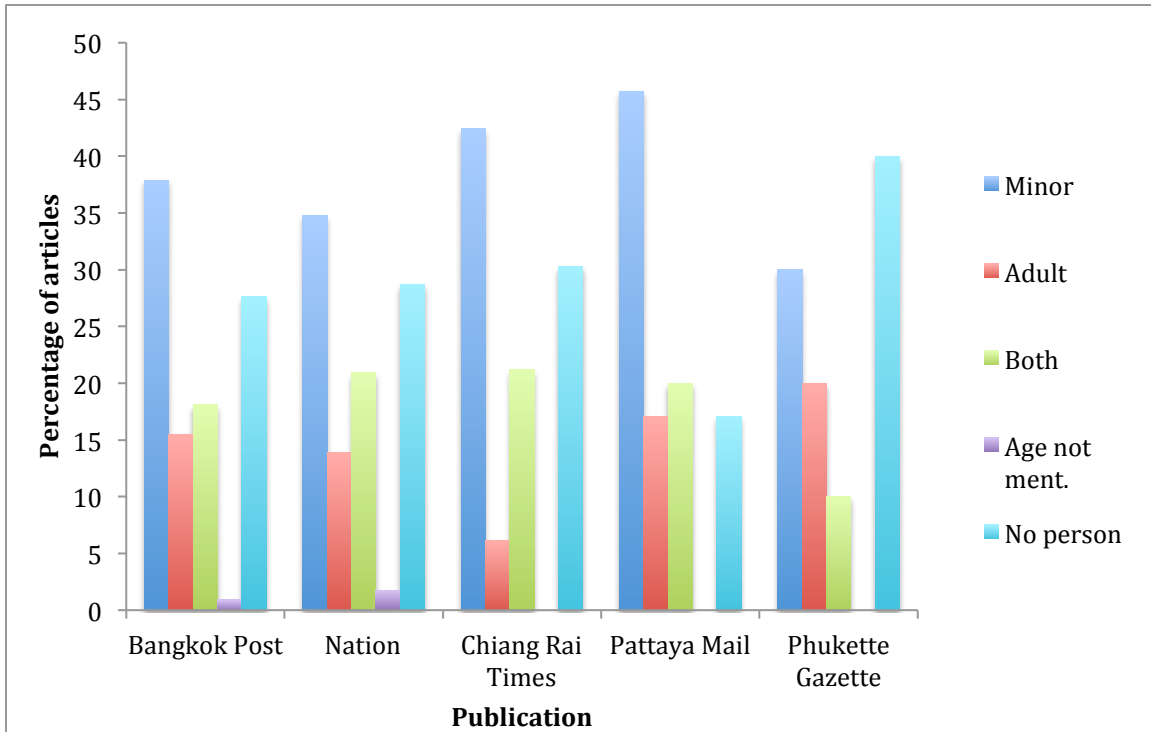
**Figure 2**

Difference in terminology used to describe trafficked person, by publication.



**Figure 3**

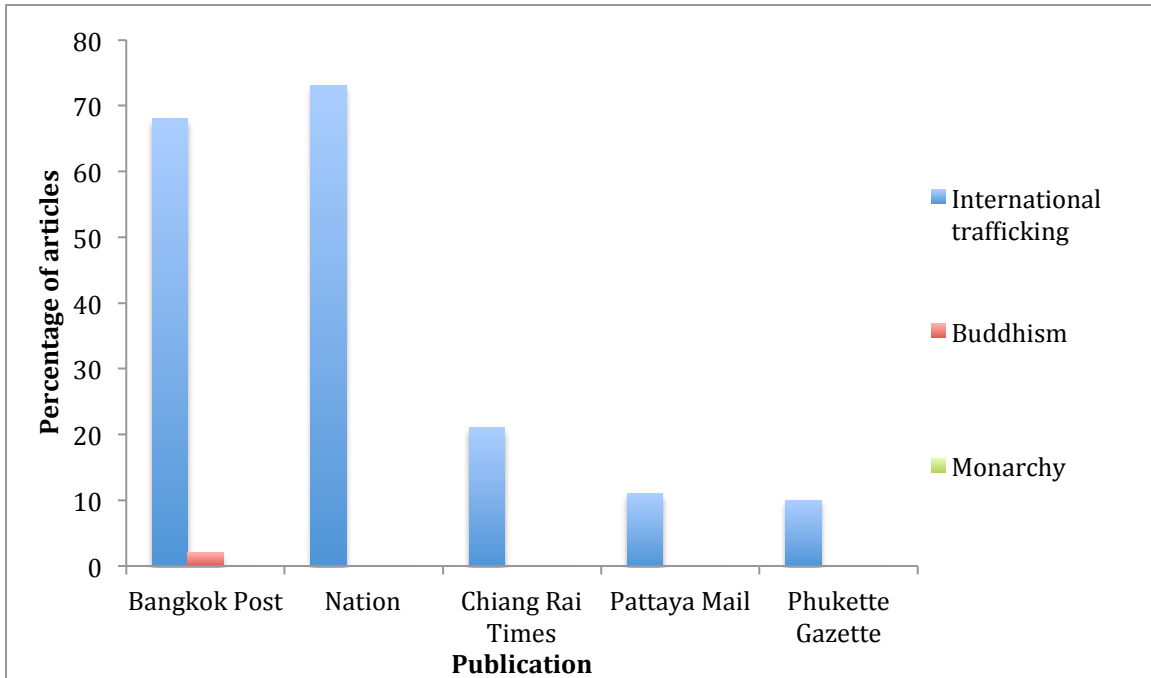
Difference in age of trafficked person, by publication.





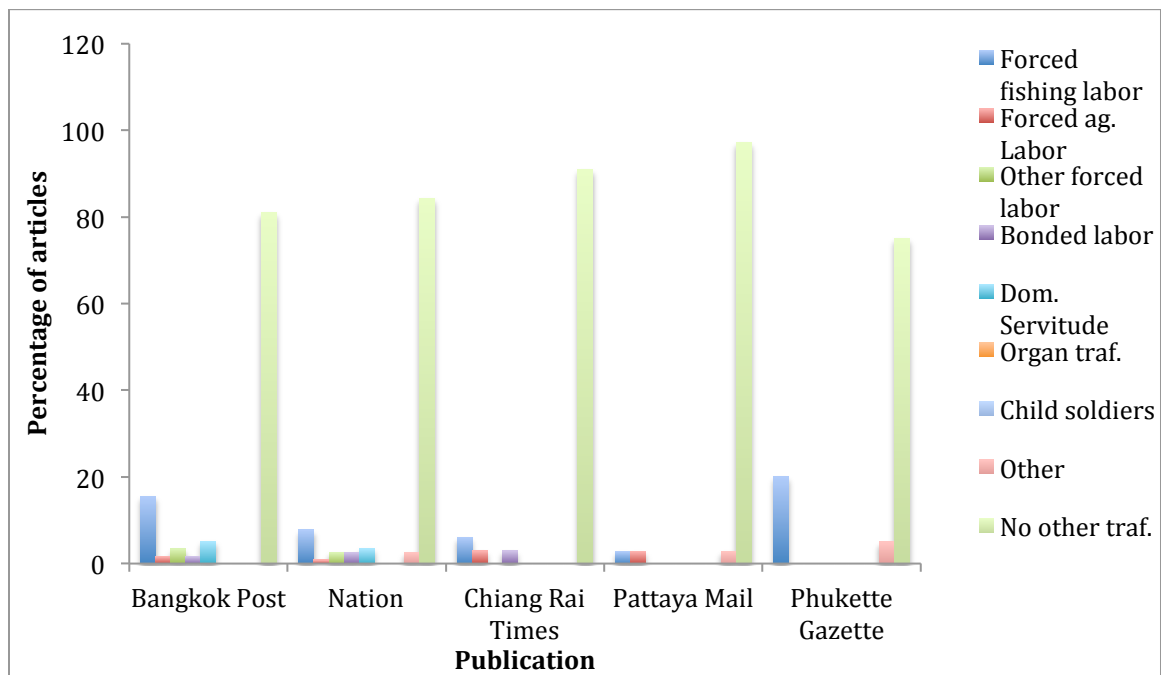
**Figure 4**

Difference in framing techniques regarding how the topic is presented in conjunction with other ideas, by publication.



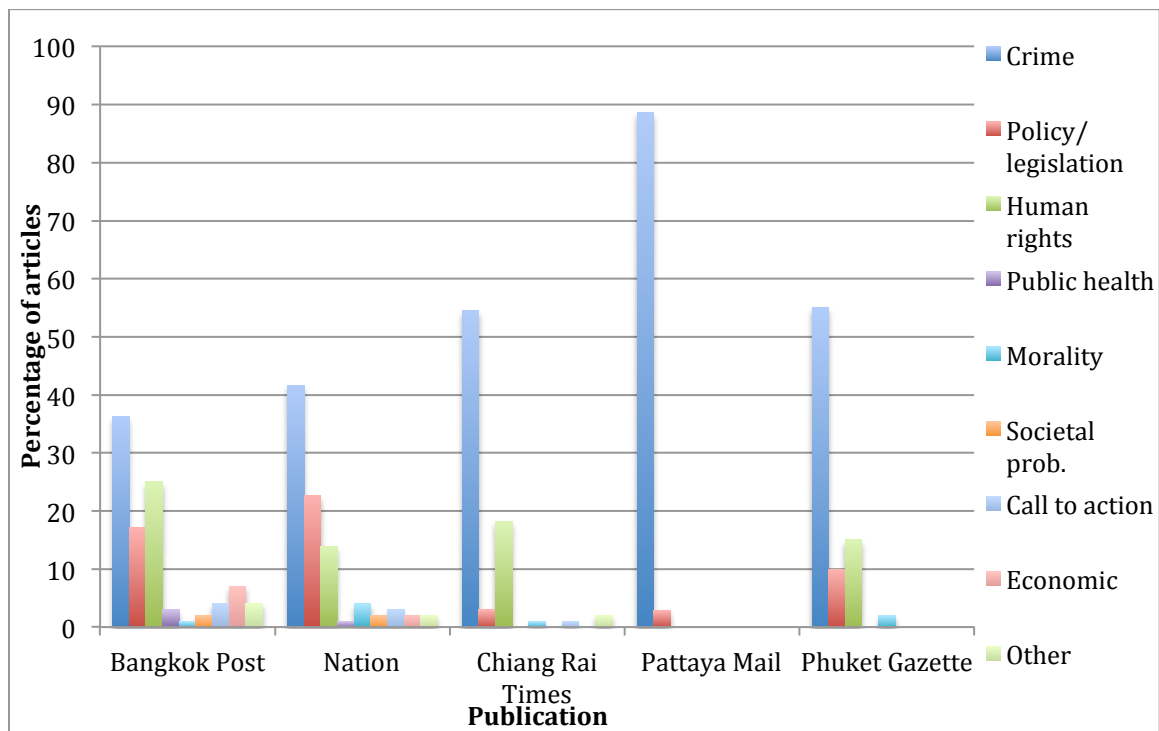
**Figure 5**

Difference in presence of other types of trafficking, by publication.



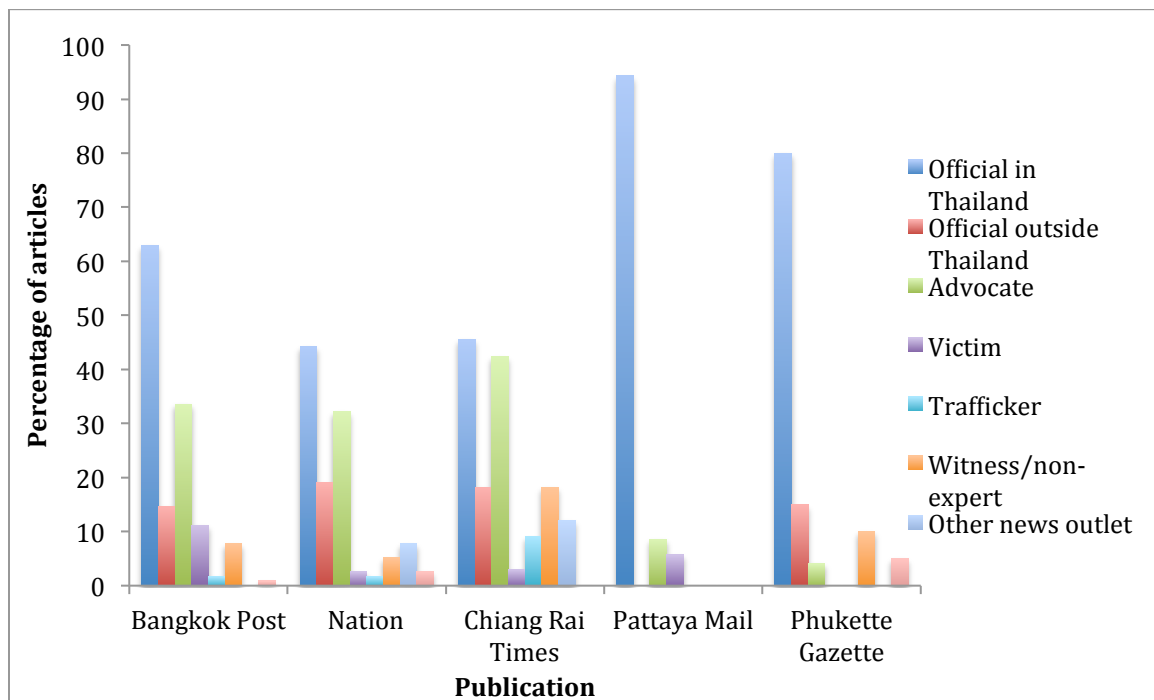
**Figure 6**

Differences in dominant issue, by publication.



**Figure 7**

Differences in presence of various sources, by publication.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Coding Protocol

**Introduction.** This study is looking at the frames present in news coverage of sex trafficking from five English-language newspapers from Thailand. The study's timeframe runs from 09/01/1999 to 09/01/2014. The articles were retrieved from an array of sources, so they may be formatted slightly differently, but the formatting should not impact how you code the article. The length of the article is irrelevant; all stories in the batch should be included. You should not encounter any images or advertisements, but if you do, please do not include them.

**Method.** Content analysis involves the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to definitions and rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories. This content analysis will analyze articles from *The Nation*, the *Bangkok Post*, *Pattaya Mail*, *Phuket Gazette* and the *Chiang Rai Times*. You may receive varying amounts of articles from each publication, but please give them all an equal amount of attention.

**Procedure.** We are coding for two primary frames: how the problem of sex trafficking is defined and how solutions are discussed. There are a number of questions intended to better understand various aspects of the coverage in order to create a full picture of how these frames function.

Please read the article in full before beginning to code. Please read the article for a second time as you work your way through the coding sheet. The first part of the codebook will ask you to enter basic information about the article and publication, then the questions will ask more specific questions about the framing of the article and sources cited, and the codebook will end with a place for you to enter any additional comments you feel should be included. You do not need to enter anything in that section unless you feel that there was something additional about the article that should be noted. Don't hesitate to move back and forth on the codebook and revisit questions more than once if necessary. Specific instructions are listed for each question as well as all necessary definitions.

1. Please write the date that the article was published on, in the format of month-day-year: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Please list the name of the publication this article appears in: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please write the headline of the article (exactly as it appears):  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Please write the name of the author(s): \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the word count of this article: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Please write the section this article appears in, if known: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Please list the page number this article appears in, if known: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Was sex trafficking the main focus of the article? Please write “1” next to the one selection that most appropriately applies.

**Main focus** is identified when the bulk of the article or the major points focus on sex trafficking. For example, an article about the arrest of the leaders of a sex trafficking ring.

A **secondary/periphery focus** would mention sex trafficking within the context of another issue or in conjunction with another event. For example, an article about a new task force created to combat poverty and sex trafficking.

A **brief mention/not a focus** would mention sex trafficking peripherally. For example, an article about the president of a country attending a conference about poverty reduction, increased international trade, improved literacy and decreased levels of sex trafficking.

Main focus	
Secondary/periphery focus	
Brief mention/not a focus	

9. Does the article specify the type of trafficking that has occurred? In other words, does the article refer to “human trafficking” broadly or does it specify the type of trafficking (i.e., sex trafficking, labor trafficking, forced domestic servitude, etc.)?

If the article either does not specify the type or is not about sex trafficking, please stop here. If the article specifies that the story is about sex trafficking or uses the phrase “human trafficking” but it is clear from other parts of the article that it is about sex trafficking, please continue coding the article with the questions below.

10. What type of article is this? Please write “1” next to the one selection that most appropriately applies.

A **news story** is defined as an article that reports on a current or breaking event, an article that has a sense of timeliness within the first 3 paragraphs.

An **editorial** is defined as an article presenting the opinion of the publisher, editor, or audience member. This would include letters to the editor, opinion pieces, etc.

A **review** is defined as an article the give information and/or a critique of a work of art. This would include book reviews, film reviews/critiques, play reviews, etc.

A **news brief** is defined as a short item of news/information, often combined with short discussions of others events/people. This is typically only a few sentences.

A **press release** is an official announcement or account of a news story that is specially prepared and issued to newspapers by an organization or individual, such as an anti-trafficking organization or government body.

News story	
Editorial	
Review	
News brief	
Press release	
Other (please specify)	

11. Did the article reference sex trafficking in conjunction with any other form of trafficking? Please write “1” next to all selections that apply. This would include any reference to another form of trafficking

**Sex trafficking** is defined as the physical and/or psychological control over a person by another for the purposes of sexual exploitation for economic gains.

**Forced labor** is defined as any work or services which people are forced to do against their will under the threat of some form of punishment. The use of forced labor in the fishing industry and in agricultural settings are common, but it is not limited to just those fields.

**Bonded labor/debt bondage** is defined as a person whose labor is demanded as a means of repayment for a loan. The value of their work is invariably greater than the original sum of money borrowed.

\*Forced labor and bonded labor differ primarily in the focus on repaying a debt. If the article discusses forced labor but does not mention a debt to the trafficker or a repayment, please code as forced labor. If the article mentions a debt that the worker owes the trafficker or is paying off, please code as bonded labor/debt bondage.

**Involuntary domestic servitude** is defined as an individual being forced to work in private households. Their movement will often be restricted and they will be

forced to perform household tasks such as childcare and housekeeping over long hours and for little if any pay.

**Organ harvesting** is defined as the trafficking of people in order to use their internal organs for transplant. The illegal trade is dominated by, but not limited to, kidneys.

**Child soldier** is defined as the unlawful recruitment or use of children – through force, fraud, or coercion – as combatants or for labor by armed forces.

Forced labor in fishing industry	
Forced agricultural labor	
Forced labor in other setting (please specify)	
Bonded labor	
Involuntary domestic servitude	
Organ harvesting	
Child soldier	
Other type of trafficking (please specify)	
No other type mentioned	

12. Are the trafficked person(s) described in the article as adults or minors? Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

A **child/minor** is 18 years old or younger.

“Women/Woman” = adult

“Girl(s)” = minor

“Men/man” = adult

“Boy(s)” = minor

Minor(s)	
Adult(s)	
Both	
Trafficked person’s age is not mentioned	
No specific person/people mentioned in the article	

13. What specific word/phrase is used to describe the trafficked person(s) in the article? Please write “1” next to all that apply.

Victim	
--------	--



Survivor	
Prostitute	
Trafficked person	
Other (please specify)	
No individual is mentioned	

14. Are the trafficked person(s) described in the article as male or female? Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

Male	
Female	
Other (such as “ladyboy”)	
Both	
No gender/sex mentioned in the article	

15. Does the article include any reference/discussion of the trafficked person(s) lacking Thai citizenship/being “stateless”? Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

A “**stateless**” person is defined as a person that is not recognized as a citizen of any country. For example, an individual that migrated from Myanmar to Thailand could be referred to as “stateless”.

No	
Yes	

16. Does the article include any reference/discussion of the trafficked person(s) being from a minority ethnic group or hill tribe? The article would need to specify that the group is an ethnic minority or a hill tribe. If the article does not specifically state that the group is a minority or does not use a phrase relating to a hill tribe, please mark “No”. Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

No	
Yes (Please write the name(s) of the minority group(s) or hill tribe, if given)	

17. Does the article include any reference to an international aspect of sex trafficking? Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

This can include mentioning that either the trafficked person or the trafficker has international ties; that is, ties to any country other than the one where the publication is from, for any reason. Even less specific references to global sex trade or similar discussions would qualify.

No	
Yes (Please write the name(s) of the country(s) mentioned)	

18. Does the article include any reference to sex trafficking outside of Bangkok?  
Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

This can include any reference to a city that is not Bangkok or a casual mention of a “regional province” or “hill tribe village”.

No	
Yes (Please write the name(s) of the city/region/province(s) mentioned)	

19. Does the article include any reference to Buddhism? This would need to be a direct reference to the religion, a monk or a member of the clergy. Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

No	
Yes	

20. Does the article include any reference to the monarchy or a member of the royal family? This would need to be a direct reference to the royal family broadly, or a specific member. Please write “1” next to the one selection that applies.

No	
Yes	

21. What type of issue was the **dominant** issue that was covered in the story? Please write “1” next to the one selection that most directly applies.

**Dominant issue** is defined as the most significant/important issue presented. This could be the topic mentioned the most, but it could also be seen in the tone of the article. If you were going to tell your friend what the story was about in one or two sentences, this is what you would focus on.

**Crime** is defined as the breaking of rules or laws for which some governing authority can instill a punishment. Articles that present a crime issue would primarily include stories about arrests, but could also include stories about organized criminal networks, raids, rescues or other criminal activity.

**Policy/legislation** is defined as the actual laws that guide society. An article that presents a policy/legislation issue would primarily include, but is not limited to, stories about new laws enacted to protect victims/survivors.

**Human rights** is defined to include cultural, economic, and political rights, such as right to life, liberty, education, beliefs, free speech, information, religion, movement, and nationality. An article that presents a human rights issue would talk about acts that violate an individual(s) basic birthrights such as the right to leave the location/situation, the right to eat, the right to be paid, etc.

**Public health** is defined as the act of protecting and improving the health of communities through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and research for disease and injury prevention. An article that presents a public health issue would discuss acts that would improve or hamper the well being of the overall population.

**Morality** is defined as principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior. An article that presents a morality issue would discuss the problem in terms of individuals being bad people, sinning, etc.

**Migration** is defined as moving from one country, place, or locality to another. An article that presents a migration issue would focus on sex trafficking in terms of individuals moving to/leaving Thailand in search of work or new opportunities, and/or individuals being particularly vulnerable to traffickers due to their status as immigrants.

**Societal problem (non-health)** is defined as a condition, set of events, or group of persons that constitute a troublesome situation that needs to be changed in order for the betterment of society at large. An article that presents a societal problem (non-health) issue would discuss sex trafficking in terms of an eyesore/making the city/region look bad to others, bringing down the quality of life for citizens, or causing things such as financial trouble for the city or added car/pedestrian traffic, etc.

**Economic** is defined as focused on making or losing money or profits, or the potential to do so. An article that presents an economic issue would discuss how much money a brothel owner earned from sex trafficking revenue or how much law enforcement officials made from allowing the sex trade to flourish.

**Call-to-action** is defined as an article that serves the primary purpose of instructing the reader to undertake an immediate response. These articles would serve the primary purpose of telling readers that they need to do something to stop the trafficking problem. These could be direction suggestions, such as volunteering at an anti-trafficking organization or reaching out to government officials, or indirect suggestions such as “we need to do something!” However, please note that this differs from an article that merely suggests a remedy. Rather,

a call-to-action article would only serve the purpose of encouraging people to act, not reporting on a news event and including the discussion of a remedy.

Crime	
Policy/Legislation	
Human rights	
Public health	
Morality	
Migration	
Societal problem (non-health)	
Economic	
Call-to-action	
Other (please specify)	

22. What timeframe did the article suggest that the event(s)/issue took place in? Please enter “1” next to one selection that most appropriately describes the timeframe suggested in the article.

**Isolated incident** is defined as the only time that such an issue took place. For example, a story detailing a one-time raid on a brothel.

**Recurring incident** is defined as an event or issue that happens consistently or somewhat consistently for a period of **more than 1 day**. For example, a story about a steady stream of women being trafficked into Northern Thailand from Myanmar over the past decade.

Isolated incident	
Recurring incident	
Other (please specify)	
No timeframe suggested	

23. Please fill in the following chart about ALL of the *sources* cited within the article:

**Cite** is broadly defined to include: direct quotes, paraphrase or any information attributed to a source.

Column 1 lists the types of sources that may be cited in the article. In column 2, please enter “1” if that type of source was cited at least once in the article.

Column 3 represents unique sources (i.e. individuals) were cited from that type of source. For example, if the article quoted 3 different police officers involved in a raid, please enter “3” in column 3 corresponding to the appropriate row.

Law enforcement, politicians/government officials, agency or document from **within Thailand** could include, but not be limited to, police officers, judges, district attorneys, prosecutors, police reports, etc. from any part of Thailand.

Law enforcement, politicians/government officials, international agencies or documents from **outside of Thailand** could include, but not be limited to, U.N. treaties, U.S. State Department reports such as the TIP report, or police officers, judges, district attorneys, prosecutors, police reports, etc. from any country other than Thailand.

**Social worker/advocate/advocacy group** could include, but not be limited to, any individual or group assisting survivors or speaking out in support of them.

**Victim/Survivor** is defined as the individual(s) that was forced into the situation, deceived, injured; one that is subjected to oppression, hardship, or mistreatment.

**Trafficker (or their spokespeople)** is defined as the wrongdoer of the actions, the facilitator of movement, the captor, or any individual or group speaking on their behalf/in support of them.

A **witness** is any individual or group who can give a firsthand account of having seen or heard any part of the trafficking process/event occurring.

**Other news outlet/wire service** is any other news organization that may be reporting on the issue, in which this article directly cites.

	Was this type of source cited anywhere in the article?
	Enter "1" if yes
Law enforcement, politicians/government officials, agency or document from <b>within Thailand</b>	
Law enforcement, politicians/government officials, international agencies or documents from <b>outside of Thailand</b>	
Social worker/Advocate/Advocacy group	
Victim/survivors(s)	
Traffickers (or their spokespeople)	
Witness/non-expert	
Other news outlet/wire service	
Other (please list)	
None Present	

24. Does the article mention a possible remedy or solution for bringing an end to sex trafficking? In other words, does this article answer the question of what could be done to prevent this from occurring again in the future? Please mark all that apply.

**The individuals doing the acts** would include any discussion of sex worker(s), trafficked “persons”, victim of trafficking or survivor of trafficking.

**Traffickers** would include any wrongdoer of the actions, facilitator of movement or captor.

**The Sex Buyer** is any individual who pays for and/or solicits services from the victim.

**Policy changes** would include any change to government rules, laws or regulations. This could include, but is not limited to, any of the following:

- Increase/improve training of law enforcement, healthcare workers and/or aid workers
- Improve existing facilities or open new facilities
- Improve coordination among various groups working to combat trafficking
- Increase treatment/counseling/advocacy
- International peacekeeping efforts to reduce/end armed conflict and war
- Programs aimed at keeping children in school
- Increased border patrol/migration/immigration control

**Promotion of non-government organizations** would include any mention of creating or improving organizations that advocate, care for and work on prevention efforts.

Increased punishments for the individuals doing the acts	
Increased punishments for traffickers	
Increased punishments for the sex buyer	
Policy changes	
Creation of programs that advocate, care for and work on prevention efforts	
Other (please specify)	

25. Any additional comments:

## Appendix B: Interview Map

### Questions for journalists:

- How did you end up as a journalist at X?
- What topics or beats do you typically cover?
- How much say do you have in the topics/events that you cover? Who else influences what topics you cover?
- Who typically decides what topics/events you cover? How much say do you feel like you get in the topics/events that you cover?
- Does your newspaper cover human rights issues such as poverty/food or water insecurity, discrimination, etc.? How much attention do you think is given to human rights issues?
- What do you think makes a good human rights story?
- What do you think makes a human rights story newsworthy?
- The following are some of the issues used by journalists in deciding whether something is newsworthy. Do you use any of these in deciding the worth of a story: where it happens, number of victims/survivors, government ties to the country where it occurs, etc.?
- Do you think that human rights violations are more newsworthy than instances where human rights are respected? Why or why not?
- I know that you have written a few articles on sex trafficking events. How was it determined that you would be the one to cover those events?
- When you cover sex trafficking, what other topics or issues do you typically cover it in relation to? For example, in some American newspapers it is often covered as a crime issue. How do you think it is covered in Thailand?
- In your opinion, what do you think sex trafficking looks like? What do you view as the most pressing problems associated with it? In other words, how would you define the problem of sex trafficking to someone who was unfamiliar with it?
- Who do you believe are the primary audiences reading your sex trafficking articles?
- What was your experience like investigating and reporting on those events?
- What aspects of writing the sex trafficking article was the easiest? The hardest?
- What groups/individuals did you seek out for information about the topic and how did you decide on those groups/individuals? What challenges did you face when trying to get quotes for the story?
- Did you face any (other) challenges when investigating and writing the story? What were they?
- Did you receive any push-back or resistance from anyone inside your news organization when writing this story or after it had been published?
- Did you receive any push-back or criticism from outside your news organization after writing the story?
- Have you ever interviewed a victim/survivor of sex trafficking? If so, what was that experience like?
- Do you feel as if you have an established relationship with any anti-trafficking NGOs or advocacy groups? If so, how would you describe that relationship?

- Have you ever interviewed a trafficker? If so, what was that experience like?
- What is your impression of the current media coverage of sex trafficking as a whole? Do you believe there is enough? Do you believe it is accurate?
- Looking back on the articles that you wrote, how do you feel that they turned out?
- What impact do you think your stories have?
- Some people say that journalists should never become involved with their stories or subjects. How do you think about this role for yourself and what problems do you think journalists face when reporting on a story? Does objectivity matter? Can a journalist be an advocate too?
- What has the response to your articles been like from the general public as well as your colleagues and other reporters?
- What could anti-trafficking advocates provide you to make reporting on the topic more efficient and/or effective in conveying the story?
- What could your media organization provide you to make reporting on the topic more efficient and/or effective in conveying the story?
- What have you learned from reporting on the issue?
- If you could rewrite those sex trafficking stories now, how would they be different?

**Questions for anti-trafficking advocates:**

- How did you end up working at X?
- What is your standard day like?
- Do you typically refer to trafficked individuals as victims or survivors of sex trafficking?
- How much interaction do you have with victims/survivors of sex trafficking?
- In your opinion, what do you think sex trafficking looks like? What do you view as the most pressing problems associated with it? In other words, how would you define the problem of sex trafficking to someone who was unfamiliar with it?
- Where do you think the general public gets most of their information about sex trafficking?
- What efforts does your organization take to spread your message and raise awareness among the general public? What communication strategies does your organization employ?
- What types of media coverage have you seen about sex trafficking?
- How important do you think it is for news media to report on the issue?
- What are your impressions of the quantity of existing sex trafficking coverage?
- What are your impressions about the quality of existing sex trafficking coverage? Can you think of any examples of coverage you really liked or disliked?
- What do you think are the most viable solutions for bringing an end to sex trafficking?
- How much have you interacted with journalists, if at all? Do you feel comfortable talking to a journalist? What, if any, attempts has your organization made to work with journalists thus far?



- If you could write an article about sex trafficking, what would it look like or focus on? What information would you not want included in the article?
- Could you please look over this article (see attached article from the Bangkok Post about sex trafficking) and tell me what you like about the article and what you would change about it? How accurately do you think it reflects how sex trafficking happens?
- What would you like journalists to know about your work/organization or sex trafficking broadly, that they might not know?
- What do you believe is the role of a journalist when he/she writes an article about sex trafficking?
- What do you think you could do or offer in order to help journalists more easily and accurately report on the topic?
- In the long run, what do you think will be the most effective or have the biggest impact on bringing an end to sex trafficking?

**Questions for sex trafficking survivors:**

- What term (i.e., victim, survivor, etc.) do you prefer to be referred to as?
- How do you feel about the word “prostitution” being used to describe a sex trafficking case?
- In your opinion, what do you think sex trafficking looks like? What do you view as the most pressing problems associated with it? In other words, how would you define the problem of sex trafficking to someone who was unfamiliar with it?
- What do you think are the most viable solutions for bringing an end to sex trafficking?
- Where do you think people find out about sex trafficking?
- What types of media coverage have you seen about sex trafficking?
- How important do you think it is for news media to report on the issue?
- What are your impressions of the quantity of existing sex trafficking coverage?
- What are your impressions about the quality of existing sex trafficking coverage? Can you think of any examples of coverage you really liked or disliked?
- How much have you interacted with journalists? What have your experiences with journalists been like? How comfortable do you feel talking to a journalist?
- Could you please look over this article (see attached article from the Bangkok Post about sex trafficking) and tell me what you like about the article and what you would change about it? How accurately do you think it reflects how sex trafficking happens?
- If you could write an article about sex trafficking to go in a newspaper, what would it focus on? What information would you not want included in the article?
- What would you like journalists to know about you or your experiences that they might not know?
- What could a journalist do to make you feel more comfortable talking to him or her?

- What do you believe is the role of a journalist when he/she writes an article about sex trafficking?
- What would you like the general public to know about you or your experiences that they might not know?
- What do you think you could do or offer in order to help journalists more easily and accurately report on the topic?
- In the long run, what do you think will be the most effective or have the biggest impact on bringing an end to sex trafficking?

## **Appendix C: Article for advocates and survivors to read and give their reaction to**

### **Two arrested for sex trafficking**

A man and a woman have been arrested and charged with sex trafficking in separate cases, police told a press conference yesterday.

Boonlert Timthong, 36, the owner of a restaurant in Kanchanaburi's Muang district, was arrested in a sting operation for allegedly forcing six women from Myanmar to work as prostitutes. Anti-Human Trafficking Division police said they found four of the women, including a 17-year-old, at a karaoke bar run by the man.

Police said Boonlert confessed to buying all six women from a broker and forcing them to work as prostitutes to pay off tens of thousands of baht each. A foundation working with the Anti-Trafficking Coordination Unit Northern Thailand (TRAFCORD) reported the alleged sex-trafficking activities at the karaoke bar to the police.

According to TRAFCORD, Boonlert forced the women to work as prostitutes, initially claiming each of the victims owed him about Bt70,000. Despite their having worked for him for two months, he later claimed that the debt had increased to Bt87,300 each.

The division also charged Prapaporn Chantakitnukul, 48, with forcing a 16-year-old schoolgirl to work as a prostitute in Si Sa Ket's Kantharalak district. Police arrested Prapaporn in a sting operation after she allegedly took the girl to a hotel to work as a prostitute. Prapaporn denied the allegation.

According to the Thailand Country Report of the 2012 Trafficking in Persons Report, the government does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government has not shown evidence that it is increasing efforts to address human trafficking compared with the previous year; therefore, Thailand is placed on the Tier 2 Watch List for a third consecutive year, according to the report.

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