

PARTNERSHIPS FOR A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION'S HUMAN TRAFFICKING DIGITAL ACTIVISM, TRAINING, LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY, AND SURVIVOR SUPPORT EFFORTS

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Partnerships for a Nonprofit Organization's Human Trafficking Digital Activism, Training, Legislative Advocacy, and Survivor Support Efforts

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Abstract

Although partnerships are a widely used approach to combat human trafficking, little research has been done on nonprofit partnerships for digital activism on human trafficking. This paper combines the public interest communication (PIC) theoretical framework with critical trafficking studies to understand one nonprofit's digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness. Employing grounded theory to analyze 54 pages of text, qualitative surveys, and interviews, data revealed organizational partnerships focused on the key areas of training, legislative advocacy, and survivor support. However, partners can potentially derail strategic efforts for social change if misaligned with PIC dimensions and human rights approaches to human trafficking. Based on these findings, recommendations for nonprofit partnerships for digital activism on human trafficking are presented.

Introduction

Human trafficking refers to compelling service from a human being. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 established two classifications of this crime: labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Both classifications involve exploiting others through force, fraud, or coercion. Researchers and practitioners utilize a variety of approaches to understand this issue, from classifying human trafficking as “modern-day slavery” to conflating trafficking with prostitution or smuggling (Lee, 2011; Lobasz, 2019). Regardless of the classification of human trafficking, and regardless of its construction, an estimated 21-25 million people are impacted annually, with

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girls and women among the most commonly trafficked (ILO, 2017; Mishra, 2015). Many organizations seeking social change for human trafficking align the crime with violence against women; for example, the United Nations includes a fifth goal within its 17 Goals for Sustainable Development to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (UN, 2023). The UN's (2023) target 5.2 seeks to “eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation” (para. 2). Critical approaches to solving this problem align with the communication and social change work of Tufte (2017) and the recommendations for effective public interest communication outlined by Johnston and Pieczka (2019) which strive to disrupt structural inequalities and interrogate power relations for broad-based structural change.

Literature review

Public interest communications

Public interest communications (PIC) refers to a developing academic discipline focused on strategic communication for social change. Johnston and Pieczka (2019) define PIC as a blend of “the conflict, negotiation and adaptation inherent in public interest with a critical approach to communication management and public relations” (p. i). Social justice is one type of social change seeking to promote equality and fairness. Hou (2019) argues that public interest is a critical component of social change and social justice due to the aforementioned process of conflict, negotiation, and adaptation using a critical approach.

PIC encompasses theory and practice. Johnston (2023) emphasizes PIC as “a pragmatic theory of communication,” emphasizing its value for communication theory but also for practical application, as a set of tools for action (p. 55). PIC aligns with what Tufte (2017) categorizes as the third generation of communication for development, the social change approach, emphasizing the communication of social problems using definitions of structural inequality and power relations for collective action and structural change (p. 17). Due to these aforementioned characteristics, nonprofit organizations may find PIC especially valuable for strategic communication efforts. For example, Adams and Johnson (2020) analyzed the digital social advocacy efforts of 13 nonprofit organizations serving immigrant Hispanic communities through a PIC lens to combat negative stereotypes and prejudices. Nonprofits focused on addressing complex public interest problems, for example climate change or homelessness, may use PIC to help audiences navigate the complexities of the problem and the challenges of problem solving (Johnston & Gulliver, 2022). Human trafficking is another such complex problem.

According to Johnston and Pieczka (2019), PIC can occur in six dimensions: 1) publicness, which focuses on communication and debate in public spaces; 2) accessibility, which focuses on information-sharing and participation opportunities for individuals to engage; 3) substantive anchoring, which focuses on the communication and language used; 4) rationality, which focuses

on providing support for decision-making; 5) inter-subjectivity, which focuses on common interests and shared understandings with the community; and 6) connectedness, which funnels those common interests and shared understandings into action (Johnston & Gulliver, 2022). These dimensions of PIC will be explored in the present study's analysis of one women's civic leadership nonprofit's partnerships for human trafficking awareness.

Partnerships for human trafficking

Because of the complexity of human trafficking, the intersections between human trafficking and other community issues, and the multifaceted needs of survivors, researchers and practitioners agree that partnerships are critical to fully and effectively addressing human trafficking. The 4P approach to human trafficking, introduced in 1998, originally included prevention, protection, and prosecution before expanding to include the fourth "P" for partnership in 2009 (U.S. Department of State, 2020). According to Busch-Armendariz et al., (2018), "Rarely have we seen multiple layers (local, state, and federal) and multiple disciplines (social services, law enforcement, and prosecutors) work so closely and collaboratively toward a shared social justice pursuit" (p. 271). For example, the U.S. Department of State partners with international organizations, nonprofits, and state and local government agencies in its efforts. Polaris, formerly called the Polaris Project, is an example of a nonprofit organization with a mission to combat human trafficking that frequently partners with other organizations. According to Foot (2016), "Most agree that the complexity of the problem and the many forms of harm to victims [of human trafficking] require collaboration across sectors" (p. 2). The present study builds on the work of Foot (2016) who examined collaboration from a communication perspective.

A variety of frameworks may be used to understand human trafficking. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services uses a public health framework as a lens through which to communicate the problem of human trafficking (OTP, 2016). Law enforcement may rely on a law-and-order approach to human trafficking. The present study relies on the human rights framework, which focuses on the basic and universal rights of all human beings to live free and safely, rights that emerged from 1948's Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN. The terms "human rights" and "social justice" may be used interchangeably because this framework concentrates on the human rights of all people to have "equal justice, opportunity, and dignity" (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 11) as well as equal "economic, political, and social access and opportunities" (p. 12). This framework centers survivor needs in efforts to combat human trafficking as opposed to, for example, centering the prosecution of a trafficker; prioritizing the agency of survivors as opposed to envisioning them as victims in need of rescue; and recognizing the intersectionality of survivors as well as the layers of vulnerabilities survivors might experience, from experiencing homelessness to addiction to poverty to discrimination (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018; Lee, 2011; Lobasz, 2019). The human rights framework's emphasis on social justice, intersectionality, human rights, and the use of a critical lens aligns with critical trafficking studies, a critical and interdisciplinary field centering

survivors while also interrogating the broader contexts in which human trafficking occurs (Hill & Chavez, 2018). In employing these frameworks, the present study contributes to a gap in the research on communication for social change and PIC for human trafficking awareness, specifically how these critical lenses might be used to strengthen partnerships and collaborations to fight trafficking.

The Junior League's anti-trafficking work

In addition to government agencies, law enforcement, and nonprofit organizations, two groups heavily involved in anti-trafficking work include religious organizations and women's organizations (Lobasz, 2019). The Junior League is an example of one such women's organization. Founded in 1901, the Junior League is a women's civic leadership nonprofit organization with over 125,000 members in more than 295 chapters around the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. The organization's mission is to advance women's leadership for meaningful community impact through volunteer action, collaboration, and training. The Junior League, sometimes abbreviated as the League, recognizes the value of, and leverages, community partnerships for its advocacy, awareness, and direct service work.

Since its founding, the League focused on a variety of community issues, including human trafficking. The Association of Junior Leagues International (AJLI), the association which supports the nearly 300 Junior League chapters in four countries around the world, notes that over 50 Junior Leagues have contributed to anti-trafficking work in their communities. One significant accomplishment is the creation of the ABOLISH Movement, or ABOLISH, which is a digital activism campaign to raise awareness of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Digital activism refers to social change work done with digital communication tools and technologies. Because digital activism may be classified into types, such as the usage patterns defined by Haunss (2015) or the continuum model of fully online to offline organization defined by Earl and Kimport (2011), a digital strategy may encompass a wide range of digital activism activities. The effectiveness of digital activism relies heavily on PIC concepts (Vardeman & Sebesta, 2000).

To gain an understanding of how the Junior League employed digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness, the following research questions guided the larger project of which this paper is one part:

RQ1: What digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness are used by the Junior League?

RQ2A: How do those digital activism strategies align with social justice approaches to human trafficking?

RQ2B: How do those digital activism strategies translate to offline action?

Method

This paper, and the larger project of which this paper is one part, employed grounded theory to analyze 54 pages of textual data, a survey completed by eight participants, and four semi-structured interviews. Grounded theory's value for qualitative analysis and critical research, detailed and step-by-step structure, and focus on practice made the method ideal for this project (Charmaz, 2014; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Oktay, 2023; Vogt et al. 2014).

First, qualitative surveys were distributed to the members of AJLI's human trafficking workgroup, which included more than 85 leaders affiliated with over 36 Junior League chapters. The survey was distributed three times in May, June, and July 2021 in an attempt to solicit responses from as many of those 36 participating Junior League chapters as possible. Qualitative survey questions sought to understand formal organizational strategies around human trafficking, such as position statements or strategic plan goals; definitions of "human trafficking" used by the organization and who constructed those definitions; how informed organizational members were about the issue of human trafficking; digital activism platforms and actions employed for human trafficking awareness; and content-creation questions including sources of information.

Follow-up, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all survey participants indicating their willingness to further participate. Interview questions sought to understand how the Junior League reached its decision to get involved in human trafficking and where Junior League's definition of "human trafficking" came from, including whether that definition overlapped with other community concerns or with social justice frameworks. Interviews also questioned Junior League's calls to action and goals for human trafficking awareness efforts.

The collection of textual data was necessary to fully explore the study's research questions. As such, textual data was collected from three sources: AJLI's public-facing website on human trafficking (18 pages copied and pasted into a word processing application), the internal AJLI document "League-Wide Human Trafficking Program Information" (12 pages) and the websites of all Junior League chapters involved in human trafficking awareness as outlined in the AJLI document. The websites of all Junior League chapters were copied and pasted into a word-processing application comprising 30 pages.

RQ1 on the digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness used by the Junior League most closely align with the PIC concepts of publicness, which examines how the Junior League uses its public digital platforms for discussions about human trafficking, and intersubjectivity, which wonders whether the digital activism strategies foster a community of shared understanding of human trafficking and common interests on how to raise awareness and further combat the crime.

RQ2A, which addresses how those digital activism strategies align with social justice approaches to human trafficking, most closely aligns with the PIC concepts of substantive anchoring, which examines the communication used and whether that communication focuses on social justice and equity in the context of human trafficking, and connectedness. This question

explores whether Junior League digital activism strategies promote actions aligning with social justice goals in combating human trafficking.

RQ2B on how the Junior League digital activism strategies translate to offline action most closely aligns with the PIC concepts of accessibility, which examines if online information-sharing translates to offline engagements and activism, and rationality, which examines whether information shared online translates into informed action offline. Arguments could be made for expanding the PIC dimensions aligning with each research question; however, the aforementioned alignment of two PIC concepts per research question, spanning all six PIC dimensions, would most closely connect the research questions as operationalized in this study.

To analyze the data, grounded theory's stages of initial, line-by-line open coding, cycles of coding and memoing, and in-depth coding were followed (Charmaz, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Related to the study's research questions on the digital activism strategies used by the Junior League to raise awareness of human trafficking, how those strategies aligned with social justice approaches to human trafficking, and how those strategies translated to offline action, results and a discussion of findings are presented below.

Results

Partnerships were one key digital activism strategy used by the Junior Leagues for human trafficking awareness. AJLI's (2021) website explains: "For more than 15 years, [individual and statewide coalitions of] Leagues have joined forces with [partners] to raise public awareness on the hidden world of human trafficking, advocate for the passage of anti-trafficking legislation and support survivors" (para. 2). Junior League chapter websites, and survey and interview data also supported this strategy; for example, the Junior League of Atlanta's (2021) website read: "Over the next several years, the JLA will be working with both its current community partners as well as developing new partnerships in order to meet our ultimate goal – to eliminate the sexual exploitation and human trafficking of women and children" (para. 2).

The Junior League communicates partnerships to combat human trafficking as partnerships for training—to train Junior League members and to train the community—as well as partnerships for legislative advocacy and partnerships for supporting survivors of human trafficking. Partnerships rarely align with social justice approaches to human trafficking, although the Junior League mission and the qualitative survey and interview data from this project highlight the potential for alignment in the future. Those partnerships rarely translated to offline action, missing a key opportunity to link digital activism with action.

Partnerships for digital activism

Data revealed the Junior League relied on organizational partners for digital activism in three areas: first, to define "human trafficking"; second, to create or co-create anti-trafficking social

media content; and third, to serve as experts on Junior League anti-trafficking websites. For digital activism on social media, survey results indicated six Junior Leagues relied on community partners for creating anti-trafficking content. This included using partner definitions of “human trafficking,” using partner content for social media campaigns, or co-creating campaign content with partners. Partners referenced were primarily anti-trafficking nonprofit organizations and task forces. For example, the Junior League of Greenville partnered with a local anti-trafficking organization for a social media campaign, and the Junior League of Huntsville partnered with the North Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force to raise awareness on Facebook Live.

AJLI’s (2021) emphasis on partnerships with “critical and influential community change-makers” was another social media strategy (para. 2). The Junior League of Nashville asked influencers, described as local community women with large followings, to promote anti-trafficking content. Three Florida Junior Leagues partnered with one another and with community leaders to develop a digital activism campaign for January’s Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

Facebook and Instagram were cited by seven Junior Leagues as platforms used to raise awareness of human trafficking, with only one of those seven organizations also using Twitter. Five survey respondents reported that compared to a typical Junior League organizational social media post, human trafficking awareness content “gets about the same level of engagement.” One respondent reported that this type of content “gets more engagement,” and one respondent reported that this type of content “gets less engagement” than a typical social media post. When relying on partners for social media content and/or collaborating with community partners on social media content, a deeper understanding of this data may be needed.

Junior Leagues frequently highlighted partners on anti-trafficking websites, publicly displaying partnership as a digital activism strategy not only on social media but also on organization websites. Typically, names and descriptions of community partners were listed with links to partner websites. For example, the Junior League of Birmingham, Michigan (2021), linked to Hope Against Trafficking describing the organization as “a 24-month residential program that provides restorative housing and comprehensive services focused on physical, mental, emotional and economic transformation” (para. 5). Websites also highlighted Junior League task force participation. The Junior League of Daytona Beach’s (2021) “Human Trafficking Initiative” website began with the following: “The Junior League of Daytona Beach is a proud member of the Freedom 7 Human Trafficking Task Force (Volusia, Flagler, Putnam, and St. Johns counties)” (para. 1). Web links to direct readers to learn more about human trafficking also relied on community partners. Links ranged from government agencies such as the U.S. Department of State and Department of Justice, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and UK’s National Crime Agency to nonprofit, NGO experts in anti-trafficking such as Polaris and Anti-Slavery International. Some links were specific to faith-based NGOs like Shared Hope International. Some were locally focused, such as the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation or GEMS Girls in New York.

Partnerships for training

Aligning with the Junior League mission, training was another key role of partnerships: training League anti-trafficking committee leaders and members, training the organization's general membership, and collaborating with Junior Leagues to train the community.

Survey results asked respondents, "On a scale from 1 (not informed) to 5 (very informed), how informed would you say your [Junior League] members are about the issue of human trafficking?" The average of 3.5, with only one respondent ranking their Junior League members at 5 (very informed), may indicate that while training is prioritized due to the Junior League mission of training women as civic leaders, membership as a whole may not be well trained on this community issue. The reason for this is unclear.

Collaborating with partners to train the community was noted in the data, including film and documentary screenings, community forums, and formal trainings. For example, the Junior League of Baton Rouge highlighted its partnership with the nonprofit Trafficking Hope to show the documentary *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls* to the community. The Junior League of Long Beach (2021) partnered with their local school district and parent teacher association to host a symposium "aimed at keeping young people safe from the world of human trafficking" (para. 1). The Junior League of Napa-Sonoma (2021) in partnership with the Sonoma County Human Trafficking Task Force, "helps to organize periodic forums and rallies on the topic" (para. 1). The Junior League of Wilmington hosted a training for members featuring an assistant district attorney with experience on human trafficking cases. If, as the survey indicated, Junior League members do not have the level of knowledge necessary to inform the community about human trafficking, relying on community partners for their expertise is critical. The community partner may benefit from Junior League marketing and visibility as well as volunteer service to plan and hold the event with or for the partner.

Junior Leagues relied on partners to train their organization's members, who would, in some cases, train the community. The Junior League of Birmingham members were licensed by the Guardian Group, a training-focused nonprofit organization. The Junior League of Huntsville reported, "Over the next several months, we will be partnering with our local Human Trafficking Task Force to train our committee to give awareness presentations as part of a speakers bureau" (AJLI, 2020, p. 6). The Junior League of Sioux City "partners with the Siouxland Coalition Against Human Trafficking to train area hotel and motel employees on how to recognize and respond to the signs of human trafficking" with participants receiving "a plaque notifying the public that the establishment has participated in the training" (AJLI, 2020, p. 10). The partners for this training included police and the district attorney. The Junior League of Orange County, New York partnered with the nonprofit Safe Homes of Orange County on a prevention training program for parents and children. Without the support of partnerships, Junior League members may not have possessed the knowledge of human trafficking to train others.

Collaboration with partners on offline awareness efforts to train the community was noted in a few cases. For example, the Junior League of Eugene, Oregon, partnered with local police on a

brochure distributed to law enforcement, medical and transit personnel, schools and parent groups, and nonprofits. The Junior League of Santa Barbara partnered with the county District Attorney's Office on an awareness campaign involving the distribution of anti-trafficking pins (AJLI, 2020). Absent were digital activism strategies connected to offline efforts.

Partnerships for legislative advocacy

Junior League websites prominently features partnerships for legislative advocacy, emphasizing the high value placed on this strategy. AJLI's (2021) website read: "League coalitions have worked to pass more than 25 different pieces of anti-trafficking legislation, primarily at the state and local level" (para. 2). Efforts included community partners and partnerships with statewide Junior League chapters called State Public Affairs Committees (SPAC). Partnerships with survivors on legislative advocacy were absent from the data.

SPACs appeared on AJLI's website under "The Work of the Junior League" in human trafficking awareness. Stories included the work of SPACs in California, Florida, and Georgia, sharing those SPAC organizational partnerships as prioritizing human trafficking and supporting specific bills with those partners. In addition to statewide Junior League partnerships, SPACs and individual Junior Leagues partnered with other organizations to advocate for legislation, such as Georgia SPAC's partnership with the United Way of Greater Atlanta on Safe Harbor Yes, a campaign "which advocated for the creation of the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund via amendment to the state constitution" (AJLI, 2021, para. 9).

Junior Leagues used websites as tools for awareness of SPAC work and to encourage legislative advocacy. For example, the Junior League of Charlotte shared its 2012 position statement on human trafficking that "opposes human trafficking in all its forms. The Junior League of Charlotte (2021) supports programs and legislation aimed at preventing the importation and detainment of children, women and men for the purposes of exploitation" (para. 4). Under the position statement, the Junior League of Charlotte shared that its membership approved support in March 2012 for North Carolina Senate Bill 547 and the creation of a North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission. Below this membership-approved public stance was a "What Can You Do To Take Action?" section focused on explaining North Carolina House Bill 855, providing the names and contact information for the state Senate Judiciary Committee members, and encouraging readers to "please contact our local law makers [*sic*] and ask them to consider HB855" (JL Charlotte, 2021, para. 9). This information had not been updated since 2013-2014. In carefully analyzing the website, beyond the call for members to call their legislators to ask them to support HB855, further information about the bill was not provided. Although rare, as a result of legislation passing, some Junior Leagues took offline action in the awareness space using partnerships. For example, after Alabama legislation required certain businesses to post human trafficking posters, the Junior League of Huntsville partnered with the Junior League of Birmingham to hang signage in airports and bus stations. Overall, while digital

activism publicized legislative advocacy, current and ongoing ways to support those efforts did not exist as often as summary statements of prior, and often outdated, actions.

Partnerships for survivor support

Some Leagues partnered with organizations to volunteer in direct support of survivors and most often in direct support for girls and women survivors of sex trafficking. For example, the Junior League of Greenville's (2021) website read: "The JLG is partnering with Jasmine Road and SWITCH. Both of these organizations have been pioneers in helping to address human trafficking in our community. The Human Trafficking Impact Committee is providing trained and skilled JLG volunteers to support these organizations" (para. 1). The website provides links to resources and partners. Importantly, the Junior League of Greenville highlights the term "trained and skilled volunteers," emphasizing the League mission. In theory, this approach works well for human rights approaches to human trafficking. AJLI (2021) highlighted the partnership between the Junior League of Des Moines and Dorothy's House, "a local home campus that provides a safe place for the practice of life for those teen and youth girls whose lives have been interrupted by sex trafficking and sexploitation" (para. 19). To elaborate on what Junior League brought to the partnership, the website noted that Junior League members volunteer and fund "the development of an urban garden co-op with the goal to provide girls with a work environment that teaches healthy food relationships, business and life skills that will help them be successful when they transition to independent living" (AJLI, 2021, para. 19). This description included language about how Dorothy's House and the Junior League "provide" survivors with services as opposed to partnering with survivors.

Two additional examples showed the partnership's focus on residential treatment for survivors of sex trafficking. For example, the Junior League of Northern Westchester "has partnered with The Gateways Program, an intensive specialized residential treatment program for girls aged 12-17 who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking" (AJLI, 2021, para. 26). The Junior League of Orange County, California (2021), partnered with "the Lighthouse, an Orangewood Foundation program providing housing for victims of sex trafficking" (para. 14). The Junior League of Fort Worth (2021) partnered with law enforcement under UnBound Fort Worth, described as supporting survivors in "three ways: prevention and awareness, professional specific identification training and 24/7 crisis response and support for survivors" (para. 1). Then, the following phrase was used to describe UnBound Fort Worth: "to help meet the immediate needs of victims when they are rescued" (para. 1). While law enforcement would understandably use the term "victim" when a crime has been committed, the rescue narrative is problematic when it fails to consider survivors' personal agency or put survivors' needs first (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018; Lobasz, 2019).

Only one Junior League—in Portland, Maine—discussed partnerships in support of survivors using a human rights approach. The survey response read:

We are working to move beyond ‘raising awareness’ to providing tangible support to survivors and individuals involved in the sex trade. We rely on community partners who also take a human rights based [*sic*] approach in their anti-trafficking work. (2021)

This survey respondent was later interviewed. When asked about this work, she said, “We’ve since had other opportunities to work with organizations that take more of a human rights approach, and so now we’re getting a little bit more nuanced explanation about what trafficking is and that you need to attack the root causes of it.” She elaborated in the interview:

We’re talking with community partners that we work with. My Place Teen Center Preble Street is the only federally funded anti-trafficking program in the state. They also take a human rights approach, but because they accept federal funds, they have limitations on their speech around decriminalization and that sort of thing. (2021)

This was the only interview to discuss decriminalizing sex work. Decriminalization focused on legalization and regulation as one end of a policy approach, with criminalization on the other. Research indicates the pros and cons of each approach; advocates of decriminalization see consensual sex work as “an inevitable component of the social order” (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 257) and seek to regulate that work for participant protection. Opponents claim decriminalization and legalization may increase demand and increase human trafficking (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018). This was the only Junior League member engaging in the nuances of policy approaches to sex work, indicating another avenue for training that may benefit Leagues working in anti-trafficking spaces.

Indirect support for survivors was noted in a few partnerships. For example, the Junior League of Long Beach, California (2021) partnered with the Long Beach Human Trafficking Task Force to publish and distribute “a comprehensive resource guide to assist service providers who are on the front lines helping trafficking survivors” (para. 1). Leagues partnered with organizations on survivor supply drives; for example, Junior League of Orange County, California hosted a donation drive in partnership with a nonprofit to collect items for survivors. The digital activism strategy noted on its website was a link to that nonprofit’s Amazon wish list along with encouragement for community participation. While the Orange County Junior League used its website as a digital activism strategy to promote one survivor-focused effort—its supply drive—most offline actions were not connected to an anti-trafficking or digital activism strategy. Connections between digital activism and offline action to support survivors were infrequently employed.

Discussion

Types of partnerships

In citing partnerships to combat human trafficking, organizations must consider an overreliance on one type of partner. Research critiques partnerships as “often focused narrowly on the prosecution of traffickers and the ‘rescue’ and service provision to survivors” (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 272), and this was confirmed in League construction of partnerships from the data collected for this project. Many Junior Leagues highlighted prosecution-focused partners including law enforcement and district attorney’s offices. AJLI’s website, for example, listed law enforcement as the first partnership type. Law enforcement partners may not promote human rights approaches to human trafficking, especially in places where these entities “have been involved in trafficking enterprises or place a very low priority on addressing problems experienced by marginalized people” (Gulati, 2012, p. 50). Organizations including the Junior League might incorporate a variety of partnership types in their digital activism efforts such as their anti-trafficking websites or social media campaigns. Another critique of partnerships is that trafficking survivors “should be at the center of collaborative efforts and partnerships” but are often absent altogether (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 272). While partnerships with nonprofits providing services to survivors were present in the data for this project, partnerships with survivors themselves were noticeably absent.

In considering the six dimensions of PIC, ensuring survivors have access to the information being shared about human trafficking and have access to participate and engage in anti-trafficking work is key. For a variety of reasons, survivors may opt not to participate; however, their inclusion in this work remains of vital importance for meaningful social change. In addition to the accessibility dimension of PIC, connectedness is key for the evaluation of partnerships. Without a shared understanding of human trafficking and an agreement on the action needed, partner incompatibility may occur. Foot (2016) acknowledges that this alignment in partnerships for human trafficking may be challenging; however, those tensions must be discussed for the PIC dimension of connectedness to be effective.

Critical trafficking studies interrogate the definitions of human trafficking that may “extend law-and-order agendas, rather than human rights initiatives” (Luibheid, 2018, p. 307). Critical trafficking studies align with the critical focus of PIC (Hou, 2019). A critical trafficking studies perspective might encourage human rights initiatives to be prioritized above law-and-order agendas. Leveraging the expertise of nonprofits with a human rights focus and ensuring the voices of survivors are considered in anti-trafficking efforts may work well for applying this perspective. The PIC dimension of publicness, or focusing on the public communication and debate around why the critical trafficking studies approach may be the best fit for anti-trafficking work, is key—as is accessibility for all individuals who want to engage in the conversation. The expertise of community partners may also be considered when Junior Leagues evaluate anti-trafficking content and audience engagement. Finally, an evaluation on whether critical and

influential community change-makers help or hurt awareness efforts may be necessary. While these change-makers may or may not have expertise in the area of human trafficking, their high-status, high-power positions in their communities, including online communities, was a rationale for the partnership. Social media influencers may increase the audience of who sees human trafficking awareness content, but if those influencers are not experts, message content must be even more carefully crafted or curated. While influencers who are government officials such as state senators and city mayors may have a marketing team dedicated to their social media, individual influencers may be solely responsible for their content, increasing the risk of disinformation. This speaks to the PIC dimension of substantive anchoring, the communication and language used by the influencers, and an evaluation of alignment in that communication.

Additionally, power dynamics inherent to partnerships must be considered. Foot (2016) used the term “platforming” as a way of understanding power: “When a leader from a higher status sector, such as a business, platforms a leader from a lower status sector, such as a nonprofit, the power of the lower status sector increases, at least for the duration of the event” (p. 65). When collaborating with a more powerful, high-status partner, the Junior League increases its legitimacy in anti-trafficking efforts. For example, a description of partnerships by AJLI (2021) included the phrase “critical and influential community change-makers” (para. 2). AJLI communicates that its organization partners with respected, powerful entities for anti-trafficking work. However, these partnerships are not one-sided; for the partners, the Junior League may be appealing because of the organization’s brand and membership base, which may increase volunteer hours, money, and/or votes for anti-trafficking efforts. Because of its mission, the Junior League has an opportunity to bring an intentional social justice approach to its partnerships, adding value to those collaborations. With the human trafficking work group, AJLI may guide Junior Leagues on how to better communicate their contributions to partners. These contributions can be included on Junior League anti-trafficking websites. Other nonprofits must also carefully consider their mission, brand, and reputation; what they bring to a partnership; and how power dynamics have the potential to influence their organization’s anti-trafficking work.

Finally, the way partnerships are formed, evaluated, and ended must be considered alongside organizational capacity. Although not explicitly stated in survey or interview data, Leagues may likely take a more ad hoc approach to forming, rotating, and/or ending partnerships. AJLI may provide guidance or best practices on the types of partners to look for and why; this may be especially helpful if Junior Leagues lack the capacity for implementing a thorough partnership research and vetting process. Other organizations may strategically consider prospective, current, and past partners while evaluating power dynamics to ensure the advancement of their mission. PIC’s dimension of rationality, concerned with support for decision-making, allows organizations to do this partnership formation, evaluation, and conclusion work in an informed and logical fashion, especially considering the aforementioned PIC dimensions of substantive anchoring and connectedness, which may also be used in the partnership evaluation process.

Digital activism

Among the aforementioned concerns, when considering digital activism efforts specifically, Junior Leagues must consider the website links shared, how those links impact audience awareness of human trafficking, and whether that information might connect with organizational strategies for offline action. According to Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2018), an organization's media strategy "is not only a cultural attractor, drawing like-minded people together to form an audience, but also a cultural activator, giving that community something to do" (p. 209). The advice from Jenkins et al. (2018) mirrors the sixth dimension of PIC, connectedness, which focuses on guiding shared interests such as anti-trafficking into community action. Junior Leagues missed opportunities to strategically use digital activism to connect audiences with offline action. For a self-motivated audience interested in increasing their awareness of human trafficking, Junior League websites may be a valuable step. However, the distance between human trafficking awareness and offline action may be even more obscured in linking to partners' homepages, resulting in the need for multiple clicks before even a highly motivated audience member might find ways to help that align with their personal wants and needs. According to Tao et al. (2021), "Information sharing and seeking, as publics' active communications, are fundamental to raising societal awareness of and behavioral support toward causes advocated by nonprofit organizations" and are "essential to cultivating positive nonprofit-public relationships" (p. 2). Digital activism must consider the partnerships between the Junior Leagues and the audiences engaging with anti-trafficking social media posts and website pages. In addition, if anti-trafficking partners use other social media platforms, that consideration must be explored by Junior Leagues that reported relying most heavily on Facebook and Instagram.

Finally, the PIC study of nonprofit digital social advocacy directed by Adams and Johnson (2020) found nonprofit engagement on a continuum of "soft" and "hard" efforts, with soft digital advocacy focusing on connections, community-building, and positivity, and hard digital advocacy focusing on direct, explicit calls to action such as protesting or voting against bills (p. 20). Adams and Johnson (2020) argue that "notions of digital social advocacy should be expanded beyond the call for direct action (use of social media for mobilization) to consider the role of soft advocacy done by nonprofits representing marginalized individuals in society" (p. 21). Specifically related to this study, soft advocacy to represent survivors of human trafficking may be just as critical as the Junior League's hard advocacy efforts, especially to address the noted gap of partnerships between members and survivors.

Training

With respect to training, the Junior League relied on the support of partnerships to train its members and the community. The Junior League mission facilitates an organizational culture in which training is valued, expected, and supported by members. This value may benefit community partners who seek to construct "human trafficking" in a particular way, because

untrained members may take those partners' constructions as truth. Lobasz (2019) argued, "American abolitionism carries a distinctly evangelical Christian tone reflective of the growing influence of evangelicals within US politics at the end of the twentieth century" (p. 16). Government agencies or law enforcement may construct human trafficking using a law-and-order message. Without internal organizational knowledge of human rights approaches to human trafficking, the Junior League misses a strategic opportunity to discuss the multitude of approaches to human trafficking and prioritize one approach with its members; hopefully, the construction prioritized aligns with the organization's mission. This advice is also important to organizations working in anti-trafficking that may not have the time and/or funding to effectively train all staff and volunteers on the various constructions of human trafficking and why care must be taken to adopt a certain framing of the issue. Finally, ensuring a public debate on the construction of human trafficking aligns with the first dimension of PIC, publicness, which focuses on communication and debate in those public spaces like an organization's meetings and trainings.

Due to survey results noting Junior League members' lack of expertise in the area of human trafficking, partnerships may increase organizational credibility. That lack of member expertise also lends itself to reliance on the partner's lens to construct human trafficking. Lobasz (2019) points out that any definition of human trafficking is political, so as a best practice, organizations should research and discuss multiple definitions of the issue before deciding which one(s) to endorse and share internally and externally. Most importantly, the definition of human trafficking selected for use should align with an organization's mission. For example, the Junior League's origins in social justice make a human rights approach to human trafficking much more ideal than a law-and-order approach. Again, this advice mirrors publicness, the first dimension of PIC defined by Johnston and Pieczka (2019). Further, engaging in this training process internally before training others gets at the heart of both the Junior League mission and existing PIC theory: the critical and open communication, cooperation, and adaptation in an organizational setting to advance meaningful social change (Hou, 2019; Johnston & Pieczka, 2019).

Leagues may also want to better understand the effectiveness of their trainings. Project data did not clarify the reason for an average ranking of 3.5 on a scale from 1 (least informed) to 5 (most informed) about human trafficking. Leagues often work on multiple issues at the same time; for example, the Junior League of Tampa, Florida has 1,900 members and lists human trafficking alongside several other community projects and programs including food insecurity, foster care, literacy, and mentoring and motivating girls among others. Providing training throughout the year on multiple topics may result in some members gaining deep knowledge on the community issue of their choice, such as human trafficking. On the other hand, providing trainings on multiple topics may also result in a shallower understanding of community issues. With complex problems like human trafficking, Junior League training alone may not be enough to move membership knowledge from a generally informed 3.5 to a very informed 5.

This level of fundamental training about human trafficking extends to training for the average citizen. Citizens may encounter myths about human trafficking such as the summer 2020

viral social media claims that the online furniture and home goods company Wayfair was involved in sex trafficking children (Polaris, 2020). Another common human trafficking conspiracy theory dates back to the 2016 presidential election, as false rumors claimed Hillary Clinton and other politicians and famous people were operating a human trafficking ring out of a pizza restaurant, with this rumor now closely tied to the QAnon conspiracy theory movement (Polaris, 2023). With viral conspiracy theories such as these causing confusion about the realities of human trafficking, training and awareness efforts must be as clear and accurate as possible, must actively seek to dispel myths, and must rely on available data. Trustworthy organizations such as Polaris Project may be relied upon for training materials, especially with the work of Polaris in recent years to research the harms to survivors caused by conspiracy theories.

As Junior Leagues and their partners focus on training, they should also communicate how audiences can participate in these trainings. Although some trainings are hosted exclusively for League members, these events can be an opportunity to recruit new members. Using simple language and a redirect to a “Join” webpage may be the only action necessary on Junior League sites: “If you are interested in gaining formal training and hands-on experience to become a civic leader in the area of preventing human trafficking, join us!” Other trainings focused on the community, and Junior Leagues can use their websites to point interested community members to ways to participate in those trainings. While Earl and Kimport (2011) discuss the inexpensive nature of a strategy such as this one, Junior League volunteer time must be considered. If Junior League volunteer member capacity limits constant webpage updates, the recommendation of simple language and a redirect may be helpful for interested community members. In this case, if Junior League social media is updated more frequently than websites, audiences may be pointed there. This recommendation aligns with the resource mobilization advice of Earl and Kimport (2011) on virtual participation in social change movements and again with the dimensions of PIC from Johnston and Pieczka (2019). Other organizations, especially nonprofits who face the same challenges of staffing, time, and funding, may also consider this advice.

Legislative advocacy

With respect to legislative advocacy in the United States, Gulati (2012) said policymakers have placed “almost all of the attention [...] on the trafficking of women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation” (p. 49). Based on this project’s data, the legislation promoted by the League followed in that same vein. According to Vanek (2015), “The solution [from a human rights approach] is to restore the rights of victims [of human trafficking] or advocate for their rights as the central response” (p. 63). Legislation promoted by many Junior Leagues may not align with human rights approaches. In particular, Junior Leagues must be cognizant of whether legislative advocacy relies too heavily on the “P” for prosecution. Daniels (2016) reminds us that criminalization of perpetrators and incarceration is “insufficient to address the problems of systemic sexual violence (across differences of race, national context, and gender identity)” (p. 51). Building on the work of Winett et al. (2021) on PIC and advocacy, during our current

politically polarized climate at multiple levels of government, equity-based messages that “resonated *across* political ideologies in the general public study” may work well for the Junior League (p. 68). If the Junior League wishes to form partnerships that make long-term, sustainable change in the area of human trafficking, more education and training on the types of legislative advocacy that best align with this goal may be necessary. Organizations participating in legislative advocacy must also carefully review bills before engaging with legislators to influence public policy.

With legislative advocacy, the Junior League’s mission of training members as civic leaders misses a valuable opportunity to consider collective impact through collaboration with fellow Junior Leagues and with community partners. Junior Leagues could rely on partnerships to train members on what human trafficking is, best practices for anti-trafficking legislation, current legislative efforts and how to evaluate those efforts, how to advocate for specific legislation after critical evaluation, and how to engage the community in advocacy through digital activism and offline action. These recommendations align with the dimensions of PIC but especially with substantive anchoring and its focus on communication choices and language used.

Legislative efforts in partnership with survivors should especially be prioritized, as this important area of collaboration is missing from currently communicated League efforts. Sullivan and Porter (1997) argued, “Justice is realizable only when people have access to the mechanisms of policy and decisionmaking [*sic*]. Access means accessibility of technologies in the technical sense, but is also means accessibility of the social frameworks for group decision making” (p. 115). If Junior Leagues doing anti-trafficking work in the legislative advocacy space have partnerships to support survivors, the organizational mission of training women as civic leaders can and should extend to survivors themselves. Junior Leagues can leverage training by their partners or conduct their own trainings to ensure survivors have access to mechanisms of policy and decision making if they choose to engage in legislative advocacy efforts. While this advice may not be applicable to all organizations, those who do engage directly with survivors may consider survivor needs and whether those needs allow for survivors to, now or in the future, take part in legislative advocacy efforts. An important consideration with this work returns to the findings of Winett et al. (2021) who note that narratives, such as a survivor’s narrative about their trafficking experience, may be an effective tool of persuasion or may backfire. Future research on strategic narratives in general, as noted by Winett et al. (2021), as well as strategic narratives about human trafficking may be helpful for future PIC and human trafficking scholarship.

Survivor support

With respect to supporting survivors, collective impact must also be considered and implemented. The “Community Impact” section of AJLI’s website highlights the mission—training women as civic leaders—as the key element of organizational success in making an impact and in ensuring long-term change on a variety of issues, including human trafficking.

According to Busch-Armendariz et al., (2018), collective impact is an “emerging approach that identifies social problems as complex and interrelated” and believes “independent action and isolated initiatives are not successful as the primary avenue toward social change” (p. 276). Instead, a focus on meaningful and intentional collaboration may bring about more lasting change on issues like human trafficking that are complex and intersect with a variety of other community issues such as poverty. However, collective impact must consider five key attributes according to Kania and Kramer (2011): a shared goal or vision for change; a shared idea of how to measure success; constant coordination on activities that mutually reinforce one another; constant communication and frequent meetings; and support from a strong infrastructure and processes. Incorporating a collective impact strategy in establishing and maintaining partnerships and ensuring collective impact goals are articulated when training others would allow for more intentional partnerships that make a more in-depth impact. This advice not only centers a human rights approach to human trafficking but also allows for the implementation of all six dimensions of PIC defined by Johnston and Pieczka (2019) for meaningful social change.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, the lower-than-expected response rate to qualitative surveys and interviews was not anticipated. While the collection of additional textual data aided in addressing the study’s research questions, a follow-up study with increased Junior League member voices may provide more information on the gaps in the data, such as ideas around audience engagement with anti-trafficking social media content, the reason for League member knowledge on human trafficking averaging 3.5 on a scale from 1 (not informed) to 5 (very informed), and other areas. As this study was conducted in 2020 and 2021 during COVID-19, future research may naturally increase human subject participation due to a lack of those external stressors caused by the global pandemic.

Second, the research focused on Junior League member participation and did not include data from community partners. The inclusion of partners is a natural next step for this work. Finally, this project analyzed only one nonprofit organization working in the anti-trafficking space. Additional data may be collected on various nonprofit and NGO partnerships for a more complete picture of digital activism for social change on the community issue of human trafficking. Despite these limitations, this study builds on existing PIC scholarship while offering a foundation for an exciting new direction on communication for social change in the area of human trafficking.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both human trafficking research and practice recognize the 4P approach to human trafficking, emphasizing partnerships as the fourth P and a critical strategy. This project used

grounded theory as a social justice-oriented methodology to analyze the partnerships of the Junior League for digital activism in human trafficking, how those strategies aligned with social justice approaches, and how those strategies translated to offline action. Overall, partnerships did not align with the six dimensions of PIC, did not include survivors or prioritize social justice approaches to human trafficking, and did not consider opportunities for collective impact. Leagues must be cognizant of partnership types and how those partners affiliate with and influence League members in a variety of ways. This advice extends to any organization working in the human trafficking awareness space but especially to nonprofits with similar constraints as the Junior League.

Because many Junior League chapters engaged in training, advocacy, and survivor support, a model for effective organizational infrastructure that incorporates these elements in human trafficking awareness is possible and beneficial for individual chapter anti-trafficking efforts and the collective impact of the Junior League organization as a whole. This paper, and the larger project of which this paper is one part, sought to provide recommendations for the Junior League, but more broadly, lessons learned can be applied by any organization and especially any nonprofit organization working in human trafficking awareness.

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