

Words Matter: Language , Imagery and Storytelling in Human Trafficking Awareness



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Speaker Biography

Samantha Searls is a program manager at the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJPC). At IJPC, Samantha's education and advocacy work focuses on breaking down unjust systems. As part of her work to end human trafficking, Samantha chairs the Public Education and Awareness Committee of End Slavery Cincinnati's Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition. Samantha has her Master of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis and her Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Indianapolis. Prior to her time at IJPC, Samantha served as a community organizer working on environmental, economic and social justice issues.





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Samantha Searls, MSW

with support from Em Joy, BFA

Content Warning:

This presentation includes examples of language and images that describe or depict people in situations of harm, bondage, and distress.

We will give warnings before these examples appear to allow for participant self-care. We encourage community care and support for those who may be activated by this content.



Look for
this symbol

MODERN DAY
SLAVERY

RESCUE

SAVE

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

What **phrases/words** come to mind?

KIDNAPPED

PROSTITUTION

RECOVER



BARBED WIRE

CHAINS

DUCT TAPE

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

What **images** come to mind?

SHADOWS

DIRTY BED

CRYING
WOMEN

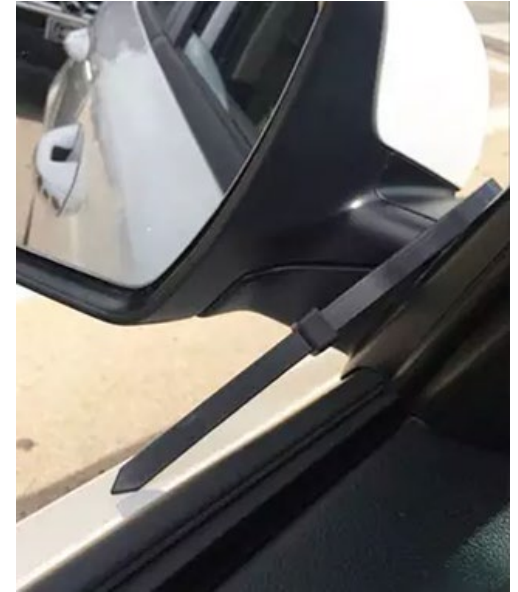
BRUISES



WHERE

We receive messages from:

- Mainstream media
- Movies, documentaries
- Viral Facebook posts
- Major anti-trafficking organizations
- Persons in authority



Are Sex Traffickers Leaving Zip Ties on Cars, Mailboxes of Potential Victims?

WHY



These messages are used to:

- Evoke emotion
- Develop sympathy
- Scare the public into being more vigilant
- Sell papers & movie tickets
- Solicit donations
- Define who is worthy of help
- Aid/harm political campaigns

Are these messages accurate?

VIDEO

Cyntoia Brown-Long



**BE
ACCURATE**

Trafficking really looks like:

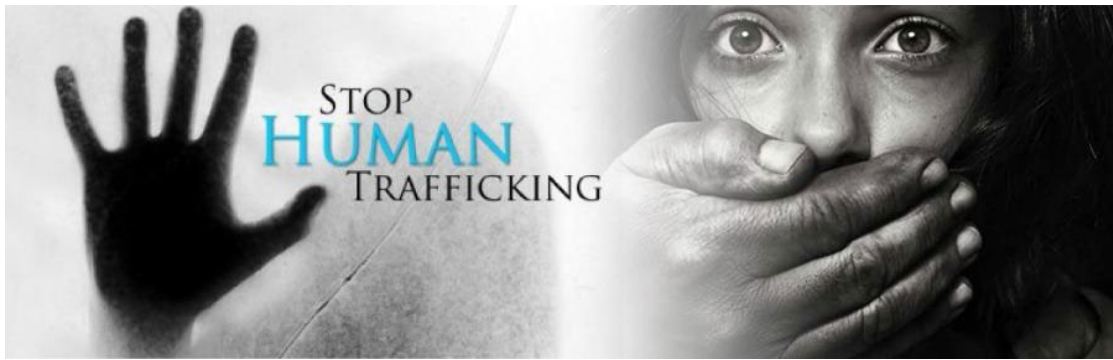
- Coercion
- Manipulation
- Promises of love
- Grooming over time
- Deception
- Broken promises
- Exploiting vulnerabilities

**BE
ACCURATE**

- Labor Trafficking ~64-68% of HT
- Sex Trafficking (forced & coerced)
- Focus on “Minority” / Marginalized People
 - ◆ Black, Latinx, and other POC
 - ◆ Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women
 - ◆ LGBTQ People
 - ◆ People with Disabilities
 - ◆ Immigrants & Refugees

We want to make sure the phrases and imagery (even if more accurate) respect the stories and experiences of survivors, and doesn't retraumatize anyone.





Consider:

How can we tell the story of human trafficking in a more accurate and dignified way?

VIDEO

My Story My Dignity

A project of Freedom United

My Story My Dignity
— Let's treat survivor stories with respect —



TELLING THE STORY

Instead of focusing on:

- Graphic details
- Suffering and abuse

Focus on:

- Resilience, strength, hope
- Preventing and Ending Trafficking

**Shift narrative to the Buyers,
Traffickers, & Systems of exploitation**



Say This		Not That	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sex Trafficker	X	Pimp
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Survivor	X	Slave
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Child Sexual Abuse Material	X	Child Pornography
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	X	Child Prostitution
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism	X	Child Sex Tourism

Activity:

Reviewing Media Articles

Objective: Highlight words and phrases that you think are good messaging or harmful messaging.



Good



Harmful



Unsure

Ohio man sentenced in sex trafficking case involving teen forced into prostitution, drug use



Man sentenced in sex trafficking case

By **Outlet Web Staff** | April 10, 2019 at 4:21 PM EDT - Updated April 10 at 10:31 PM

CINCINNATI, OH (Outlet) - A local man has been sentenced to eight years in prison for sex trafficking a minor. The sentencing is connected to a larger case involving two brothers who have since been arrested and accused of forcing a teen into prostitution and narcotics use.

Steven E. Ritter, 54, of Sharonville, was sentenced in U.S. District Court Wednesday to 96 months in prison. According to court documents, in April 2017, Ritter coordinated with two brothers to arrange for sexual acts with a 16-year-old female. Ritter paid \$200 to William P. Washington, 38, of Cincinnati, for Washington to deliver narcotics and the minor victim to his hotel room.

There, Ritter engaged in sexual activity with the victim and they both used the narcotics. After doing so, Ritter called William Washington, Jr., 49, of Cincinnati, to come get the victim from the hotel.

Ritter pleaded guilty in February 2018 to one count of sex trafficking a minor. As part of his plea, Ritter admitted that on numerous previous occasions, he arranged personally and with others to pay Washington for narcotics and prostitutes. Some of those instances involved both an adult female and the minor victim.

The two brothers were each arrested in June 2017 on federal charges of sex trafficking a minor. According to their complaint, the minor victim was forced to engage in prostitution, was injected with heroin and forced to smoke crack cocaine. The victim told investigators she was often beaten and on one occasion had a gun held to her head while being forced to have sex with someone.

Every time she was forced to engage in prostitution, Washington and Washington, Jr. arranged her transportation and had control over the transactions.

Both brothers have pleaded guilty. Washington, Jr. has since filed to a motion to withdraw his guilty plea, and the court has yet to rule on that motion.

Sharonville police **Person #1** said the 16-year-old **was a runaway** from Clermont County. She was eventually found at the Woodspring Suites off Hauck Road in Sharonville.

“Our initial radio run was to respond to the hotel for a female subject stating someone was trying to kill her,” said **Person #1**

Person #2 is the Human Trafficking Liaison for the **County** Sheriff’s Office -- she is also the owner of **Business**

“In hotels, what we’ll often see is there will be a young female made to look older,” she said. **“She’ll try** to look 18, sometimes she stands in the lobby, a lot of times **they don’t know where they are.”**

#2 says runaways are at extreme high risk of being recruited for labor and sex trafficking in the U.S.

“This young lady was recruited, her vulnerability was, ‘I need a place to stay, I need food,’” said #2. “Recruitment is three easy steps -- we create a relationship, identify a vulnerability and exploit it.”

One in four girls -- one in six boys -- according the CDC, will be raped or molested by another child or adult before the age of 18 in the U.S.

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A GOOD EXAMPLE

“Judge says teen murder suspect was not a human trafficking victim”

Cincinnati Enquirer; June 8, 2020

- Explains what Safe Harbor is
- Doesn't name the teen
- Talks about forced drug trafficking
- Explains harm of jailing teenagers

NEXT STEPS

Increase Education & Focus on Marginalized / Oppressed Groups:

- Black / African-American People
- Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women
- LGBTQ People
- Latinx & Other People of Color
- People with Disabilities
- Immigrants & Refugees

NEXT STEPS

Learn more:

- **Do's & Don'ts of Human Trafficking Awareness** IJPCcincinnati.org
- **My Story, My Dignity Guidelines** freedomunited.org
- **Trauma-Informed Care & Response** acesconnection.com

NEXT STEPS

Take action:

- Challenge yourself and your organizations to do better
 - ◆ Review & Evaluate materials
 - ◆ Practice for media interviews
 - ◆ Pay Survivors
- Respond through Op-Eds or Letters to the Editor
- Hold people & organizations accountable

Questions



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A portrait of Dr. Suk-hee Kim, a woman with short dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a green and white patterned top and a name tag that reads "NKU DR. SUK-HEE KIM".

Human Trafficking, Health Equity, and Academic Collaborative

For more information, please visit [website](#) and contact Dr. Suk-hee Kim, Ph.D., COI, MSW, Associate Professor in the School of Social Work & NKU's Diversity Faculty Fellow at kims16@nku.edu