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April 5, 2022

“It’s not your fault”

How Attribution of Responsibility and Empathy Lead to Helping Behavior for Migrants who are
Victims of Labor Trafficking

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Abstract

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Human trafficking is slavery. No gender, race, social class, nor state has escaped its impact. Given this abominable human rights violation, every actor—governments, civil societies, individuals— has the responsibility to address it. Studies find that personal stories, narratives that describe the life experiences of an individual, move individuals to action and opinion change on human rights issues. Hence, this study applies such findings in the context of a previously unexamined human rights issue: trafficked migrants. It brings social psychology and political science literature together, drawing from attribution theory to examine the impact of “responsibility” frames on increasing collective mobilization and opinion change. Utilizing an experimental survey design, the study finds that personal-choice migration frames elicit more anger and disgust whereas state-caused migration frames evoke more empathy. However, personal choice frames also lead to greater willingness to help. This study is the first of its kind to conjoin pro-social and framing theories to inform anti-trafficking actors on mechanisms that drive individuals to mobilize for migrants who are victims of labor trafficking.

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“Human morality is unthinkable without empathy”

- Frans de Waal

I. Introduction

I begin with a true story. Lucas Benitez, farmworker and front-line organizer was born in Guerrero, Mexico and moved to Immokalee, Florida to work in tomato fields at age 16. When he faced extreme working conditions, violence, fear, and minimal wages, he united with other workers to address their labor exploitation and helped found the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (rfkhumanrights.org). “Debt begins when the coyote turns you over to the crew leader,” he states. “So many of our companeros have suffered in this way and say being sold...feels worse than being an animal... You get sold for \$500, but next day the debt is \$1,000. Then they add on rent and food, and your debt increases...If you have a slow day in the fields, the crew leader will say, ‘You owe us more now; you didn’t work well.’ You never see the check stubs, so you have no idea where you stand with your debt...’ By convincing the worker that he is responsible and might someday pay off this debt, the slaveholder diverts his attention from the real situation: he is a slave and if he tries to leave he will be hurt” (Bales & Soodalter, 51).

Section 1.1 The Problem and its Scope

Benitez’ story is one of countless accounts of human trafficking in America today. Human trafficking is modern day slavery. It is defined as the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons” by means of “using methods of threat, force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of exploitation” (UNCATOC). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) defines trafficking as the following:

- a.) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or
- b.) The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. (22 U.S.C. § 7102 (9)).

Like other violent crimes, trafficking flourishes where vulnerabilities are high; factors that heighten exploitation include internal characteristics such as sexual orientation, age, and gender as well as external factors such as homelessness and lack of family support, poverty, political instability in a country of origin, and inequality from globalization (IOM).

According to the International Labor Organization, an estimated 40.3 million people are victims of human trafficking globally, and approximately 14,500 to 17,500 people trafficked into the U.S. annually, with at least 10,000 people labor trafficked at a given time in the U.S. (aclu.org). Migrants are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to language and cultural barriers, visa status, fear of deportation and law enforcement agencies, secondary displacement, and lack of knowledge of their rights. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants have become even more vulnerable to trafficking due to increased mental and financial vulnerabilities and stay-at-home orders. In fact, according to one IST Research survey of 6,000 migrant workers in the Gulf States, “employers were 36 percent more likely to confine migrant domestic workers to their workplace and were 240 percent more likely to force those workers to work on rest days than any other migrant workers...and 50 percent of migrant workers reported bearing new debts because of the pandemic...” (Department of State 2021).

Though trafficking is a global-scaled problem with socio-economic and political implications, its impact on the trafficked individual is why this issue holds more than theoretical importance. The human rights violations inflicted on these individuals leave physical and psychological consequences that are serious and long term including mental health disorders, self-harm and suicidal ideation, intrusive memories of abuse, as well as substance abuse and inability to plan for the future (ovcttac.gov).

Section 1.2 The Response to Human Trafficking: Why Collective Action Matters

Given the nefarious nature and pervasive scope of the problem, government and civil society actors have built in mechanisms to counter trafficking. The 4 Ps paradigm—prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership¹—outlined in the U.S. TVPA and UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol, is one of the fundamental frameworks outlining the four fronts to combat trafficking (state.gov). Prevention addresses a focus on public awareness campaigns both at the origin and receiving country to warn vulnerable populations. Prevention also consists of law reforms and enforcement. Protection focuses on victim-centered protection such as providing victims with services and means for reintegration. Prosecution addresses the restorative justice aspect of the process and partnerships focus on forming coalitions and uniting various non-profits to share resources and information to best eradicate human trafficking.

Within the aforementioned anti-trafficking framework, individuals play an integral role. One particular area the public plays an immediate role is in prevention. Government agencies and other non-profit agencies focused on prevention emphasize public education and awareness to encourage the reporting of suspicious activities (e.g. DHS' Blue Campaign, A21's Can you

¹ The “fourth P” was added to the “3P” paradigm in 2009 by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

See Me Campaign). Increasing public awareness about the signs of trafficking and methods to report it multiplies the likelihood of trafficking being reported and addressed. For instance, the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline (operated by Polaris, an anti-trafficking non-profit organization) received more than 35,174 hotline calls of which 78.2% were those who either were in direct contact with potential victims, indirect contact, or observed suspicious activity—40.9%, 11.9%, and 25.4% respectively (Tillyer et al., 2021). Public awareness of human trafficking is necessary for collective action.

Another factor necessary for collective action is a common frame. There must be an agreement that a particular phenomenon is an issue in order for people to unite under this frame to bring about tangible, systemic change (McEntire et al., 2015). Frames exist in all appeals for change, and they are commonly used by organizations to mobilize individuals around an issue (McEntire et al., 2015). In essence, a frame consists of the type of appeal and the intentional salience placed (through including/omitting information or emphasis placement) on a particular interest to guide an individual's response process. Though there are multiple ways to frame a single problem and there is no one generalizable framing theory, personal narrative frames lead to the most donations and opinion change for human rights violations (compared to informational or motivational frames (McEntire et al., 2015)). This effect has been attributed to "empathy and other emotional reactions" though it has not been tested (McEntire et al., 2015).

My study will test the generalizability of the McEntire et al. (2015) findings in the context of trafficked labor migrants, an understudied, marginalized population. The questions I pose are the following: under what circumstances does the public empathize with and or support migrants who are victims of trafficking? Does the type of appeal (personal frame) and the particular human right issue (trafficked labor migrants) impact how people respond? (e.g., feel

about the problem and willingness to take action to address it) Specifically how do gendered attribution of blame frames influence feelings of empathy and influence helping behavior?

Drawing on literature from prosocial, framing, and attribution of responsibility theories, the contributions of this research are three-fold: it applies the McEntire et al. (2015) study in the context of migrants who are trafficked, a previously unexamined human rights issue. Secondly, it informs anti-trafficking actors about mechanisms that drive the public to mobilize against human rights violations. Thirdly, it tests a new combination of relationships by drawing together gender and personal and responsibility framing strategies and the impact these frames have on increasing consensus building and micro mobilization.

II. Literature

Section 2.1 Human rights and Empathy

Why do personal stories matter? What about a personal story provokes people to act on behalf of another? Literature in fields ranging from social psychology to political science have explored how narratives affect individual emotions and move individuals to opinion change and action (Bae, 2021; Erlandsson et al., 2018; Merchant et al., 2010; Das et al., 2008, McEntire et al., 2015). The literature suggests that there are key components in a personal story that have the power to move individuals. One factor is the personability of a story known as the identified victim effect (Kogut & Ritov, 2005). A story of a single, identified victim led to greater emotional arousal and higher donations than stories with non-identified individuals (Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Erlandsson et al., 2016). Identification intensified feelings which, in turn, increased giving. Another factor which affects individual responses is the specific emotional appeal made in a story; emotion-specific frames have been studied in various ways: positive or negative

appeals (Erlandsson et al, 2018.), loss and gain-framed appeals (Cao, 2016; Chou & Murnighan, 2013) and positive or negative consequences, warmth or guilt-framed appeals (Haynes et al., 2004).² Among the range of emotional appeals, social psychology literature affirms that emotions broadly mediate pro-social action, particularly empathy³ (Thravalou et al., 2021; Rudolph et al. 2004, Weiner 2000, Batson et al., 1997, Betancourt, 1990, Weiner, 1980).

However, there is, at present, only limited interaction between political science and social psychology literature connecting the role of empathy on human rights issues with the political implications of prosocial motivations. From the political science literature, one justification for how personal narratives generate empathy and mobilize action is by “humanizing the subject and connecting the audience to him or her....” and by “...elicit[ing] strong emotional reactions based on a connection formed from a sense of common humanity, and the recognition of the inhumanity of rights abuses” (McEntire et al., 2015, 412). Though the human rights frame for empathic emotions is not directly tested in McEntire et al. (2015), the rationale behind the study is that through an appeal to human rights, respondents feel empathy and consequently, demonstrate prosocial behavior.⁴ This study will be directly studying the emotions that drive action.

In conjunction to the McEntire study, another study examines human rights appeals towards undocumented immigrants and U.S. citizens in need, and it finds that human rights

² The results from literature studying framing techniques often vary due to differing measures for ‘help-giving.’

³ Help-giving behavior, similar to prosocial action, is an overarching term to describe actions intended to help people (e.g. in the form of support such as financial or physical assistance as circumstances allow)

⁴ To elaborate, empathy is not directly tested in the McEntire et al. (2015) study; rather, it is only measured emotions on a broad scale without delineating the specific emotions that drive behavior (e.g. the survey questionnaire asked: “how much of an emotional reaction do you experience”) (McEntire et al., 2015, 416).

appeals⁵ are ineffectual in support of pro social government action (Voss et al., 2020).⁶ This demonstrates that the impact of human rights appeals is not ubiquitous to all social issues. In an ideal world, human rights abuses in their own right should motivate individuals to take action (or no abuses at all). The reality is that every human “right” is intertwined with the politics of responsible actors, issue framing, and scarce resources to name a few. Such external variables evoke emotions that can interfere with empathetic emotions and inhibit helping behavior. For instance, a recent study finds that holding anti-immigration sentiment leads to less public support for victim services for migrant trafficked persons (de Vries et al., 2019). Thus, not only are human rights abuses viewed unequally but the personal stories that frame them are viewed unequally as well. Thus, the human rights appeal for empathy, particularly as it relates to migrants who are trafficked, is unlikely to hold. Thus, rights-based framing for human rights will not be studied.

The ability to apply the effectiveness of particular appeals is crucial for both civil service and international actors that seek to find ways to best address and alleviate specific human rights abuses. Given the limited applicability of appeals to different social groups, this study will be the first of its kind to examine the role of empathy on migrants who are trafficked: it combines the highly polarized issue of migration with the widely acknowledged “immoral” phenomena of trafficking. Nonetheless, considering that empathy is an integral component to the “development and diffusion of the very ideas of human rights” (McEntire et al., 2015) and it is found to

⁵ Defined by an appeal to the dignity of a human being and common humanity

⁶ The Voss et al. (2020) study also found that regardless of the frame—American values, civil rights, or human rights – U.S. respondents were significantly less supportive of government action for undocumented immigrants than citizens. One plausible reason Voss et al. (2020) found less government support for undocumented migrants may be due to the differing views on the responsible actor; respondents may have believed that the *government* should not be responsible for supporting immigrants (as opposed to non-profits, individuals etc). This present study will test the support for migrants who are trafficked on an individual level.

influence help-giving behavior more holistically, empathy's role on human rights issues deserves to be examined separately and exclusively in light of its political implications. This study will be the first of its kind to address both of these aspects in a singular study.

The question which remains after an overview of the social psychology and political science literature on framing is the following: if empathy is tied to pro social actions but human rights appeals do not always guarantee empathy and pro social actions, what can? This study will address this question and bridge the gap between these two literatures.

2.2 Empathy–Mediator for Helping Behavior and Attitudes

As stated above, if empathy is not necessarily evoked by “shared-humanity” as the human rights frame argument poses, how else could empathy evoke prosocial action? Although there are numerous plausible explanations, two primary means are delineated in this review, and they are drawn primarily from the social psychology literature. One approach is through attribution and the latter through empathy induction. Both approaches affirm the mediating role that emotions—specifically empathy—play in directing helping behavior and attitudes.⁷

The first possible mechanism that increases an individual's empathy is when an individual has perceived lack of personal control over a situation. When an individual is not responsible for their plight (lacking control), onlookers feel sympathetic and behave prosocially (e.g. help the individual etc.) (Weiner, 2000). The underlying theory for this phenomenon, Attribution Theory, describes the process under which individuals use information to arrive at causal explanations for events (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Heider's Theory of Attribution (1958) established a distinction between two types of attribution, namely, dispositional and situational

⁷ For a more comprehensive overview of attribution, see [Muschetto & Siegel \(2021\)](#)

attributions (Heider, 1982). Dispositional (internal) attribution assigns “the cause of behavior to internal characteristics of a person rather than to outside forces” (e.g. personality trait) (McLeod, 2012). On the other hand, situational (external) attributions assign “the cause of behavior to some situation or event outside a person’s control rather than to some internal characteristic” (e.g. environmental factors) (McLeod, 2012).

Building off this, Weiner (1980) established an attribution approach towards behavior consisting of tripartite division between the “thought, feeling, and action” of a given phenomenon (Weiner, 1980, 86). The study found that attribution of responsibility through perceived personal controllability guided an individual’s emotions that then directed behavior. Specifically, the study found that attribution to factors uncontrollable to the individual generated positive emotions (sympathy) and increased willingness to help (also described as helping judgment). Recent studies continue to build off these studies and affirm the reliability of this theory (Zhang et al., 2008) in cross-cultural contexts as well as the traditional academic setting (Peterson & Schreiber, 2012) though most commonly in a work or teaching setting. In this sense, empathy as a mediator from attribution to action is largely uncontested.

Correspondingly, the induced empathy approach, developed by Batson, among other scholars, finds that induced empathy through empathic *perspective-taking* of the other increases helping (Batson, 1990). Thus, the former approach states that lack of perceived control creates a state of empathic emotions whereas Batson’s study proposes that the act of perspective-taking creates empathy. In either case, whether through attribution or perspective taking, empathic emotions drive helping behavior.⁸

⁸ *Empathic emotions* are defined as interpersonal emotions of compassion and sympathy by Batson (1997) and *sympathy* by Weiner (1980)). Empathy, however, is a multi-faceted word. Social psychologists have described four cognitive states as “empathy” (Batson & Ahmad, 2009). The divide is along a “cognitive/perpetual state” or an “affective/emotional state” (Batson & Ahmad, 2009, 144). *Cognitive/perceptual states* consist of *imagining* how one

To synthesize the two approaches, Betancourt (1990) conjoined the two approaches into a structural equations model and found that *both* causal attribution and induced empathy by perspective-taking “additively determine helping behavior.”⁹ More specifically, this study found that “the same empathic emotions proposed to influence helping are affected by both perceived controllability of causes and empathic perspectives...reflecting the importance of emotions as mediators between cognition and action in social behavior” (Betancourt, 1990, 587-588). There is a distinction between inducing empathy through perspective-taking as found in Batson et al. (1997) from the empathic emotions mediated in the causal attribution approach found in Weiner (1980). In order to test the role of attribution more specifically, the latter will be applied to this study.

Batson et al. (1997), similar to Weiner (1980), also addresses the influence of perceived responsibility—though more so as a nullifying variable to empathy. Both studies measure the variable through a form of “perceived personal controllability” though applied in different circumstances (Batson et al., 1997; Weiner, 1980). Interestingly, Batson et al. (1997) specifically find that identification towards a member of a stigmatized group improves attitudes towards the group as a whole—*regardless* of perceived responsibility. In other words, the study finds that when empathy is already evoked, perceived responsibility does not impact empathy. This seems to counter the finding of Betancourt (1990) except that both Betancourt (1980) and Weiner (1980) find that *temporality* of the perspective-taking matters; in other words, learning about

or how another person may think or feel in a particular plight. On the other hand, *affective/emotional states* emphasize feeling for another person or feeling as another person feels. As the name of the typology suggests, the emphasis is on the emotional state. All aforementioned psychological states have been considered empathy. In this study, empathy is tested as an affective/emotional state, or in terms of how respondents feel towards another person in need. Further studies may examine the role of different aspects of empathy on human rights issues

⁹ Helping behavior defined as both the judgments of help-giving (willingness) as well as actual help offered

responsibility before empathic perspective-taking is induced inhibits empathy. Thus, the role of perceived responsibility on empathic emotions stands.

Though the present study could have just as easily directed its focus to the role of empathy through perspective-taking as to attribution, it looks at empathy from the attribution perspective for reasons that pertain primarily to its intersectionality with its political implications. Political science literature often focuses on blame (attribution of blame) and public action as an act independent of empathy. Blame holds a specific role on all levels of interactions between actors. Human rights organizations “name and blame” (or name and shame) states for human rights abuses, and this contributes to improved human rights practices by states (Murdie & Davis, 2012). On the other hand, “political entrepreneurs” blame specific actors which increases the frequency of collective action through protests (Javeline, 2003). Blame also plays a role in national politics (Bellucci, 2014; Maestas et al., 2008). For instance, attribution of blame is viewed in light of political accountability—including its implications on political processes such as party affiliations or elections (Bellucci, 2014; Lyons & Jaeger, 2014). Hence the role of blame in politics has often been pointed at punishing ‘guilty’ actors (e.g. voting individuals out of office) or rising up against blameworthy actors (e.g. protests, boycotts) as opposed to blaming as a mechanism for empathy towards an individual in need. Blame serves as a mechanism for applying pressure rather than a tool towards empathy.

This study will bridge the gap between a political act of blame and the prosocial emotion of empathy. Thus, it contributes to the social psychology and political science literature by looking specifically at the role blame has on empathy to lead to collective action— mobilizing the public to act. It not only applies what is known about perceived responsibility and empathic

emotions to understudied, politically-charged groups but it also measures the willingness to engage in various public activism following the exposure to the attribution.

Secondly, attribution is studied to fill the gap in generalizability of attribution to the specific contexts and environments of marginalized groups. Attribution literature has primarily looked at attribution from the standpoint of achievement-related contexts and work settings (Weiner, 1980; Muschetto & Siegell, 2021) with the context of the perceived controllability variable to each situational context. Migrants who are trafficked face a unique challenge because they are often placed into their given circumstances through a series of more insidious means of coercion and manipulation than the traditional more or less obvious “drunk man falling vs. disabled man” (Weiner, 1980). This study will therefore affirm and qualify the role of attribution on empathy in regards to a highly complex and real-world group of individuals in addition to increasing the generalizability of the respondent pool.¹⁰

Attribution as a means to frame a human right issue for social change is highly relevant to civil society organizations because they seek to understand the effects of framing on collective action efforts as well as explore new strategies for mobilization in unexplored contexts (McEntire et al., 2015). Viewed in this way, attribution is divided into a variety of “frames” which organize the conceptual boundaries of a particular issue.¹¹ Thus, appeals undergirded by

¹⁰ Batson et al. (1997) and Weiner (1980) utilized respondents who were all students at a particular university.

¹¹ Personal frames, like the one used in McEntire et al. (2015) and in this study, fall broadly under framing theory. Whether it be a headline, television ad, or charity appeal, information relayed to the public has a frame. A frame is the way a particular subject is emphasized, organized, and interpreted; it helps individuals make sense of the information they are receiving. For instance, public tolerance towards a protest may be framed as a threat to public safety or a right to free speech. This, in turn, shapes an individual’s opinion and response to this issue. Granted, “personal frames” do not align perfectly with this understanding of framing theory, but it nonetheless works in a similar way—by eliciting particular emotions or aspects seminal to personal frames—however those key components are defined—they guide individuals’ decision making to be in line with the goals of the narrative frame. In other words, frames inherently shape opinions and actions by developing conceptual boundaries around issues that reorient one’s opinions and response (Chong et al., 2007). For instance, after exposure to a frame that names combatting human trafficking internationally as fighting crime and another as a violation of human rights (Charnysh

attribution theory serves as a compelling and convincing argument that provides ground for broadening the socio-political implications of frames, empathy, and collective action.

Section 2.3 Trafficking victim and the Role of Gender

The previous section provides an overview of empathy and prosocial behavior in the social psychology literature as well as the rationale for attribution as the primary frame for this study. The following section overviews literature on the gendered nature of human trafficking and public perceptions. Though there are currently little to no studies that look at how the gender of an individual in need influences attribution of responsibility and prosocial behavior specifically, there are studies that examine public perceptions of human trafficking. Such studies affirm that there are overarching themes as it relates to the “face” of human trafficking and that prevailing perceptions are both gendered and limited in scope. Gendered and stereotyped perceptions of trafficking have the potential to influence public perception of need and controllability. For this reason, the gender of the individual in need will also be examined in this study.

One of the primary drivers of public perception is the media. Human trafficking on media is overwhelmingly gendered which, when reinforced, shapes public perception. Public awareness campaigns and media tend to overemphasize one type of trafficking and victim demographics over others. Sanford et al. (2016), for instance, conducted a content analysis of articles on human trafficking published in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* between 2012-2013 (a continuation of a study conducted from 1986-2006). The study finds that “...victims are most

et al., 2015), exposure to the respective frames would theoretically move individuals to “assign greater weight to the value that the frame invokes” (Chong et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 1997).

often portrayed as minors and females, reflecting prevailing assumptions regarding ideal victimhood, where some individuals are viewed as more “legitimate” and worthy of assistance than others” (Sanford et al., 2016, 153). Kemp (2014), who conducted field study at a case management non-profit for victims of human trafficking found that the dominant frame used to describe victims “was a dichotomous narrative of the unagentic victim and the moral survivor” (Kemp, 2014, 29). She found such dichotomies created by service providers contributed to the construction of ‘pure victims.’ Once again, adopting the perfect victim trope is harmful by reinforcing distorted conceptions of who and where the need is concentrated (Rocha 2016).

Thus, those who do not fit the “majority” profile of trafficking victims either in gender or type of trafficking— such as men who are victims of sex trafficking—are marginalized¹². In other words, because the overwhelming perception of human trafficking is sex trafficking, which is most commonly associated with women and children, other categorical victims such as men in labor trafficking find themselves against the perceived gender stereotypes of trafficking victims (Pocock et al., 2016)). Thus, the influence and prevalence of media framing suggest that the perception of trafficking by gender and type is already seared into the public conscience.

In conjunction to the prevailing victim frames, due to mass media, public perception of “victimizers” is gendered as well. Studies find that embedded into various public campaigns, there exists a “male demand” narrative in which “predatory non-white men” are the victimizers and “innocent young white girls” are the victims (Majic et al., 2017,9). Such perceptions, once again, further hinder perceptions of victimhood of men who are trafficked.

The literature on gendered framed and human trafficking focuses primarily on sex trafficking. An overlooked category in the public consciousness and literature is perceptions on

¹² For more information see humantraffickinghotline.org and ECPAT-USA

labor trafficking. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that about 60% of state-imposed forced labor victims were men. This reflects the disproportionate gendered impact of forced labor, particularly in government-conscripted manual labor-intensive sectors such as construction, agriculture, and fishing (ILO, 2017, 51). Nonetheless, for various reasons, including the inconsistent laws protecting labor trafficking victims or lack of convincing evidence, labor trafficking victims are often an overlooked population in both the legal and public eye.¹³ Thus, this study aims to fill in the gaps in literature studying the public perception as it relates to labor trafficking victims.

III. Theory: Attribution-Empathy and Human Trafficking

The following section now examines the theoretical frameworks of attribution and gender theories to test the drivers of empathy and helping behavior.

Section 3. 1 Attribution

Based on Weiner's Attribution Theory, attribution of responsibility guides an individual's emotions (sympathy/pity vs. disgust/anger), and emotions, in turn, become the mechanism that gives behaviors its direction (Weiner 1980). For instance, once an event is perceived, individuals search for a causal attribution which evokes emotions that lead to helping (or neglectful) behavior. When an individual is not responsible for their plight (either due to internal or situational reasons), onlookers feel sympathetic and behave pro-socially (e.g. help the individual

¹³ Not all states recognize international definitions and indicators of trafficking in their own national prosecution and identification of 'victims.' The inconsistencies in recognition may lead to underreporting of victims per international laws. For instance, in Singapore, national trafficking classifications exclude some trafficked labor migrants from being recognized as trafficking victims despite being considered so under international law (Yea 2015). Lack of recognition is a common and critical problem as it comes to monitoring and tracking trafficking instances.

etc.) (Weiner, 2000). Weiner (1980) found that attribution of responsibility through perceived *personal controllability* guided an individual's emotions that then directed behavior. Specifically, this study found that attribution to factors uncontrollable to the individual generated positive affect (sympathy) and increased willingness to help (helping judgment) while perceived controllability led to disgust and anger.

Individual-cause attribution has implications in the real world as well. As discussed before, labor migrants who are trafficked face specific obstacles as it relates to public perception of victimhood. Labor trafficking migrants are perceived to have greater control because they often chose to leave their home country before being coerced into trafficking; though from an ethical standpoint, it is not desirable, perceived victimhood is often tied closely to less perceived control (Verkuyten, 2018). In other words, the more control one has over their plight, the more responsible they are perceived for their plight. The less responsible an individual is perceived to be for their plight, the more willing people are to engage in helping behavior towards the individual in need. On the other hand, the state-blame frame attributes responsibility for an individual's plight to an actor outside the individual ("they had no choice but to leave"). Because attribution becomes external and outside the control of the individual, one would expect respondents to feel empathy and be willing to help the individual. Thus,

*H1: If the trafficking of a migrant is attributed to their **personal decision** to leave their home country, respondents will feel less empathy and be less willing to engage in helping behavior than if attributed to their **home country** (forced to leave).*

Section 3. 2 Gendered Human Trafficking and Migrants

Public attitudes on migrants and trafficking victims based on gender are wide-ranging. Most studies that look at the role of gender in immigrant or trafficking-sentiment examine the gender of the respondent rather than at the gender of the migrant themselves (Honeyman et al., 2016; Ponce, 2017; Naber, 2006) However, the question posed here is whether the gender of the migrant in the narrative impacts public attitudes and willingness to respond.

Role Congruity Theory

According to Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), public opinion about women and men are based on the constructs of gender roles. Gender roles refer to the consensual expectations of women and men in society (Eagly & Karau, 2002). There are two types of consensual norms in society: *descriptive* norms, which are the expectations of what members of groups actually do (stereotypes) and *injunctive* norms, which are what society expects individuals *should* do. Social Role Theory proposes that the former expectations can be categorized by communal and agentic attributes (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987). Communal attributes—such as being affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, nurturant (primarily in domestic sphere)—are attributed strongly to women whereas agentic attributes—assertive, controlling, dominant (public sphere)—are attributed strongly to men (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra 2006). Furthermore, studies find that these stereotyped attributes are also embraced normatively (injunctively) (Spence & Helmreich, 1978; J.E. Williams & Best, 1990b). In other words, individuals believe that each gender *should* fill their respective roles in the aforementioned ways. Subsequently, Role Congruity Theory states that remaining consistent with the expectations of one's social role results in positive evaluations whereas not meeting expectations leads to prejudiced attitudes.

In the context of migrants who are trafficked, because migrating to seek a job involves controlled decision-making, it is an inherently agentic action and thus, more in line with a man's gender role, as well as corroborating with the stereotype that men are the primary breadwinners of the family. Given this notion, people may feel more sympathy for a man who is trafficked while seeking a job because he is exploited while conforming to his social role than a woman who is perceived to have "stepped-out" of her prescribed role as the nurturer and 'remaining' agent in a family.

Thus,

H₂: If the trafficked individual is a male migrant, respondents will feel more empathy and be more willing to engage in helping behavior than if he was a female migrant.

Benevolent Sexism

An alternative theory is that people feel more empathy and willingness to act if the trafficked individual is a female migrant than a male migrant. Trafficked women, though associated with victimhood in sex trafficking more than labor trafficking in the U.S. (Bonilla & Mo, 2018), are often considered more innocent, vulnerable, and in need of more protection than men, who are presumed to have more agency over their own life and in need of less protection (Leiby et al., 2021). This is in line with benevolent sexism theory, which posits that "women should be protected by men" (protective paternalism) and "...that women possess domestic qualities that few men possess..." (complementary gender differentiation) (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005, 634). Such subjectively positive attitudes toward women contribute to a sense of "protection, idealization, and affection for women." (Hideg & Ferris, 2016, 4). Hideg & Ferris (2016) find that those with benevolent sexist attitudes were more likely to support an employment equity

policy supporting women due to the mediation of compassion. Though not a perfect comparison to the present study, it suggests that benevolent sexism has a role on evoking particular empathetic emotions towards women to lead to prosocial behavior.

Thus alternatively,

H3: If the trafficked individual is a female migrant, respondents will feel more empathy and be more willing to engage in helping behavior than if she was a male migrant.

Section 3.3 Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

The following section now examines the role of respondent characteristics that may interact with the treatment (attribution and or gender) to impact attitudes and willingness to act. The primary characteristics of respondents examined their gender and political ideology.

Gender of Respondent

In general, studies have consistently found that women are more empathetic towards others than men due to a greater perceived “sensitivity to the suffering of others in general” (Neff & Pommier 2012, 11; Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, & Miller, 1989; Eisenberg et al., 1988). Thus,

H4 If the respondent is a female, they will feel more empathy towards the victim regardless of their gender. [of the migrant]

As it relates to attributional gender differences, the literature is limited. Some studies find that men tend to place stronger weight on internal attribution and women towards external attribution in achievement behavior settings (Frieze et al., 1982). Other studies argue that social roles associated with one’s gender predisposed individuals to different attributions. In other words,

people who have less or limited control are more inclined to attribute change to external factors than someone with more control (Shirazi & Biel, 2005). This is consistent with the study conducted by Kouabenan et al. (2001) which found that supervisors who were men were more internal in attribution to accidents than that of their subordinates (Shirazi & Biel, 2005, 99). Such studies posit that internality bias for men and externality bias among women occur due to preexisting social roles. In this study, each respondent has an equal amount of control (reading vignette) control over social/physical environment and the situation is not one that is being done “to them” but one with third person perspectives. Despite these variations, due to preexisting social roles, there is a chance that respondents impose their own gendered expectations onto the individual in need. Thus,

H₅ If the respondent is male, they are more likely to place internal attribution on the migrant than a female respondent.¹⁴

Political Ideology of Respondent

Studies confirm that liberals tend to associate attribution to external causes (structural/social causes) and conservatives towards internal causes (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Liberals were more generous toward the needy regardless of perceived responsibility. Farwell & Weiner (2000) find that conservatives were less generous toward “responsible individuals” than liberals—another way to say that conservatives place greater internal attribution blame than liberals. Thus,

H₆ If the respondent is a liberal, they will place greater external attribution and feel even more empathy and willingness to help the migrant in need.

H₇ If the respondent is a conservative, they will place greater internal attribution and feel even less empathy and be less willing to help the migrant in need.¹⁵

¹⁴ Regardless of attribution treatment

¹⁵ For both *H₆* and *H₇*, the respondents are compared against conservatives in *H₆* and liberals in *H₇* and *H₈*

There is a strong correlation regarding gender roles and a respondent's political ideology as well. Conservative and liberal worldviews vary on their models of the family—conservatives follow the “strict father” and liberals the “nurturing parent” models which mirror much of the social norms outlined in the Role Congruity Theory (Lakoff, 2002). Fathers are to have the strict responsibility of “supporting and protecting the family” and the mother responsible for taking “care of the household, raising children, and upholding the father's authority” (Brint & Abrutyn, 2010). The nurturing parent model tends to create a more egalitarian model of power over a more strict authoritarian model (Brint & Abrutyn, 2010).

Thus,

H₈ If the respondent is a conservative, they will feel less empathy and be less willing to help a female migrant who leaves their country than a male migrant.

IV. Research Design

4.1 Survey Experiment Overview

To test these theoretical expectations, I conducted a survey experiment on the MTurk platform. MTurk is an online tool that compensates individuals (called workers) to complete particular HITs (Human Intelligence Tasks). Its usage has grown significantly in the social sciences over the past decade--particularly in political science (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Horton et al., 2011; Shank, 2015).

The reasons for this are primarily due to its capacity to facilitate inexpensive experiments---with respect to both monetary cost per subject as well as implementation costs (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). Secondly, MTurk provides a substantially stronger internal and external validity compared to other instruments. Horton et al. (2011) found that online

experiments are “...just as valid—both internally and externally—as laboratory and field experiments, while often requiring far less money and time to design and conduct” (Horton et al., 2011, 399).

As it relates to external validity, MTurk provides a data set representative (though not identical) to the U.S. population as a whole than traditional subject pools (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). Admittedly, U.S. MTurk workers have been found to be slightly “younger, more liberal, and slightly more educated than the U.S. population” (McEntire et al., 2015; Berinsky et al., 2012). Thus, though there may be a slight limitation to generalizability, MTurk workers are more representative than standard samples utilized in political science studies and sample differences are substantively small (Berinsky et al., 2012).

MTurk presents appealing factors in terms of internal validity as well. In order to establish strong internal validity within an experiment, randomization is essential. Hence, MTurk does this well by incorporating random assignment into the design by allowing workers to undertake eligible HITs and are accepted into the study in this random sequence (Berinsky et al., 2012). Furthermore, internal validity is strengthened by the absence of any experimenter bias (Paolacci et al., 2010).

Some concerns relating to internal validity include subject inattentiveness, repeat participants, attrition, and stable unit treatment value assumption. Subject inattentiveness is a concern for experimental survey studies. However, considering the reward incentives and a standard 95% prior acceptance rate from prior Requestors, MTurk workers have been found to generally pay greater attention to experimental and survey instruments than other subjects and have a greater incentive to carefully consider the questions and responses (Berinsky et al., 2012).

One challenge of online platforms is the possibility that MTurk workers may open multiple accounts to participate in the same study multiple times. However, this concern has been affirmed by studies to be inconsequential to results (Berinsky et al., 2012; Horton et al., 2012; Paolacci et al., 2010). This concern can also be diminished by increasing sample size and statistical power.

The third concern, selective attrition, is that subjects may drop out of the experiment for systematic reasons that lead to selection bias. This concern is more acute online when subjects are able to inspect treatments before deciding whether or not to enroll. This problem can be addressed by giving “subjects strong incentives to continue participating in the experiment after receiving their treatment assignments” through hooks and sufficient details at the outset (Horton et al., 2012).

Lastly, the stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA) is that a worker’s outcome is dependent on his or her treatment alone and not on any other worker (Horton et al., 2012). This can be violated if subjects communicate about the content of the treatment assignments. One advantage of MTurk is that online platforms generally limit communication to the online platform itself (as opposed to physical proximity) and it restricts the venues for communication (most likely on the discussion boards found on the platform itself). Limited platforms for communication can allow for better monitoring to prevent bias. One downside of online platforms, however, is that the data will be gathered over a period of time rather than at a specified single moment in time (Horton et al., 2012).

MTurk is particularly appealing as it relates to my study for the following reasons: it is particularly well-established for “mainly psychological tasks” (Shank, 2016). In particular, for a framing and priming study (Horton et al., 2011) MTurk was found to produce similar results to

physical “offline samples” (Shank, 2016). Another reason why MTurk is beneficial for this study is that it is particularly suited for political studies and provides better representation than common in-person convenience samples commonly used in experimental political science studies (Berinsky, 2017). Thus, given the specific advantages as well as general pros and cons of MTurk and online survey experiments more holistically, MTurk provides a valid and convincing tool for distributing and gathering results about the study.

4.2 Variables

The main variables examined in this study are the following: the independent variable is attribution of responsibility and the two dependent variables are empathy (and other emotions) towards the group through an individual and the respondents’ willingness to act. The subsequent section enumerates each of these terms.

Independent Variable: Attribution of Responsibility

The next key variable is attribution of responsibility. Attribution of responsibility implies the transference of responsibility onto someone or some entity. In regards to how responsibility is measured, literature from fields including philosophy, psychology, and political science describe what attribution of responsibility (or blame---used interchangeably) signifies. For the purposes of this study, attribution is defined and measured as what Weiner (1980) describes as perceived personal control. Building off the Heider’s theory on attribution (1958), Weiner (1980), enumerates the dimensions of causality to be the locus, stability, and controllability. Locus refers to whether the cause is internal or external to the actor. Stability refers to the temporary or permanent nature of the cause. Lastly, controllability addresses whether or not the cause was subject to personal influence. Weiner’s (1980) study confirmed the importance of perceived

personal control for attribution as well as how the interaction between locus and control influenced willingness to help. Though the measuring of the dimensions of causality are beyond the scope of this study, this study builds on the foundation of a tried and tested means of measuring attribution through the factor of controllability. Another study, Weiner et al., (1988) reinforces the use of “causal controllability” as a reliable means to measure attribution. Batson et al. (1997) addressed the impact of attribution in terms of victim responsibility, “bringing [their situation] on themselves” on empathy as well (Batson et al., 1997, 107). Once again, attribution is defined in regard to the “perceived” responsibility or control that an individual had on his or her own plight. Hence, despite the wide scope of responsibility, perceived control will be the means to measure degree of attribution. (e.g. agreeing or disagreeing on the extent that an agent could have prevented the cause.).

Regarding how perceived controllability is tested, this study bases its accounts on real life scenarios of migrants who are trafficked. The primary distinction is made between migrants who chose to leave their home country due to personal gain reasons and those who were forced to leave due to state instability and corruption. The trafficking of the migrant serves as a constant in both scenarios. Those who chose to leave their state of their own choice are the group that has more perceived control and those who were driven out by external forces are those perceived to have less control.

4.3 Treatment Rationale

Individual-Choice Rationale

The following section enumerates the break from an experimental design and the real-world narratives from which this study is based. This is necessary to do so that the study can be placed

in its proper frame within a larger more complex issue than can be measured within the scope of a study. In short, for the sake of experimentation, “individual and state responsibility” are distinguished as mutually exclusive factors. For instance, from a research design perspective, an individual who chose to leave has relatively more control than the one forced to leave by external causes. However, in the real world, there is literature that suggests that those who are forced still have some agency in their decision to leave (Adhikari, 2013). In other words, outside of the study, there is not always clear-cut binary distinction but rather a complex interaction of the two. Anne Gallagher, leading global expert on the international law of human trafficking describes it this way:

Contrary to the popular, sensationalized image of trafficked persons as either kidnapped or coerced into leaving their homes, more often than not the initial decision to migrate is a conscious one. Yet, the decision to uproot oneself, leave one’s home, and migrate elsewhere cannot be explained as a straightforward “rational choice by persons who assess the costs and benefits of relocating”; rather, an understanding of this decision must account for “macro factors that encourage, induce or often, compel migration.” “Push” factors are not created by the traffickers so much as this broader context, i.e., the economic impact of globalization. Traffickers, being opportunity-seeking by nature, simply take advantage of the resulting vulnerabilities to make a profit (Chuang, 2006, 141).

To address some of the distinctions in the relationship of agency, Kemp (2014) proposes that a direct counter to the ‘unagentic victim’ is the ‘responsible actor perspective’ proposed by Susan Wendell (1990). This perspective creates “...a distinction between holding victims responsible for their actions and making judgments on their responsibility.” This position demonstrates the

complexity of trafficking experiences and provides an alternative perspective that allows for “victim agency without blame” (Kemp, 2014, 32). One downfall of this perspective, however, is that it still focuses on the individual responsibility without directly addressing the systemic causes that perpetuate trafficking (Kemp, 2014). Although both dichotomies cannot be tested at the same time, my study builds on this ideology by presenting individual stories (those with and without agency for the sake of experimentation) and attributing blame to systemic causes of trafficking as one of the frames.¹⁶

Origin State Blame Rationale

Tangentially, from a psychology standpoint, “who” the external attribution does not matter to empathy so long as the actor is outside the individual. However, from a political implication context, where the generalizability of attribution outside of a particular political context is limited, knowing *who* is being blamed matters as much as the fact that it is a factor outside of the individual. In other words, although the specific blame categories are beyond the scope of this study, it is useful to understand that there are many actors that could be to blame for a particular issue and which responsible actor is emphasized may impact people’s opinions and willingness to act. For instance, taking the United States as an example, due to a wide range of socioeconomic reasons, a migrant may have been placed in an exploitative circumstance and be trafficked into the U.S. Though the United States is not responsible for causing the individual to be trafficked, failure to conduct adequate background checks or passing policies that bind

¹⁶ As a disclaimer, it is important to address that the purpose of this study is not to endorse the blame of victims. There are clearly realistic limitations in a study format that will be addressed below. But in short, to test the impact of each given attribution, they must be parsed out individually (even if in the real-world context, there is an interaction of many factors involved); furthermore, to clarify such distinctions, there will be a debrief section that addresses the interrelated roles of the various factors. Furthermore, the theories in this section are testing people’s perception rather than the reality of a situation (migrants for instance are not entirely to blame for their plight etc.)

temporary workers to employers increases vulnerability to trafficking could all be considered as factors for which the U.S. should also be held accountable. Hence, further studies may also examine how the specific state actor blamed may impact public opinion and willingness to act as well as the comparative weight of accountability.

Dependent Variable: Empathy

My first dependent variable is empathy. Past studies in psychology have surveyed this term (see Niezink, 2008). However, a common problem with measuring empathy is the lack of consensus in operationalizing the term, making findings less generalizable across studies.

Coke et al., (1978) initially proposed twenty-three adjectives to describe emotional responses (including empathy) through an Emotional Response Questionnaire (ERQ) which has since, over fifty-five studies utilizing this (Niezink et al., 2012). Batson et al., (1987) then conducted a factor analysis over several studies and concluded that of those twenty-three adjectives, six measured empathic concern: *moved, compassionate, tender, warm, and softhearted*. Of the fifty-five studies, a little under half utilized Batson's measure (Niezink et al., 2012). One of these studies, Batson et al., (1997) surveyed how empathy towards an individual of a stigmatized group improved feelings toward the group itself. In this study, Batson assessed empathic response to an individual's plight by applying the six 'empathy' adjectives on a self-reported likert-type scale between 1 being not at all and 7 being extremely. However, a recent factor analysis conducted by Niezink et al., (2012) found that Batson's six empathy adjectives could be separated into two scale models: one that differentiates distress, sympathy-related, and tenderheartedness-related emotions. The former are emotions "oriented towards ourselves," the second oriented towards those in need, and the third oriented towards "emotions which might be elicited by the other

person's need" without being directly felt for the individual in need (*tender, warm, softhearted*) (Niezink et al., 2012, 58). The in-depth analysis found that "sympathetic and compassionate are two emotions that can only be felt in relation to someone else. One feels sympathetic and compassionate towards the other, not towards oneself" (Niezink et al., 2012, 58). Hence, in this study, empathy is measured as it directly relates to the emotions felt towards the individual in need. It applies the Likert-type scale from Batson et al. (1997) on the two empathy-confirmed terms of sympathy and compassion.

Dependent Variable: Helping-behavior: Willingness to Act

Lastly, the final key variable of measure is willingness to engage in helping behavior. This variable, by far, is the most variable to a wide range of possibilities. As a standard, studies focusing on human rights issues have generally measured "willingness to act various" and presented various courses of action (e.g. mobilizing by signing up for a protest (Hertel et al., 2009; McClendon, 2013).

One downside of this variable is that it is a proxy for measuring "real action." However, due to social desirability bias, one's willingness may not always correlate to one's actions. In other words, there is no cost attached to answering in a socially desirable way hence making it not as reliable as 'real' action. Some studies have circumvented this potential weakness by utilizing other means to measure action such as by counting "clicks" (to a particular awareness website etc.). Nonetheless, while being aware of the limitations of this variable, willingness to act is a valuable, reliable and cost-efficient method that can get at an individual's convictions--one step beyond opinions about an issue (Hertel et al., 2009). Hence, in this study, willingness to act is broken into various components on a 7-point likert-type scale ranging from 0=not at all to

7=extremely. There are 7 potential action steps randomly listed with varying degrees of effort. There are political actions (signing petitions, contacting elected officials), awareness actions (educating oneself about human trafficking, reposting on social media), and behavioral changes (buying fair trade goods, contributing money to NGO, volunteering at an anti-trafficking NGO). On one particular note, “buying fair trade goods” is reflective of the fact that cheaper goods that were created using exploitative means of workers perpetuates the system. Hence, the solution of buying “fair trade goods that protect laborers” aims to address this problem.

4.4 Methods

As enumerated above, this study is designed through Qualtrics, an online survey tool, and distributed through MTurk. The survey begins with basic information including the survey content and potential risks. This is to ensure that potential respondents may provide informed consent (see Appendix A for details). Following consent, demographic questions that serve the basis for the control variables are enumerated. Participants were then randomly assigned into one of four groups: one control and three experimental groups. Because of the general misconception on labor trafficking, each group received the following background information:

Labor trafficking is a form of human trafficking that forces individuals to perform a task against their will through force, fraud, or coercion (22 USC § 7102). Labor trafficking occurs in all sectors of the economy including but not limited to hospitality, domestic work, food services, construction, agriculture, and manufacturing industries.

Despite the wide range of sectors, past federal U.S. labor trafficking cases show common patterns of exploitation such as the following: making false promises of legal

immigration status, threatening with deportation and violence, imposing inhumane living conditions and work hours, imposing significant debt repayment, and confiscating identification (passports, visas etc.) (humantrafficking.org). Please answer a question about labor trafficking.

In formulating the background information, it was important to ensure that no priming occurs in this stage. Hence, rather than elaborating on the specific conditions befalling the individual in the treatment, I provide a general overview on what labor trafficking is, as defined by law, and its presence and prevalence in all economic sectors. I compiled and synthesized the latter portion of the background by looking at common patterns in sixteen landmark labor trafficking cases.¹⁷ This was intentionally wide-ranging in order to prevent priming (regarding the specific plight of the individual). A comprehension check followed this background.

The experimental groups were also shown a vignette detailing a man or woman from Central America who quit or lost his job and was coerced into labor trafficking in the U.S. The vignettes varied on why the man or woman lost their job which, in turn, varies the primary attribution of responsibility for the plight: the individual (personal choice/desires) or home country socio economic instability. The region, and type of trafficking was held constant to isolate the impact of attribution of responsibility. The first vignette detailing “individual attribution” was the following:

Pablo is a 28-year-old husband and father of two daughters, Esperanza and Natalia.

Although Pablo’s current job in Central America was stable, he desired something more.

¹⁷ See

https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Labor%20Trafficking%20Cases%20by%20Industry%20in%20the%20US%20Fact%20Sheet%20FINAL_1.pdf for details on landmark cases on labor trafficking.

He heard stories about how easy it was to find extremely well-paying jobs in the U.S., so he quit his current job.

Soon after quitting, “recruiters” approached Pablo and promised him a well-paying, steady job in the U.S. on H-2B temporary work visas in exchange for \$10,000. Because of the attractiveness of better job prospects, Pablo agreed to take on a debt to go to the U.S.

However, when Pablo arrived at his new factory job in the U.S, all his identification papers were taken from him. He was forced to work 16-hour workdays at a poultry processing plant and the traffickers took all his wages to pay the debt he supposedly owed them. Furthermore, he was told he would be deported, and his family back home would be harmed if he complained. Pablo is desperate to see his daughters again. He wishes he hadn’t chosen to quit his job.

And

Pamela is a 28-year-old wife and mother of two daughters, Esperanza and Natalia.

Although Pamela's current job in Central America was stable, she desired something more. She heard stories about how easy it was to find extremely well-paying jobs in the U.S., so she quit her current job.

Soon after quitting, “recruiters” approached Pamela and promised her a well-paying, steady job in the U.S. on H-2B temporary work visas in exchange for \$10,000. Because of the attractiveness of better job prospects, Pamela agreed to take on a debt to go to the U.S.

However, when Pamela arrived at her new factory job in the U.S, all her identification papers were taken from her. She was forced to work 16-hour workdays at a poultry processing plant and the traffickers took all her wages to pay the debt he supposedly owed them. Furthermore, she was told he would be deported, and her family back home would be harmed if she complained. Pamela is desperate to see her daughters again. She wishes she hadn't chosen to quit her job.

The second vignette detailing “state responsibility” was:

Pablo is a 28-year-old husband and father of two daughters, Esperanza and Natalia. Last year, Pablo lost his factory job in Central America because a national economic crisis made it impossible for the owner to turn a profit. This economic crisis was spurred by his government's failure to limit political instability, stop rising crime, and reduce corruption in the country.

Soon after losing his job, “recruiters” approached Pablo and promised him a well-paying, steady job in the U.S. on H-2B temporary work visas in exchange for \$10,000.

Pablo looked desperately for other jobs, but most other companies in his state were closing because of the same government- rooted economic crisis. Thus, Pablo felt he had no choice but to take on a debt to go to the U.S. and provide a better future for his family.

However, when Pablo arrived at his new factory job in the U.S, all his identification papers were taken from him. He was forced to work 16-hour workdays at a poultry processing plant and the traffickers took all his wages to pay the debt he supposedly owed them. Furthermore, he was told he would be deported, and his family back home

would be harmed if he complained. Pablo is desperate to see his daughters again. He wishes his home country's economy had been more stable so that he wouldn't have lost his job.

And

Pamela is a 28-year-old wife and mother of two daughters, Esperanza and Natalia. Last year, Pamela lost her factory job in Central America because a national economic crisis made it impossible for the owner to turn a profit. This economic crisis was spurred by her government's failure to limit political instability, stop rising crime, and reduce corruption in the country.

Soon after losing her job, "recruiters" approached Pamela and promised her a well-paying, steady job in the U.S. on H-2B temporary work visas in exchange for \$10,000. Pamela looked desperately for other jobs, but most other companies in her state were closing because of the same government-rooted economic crisis. Thus, Pamela felt she had no choice but to take on a debt to go to the U.S. and provide a better future for her family.

However, when Pamela arrived at her new factory job in the U.S, all her identification papers were taken from her. She was forced to work 16-hour workdays at a poultry processing plant and the traffickers took all her wages to pay the debt she supposedly owed them. Furthermore, she was told she would be deported, and her family back home would be harmed if she complained. Pamela is desperate to see her daughters again. She wishes her home country's economy had been more stable so that she wouldn't have lost her job.

There are important differences that were made in the following vignettes that must be noted. First, each vignette is in third person to provide more “legitimacy” to the stated story. This is counterbalanced with the sense that a first-person account may evoke more empathy. Secondly, the country of origin was left intentionally unnamed in order to prevent any bias that may occur from evoking a particular country (e.g. familiar with, personal ties, negative associations etc.). Third, the portion that is manipulated in each treatment vignette is why Pablo or Pamela lost their job as well as the last sentence of the vignette that restates the proposed cause of the plight.

The fundamental differences in the treatment frames were rooted in the perceived controllability and agency of the migrant who chose to leave or was forced to leave. For instance, the state/external blame states that the migrant “lost” their job whereas the first states they “quit” their job. The latter two also state that they “had no choice but to take on debt” whereas the first states they “agreed to take on debt.” Another point of difference is the omission of providing “a better future for their family” from the individual attribution frame. This was done so that the individual attribution may not be tainted by any form of perceived non-self-motivation. The remainder of the portions about the coercion and exploitation were in keeping with common patterns of exploitation in labor trafficking and did not have any significant differences between the vignettes. It is also important to note that these narratives are not representative of all labor trafficking victims, but it does represent *a* story following the common frame that defines all labor trafficking.

Another important aspect to note about the challenge of these vignettes is that there are various moving parts. Hence, in order to reinforce that the “responsibility frames” are being processed by the respondent, I include an attention check that asks what the “fundamental

reason” for Pamela or Pablo’s choice was and only analyze those who accurately captured this primary reason per each treatment received.

V. Results

In this section, I present the results of my findings on the impact of attribution and gender on empathy and willingness to help migrants who are victims of trafficking.

Table 1 presents the means of the emotional response dependent variables post treatment. What is interesting to note from this table is that sympathy and compassion have a generally high average mean on the Likert scale, though not significant. This can be most reasonably described by the human trafficking that creates a baseline that already elicits high empathy.

Table 1. Baseline Difference of Means Test: All Results

	statistic	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust
Male Personal	mean	4.26	4.15	2.97	2.85
	N	237	229	227	233
Male State	mean	4.41	4.23	2.31	2.23
	N	155	147	157	156
Female Personal	mean	4.17	4.25	2.79	2.56
	N	225	219	222	214
Female State	mean	4.42	4.3	2.42	2.47

	N	187	181	196	188
All Female	mean	4.28	4.27	2.62	2.52
	N	412	400	418	402
All Male	mean	4.32	4.18	2.7	2.6
	N	392	376	384	389
All State	mean	4.41	4.27	2.37	2.36
	N	342	328	353	344
All Personal	mean	4.22	4.2	2.88	2.71
	N	462	448	449	447

Note: Male/Female Personal stands for a man/woman who chose to leave his/her state;
 Male/Female State stands for a man/woman who was forced to leave his/her state

Table 2 displays a key with the statement and abbreviation for pro-social actions respondents would be willing to engage in post-treatment.

Table 2. Key of Willingness to Act Statements

Statement	Table Abbreviation
Volunteer at an anti-trafficking non-profit organization	Volunteer
Sign petition for increased rights for migrants who are trafficked	Sign
Repost information raising awareness about labor trafficking on social media	Repost
Buy certified fair-trade goods that protect laborers	Buy
Educate yourself about the issue of trafficking	Educate
Contribute money to an anti-trafficking non-profit organization	Contribute

Following this, Table 3a and 3b exhibit the impact of attribution (external vs internal) on emotions and action outcomes while holding each gender variable constant.

Table 3.A. T-Table Test Attribution: Female Personal + Female State

Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
FP	4.173	4.251	2.793	2.561		
FS	4.417	4.298	2.423	2.468		
Diff	-0.244	-0.047	0.369	0.093		
Sig	Pr=0.007**	Pr=0.307	Pr=0.0095**	Pr=0.284		
Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute
FP	3.487	3.9286	3.832	4.063	4.181	3.824
FS	3.449	3.9293	3.692	3.909	4.172	3.621
Diff	0.038	-0.0007	0.140	0.154	0.009	0.202
Sig	Pr= 0.389	Pr=0.498	Pr=0.137	Pr=0.074*	Pr=0.466	Pr=0.062*

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3.B. T-Table Test Attribution: Male Personal + Male State

Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
MP	4.262	4.148	2.969	2.845		
MS	4.407	4.231	2.306	2.231		
Diff	-0.145	-0.083	0.663	0.615		
Sig	Pr=0.083*	Pr=0.214	Pr=0.000***	Pr=0.000***		
Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute

MP	3.552	3.932	3.84	4.088	4.184	3.82
MS	3.081	3.646	3.466	3.863	3.963	3.348
Diff	0.471	0.286	0.374	0.225	0.221	0.472
Sig	Pr=0.001* **	Pr=0.016**	Pr=0.004***	Pr= 0.027**	Pr=0.027* *	Pr=0.001** *

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The key findings are that, as expected, respondents significantly feel more sympathy towards migrants who were forced to leave as opposed to those who chose to leave and more anger if the migrant left for personal reasons than if forced by the state. This affirms the first hypothesis that respondents are more likely to feel more empathy towards those who were forced to leave than those who chose to leave.

However, contrary to expectation, respondents were also unanimously more likely to help a migrant who chose to leave on all types of helping behavior with no effect when the migrant was forced to leave. Thus, emotions associated with attribution do not always lead to a willingness to help. The helping effect was particularly salient for men who chose to leave though people were also more willing to help women who chose to leave on a limited type of activities (contributing and buying fair trade goods) and on a lower confidence level (see Table 3a)

It is interesting that though people felt more anger towards migrants who chose to leave and more sympathy towards migrants who were forced as expected, they were more willing to help those who chose to leave. Contrary to expectation, which posited that empathy would lead to significant helping behavior and non-empathy (anger, negative emotions etc.) would lead to significantly less helping, there was significantly more willingness to help those who left

personally and no effect for those who were forced to leave. There may be several plausible justifications for this: (1) social conditioning and other normative factors suggest that emotions are not the primary driver for action but rather what one has learned and “should” do. However, even if this were the case, it could not explain the correlation between the significant emotions in this study and corresponding willingness to help. (2) People may have felt that the issue was too difficult to help when the initial cause was a systemic factor for the migration (collective issue problem) so resorted to helping the individual who chose to leave and was subsequently trafficked despite the initial personal choice the migrant made for leaving.

The significant result of disgust towards men who chose to leave (over men who were forced to leave) is also an interesting finding. Why would individuals go on to help an individual they felt disgust towards? Though the previous explanations for anger are applicable here, there are also other explanations for this: (1) misunderstanding the question. Though the design explicitly states how the respondent feels toward the *individual* regardless of treatment, it is possible that respondents may have placed their anger or disgust towards the issue itself or on other factors that they wished to help change. (2) Tangentially, it is also possible that the respondent was unable to distinguish who their emotional state was towards after reading the vignette. For instance, even if the individuals did not feel as much empathy towards individuals who chose to leave, their disgust may have been aimed at the issue more broadly. (3) A less probable, but still possible explanation is that the disgust felt was towards the individual in the treatment and the corresponding helping behavior, a means to “fix” the individual.

Table 4a and 4b present the impact of gender on the emotional and action outcomes while holding the respective attribution variables constant.

Table 4.A. T-Table Test Gender: Male Personal + Female Personal

Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
MP	4.262	4.148	2.969	2.845		
FP	4.173	4.251	2.793	2.561		
Diff	0.0883	-0.103	0.176	0.285		
SIG	Pr= 0.185	Pr=0.131	Pr= 0.124	Pr= 0.034**		
Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute
MP	3.552	3.932	3.84	4.088	4.184	3.82
FP	3.487	3.929	3.832	4.063	4.181	3.824
Diff	0.065	0.003	0.008	0.025	0.003	-0.004
SIG	Pr= 0.313	Pr=0.488	Pr=0.474	Pr=0.404	Pr=0.487	Pr=0.489

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4.B. T-Table Test Gender: Male State + Female State

Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
MS	4.406	4.231	2.306	2.231		
FS	4.417	4.298	2.423	2.468		
Diff	-0.011	-0.067	-0.118	-0.237		
SIG	Pr= 0.458	Pr=0.262	Pr= 0.239	Pr= 0.080*		
Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute
MS	3.081	3.646	3.466	3.863	3.963	3.348
FS	3.449	3.929	3.692	3.909	4.172	3.621
Diff	-0.369	-0.283	-0.226	-0.046	-0.209	-0.273
SIG	Pr= 0.006***	Pr=0.020**	Pr=0.06*	Pr=0.351	Pr=0.040**	Pr=0.030**

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In regard to gender treatments, there were generally no significant impacts on emotions though mixed results regarding disgust; respondents generally felt more disgust towards male migrants who chose to leave than female migrants who chose to leave (See Table 4A). This is an interesting finding since, according to Role Congruity Theory, it would be expected that people would approve of men who demonstrated their traditional role of being agentic by leaving and providing for their family. One possible explanation for this is that people may hold certain gender role stereotypes toward men but not towards women.

Another interesting factor, however, is that disgust towards men did not immediately equate to significant empathy towards women. Thus, rather than being mutually exclusive where there are only two sides, the study demonstrates that disgust (not having as much empathy) towards one gender does not automatically equate to empathy towards the other. The hypothesis in this study posited that according to Role Congruity Theory, “if the trafficked individual is male migrant, respondents will feel more empathy and be more willing to engage in helping behavior than if he was a female migrant.” According to the alternative theory (H3 Benevolent sexism) if the trafficked individual is a female migrant, respondents will feel more empathy and be willing to engage in helping behavior than if she was a male migrant. However, neither hypothesis has significance, and rather, the opposite emotions to empathy present asymmetrical emotional responses not initially anticipated.

Furthermore, within the gender findings, people are significantly more willing to help female migrants over male migrants (though not significantly different with degrees of feeling empathy). However, the significant willingness to help is only present when both females and male migrants were forced to leave. This is supported by the Benevolent Sexism Theory which states that individuals believe that women are more vulnerable and need to be protected. Alternative explanations are discussed below as well.

The final noteworthy finding is that respondents also displayed disgust towards female migrants who were forced to leave more than male migrants who were forced to leave. Though this could be explained through the Role Congruity Theory which states that women, according to their traditional gender roles, should not leave their domestic spheres, if following Role Congruity Theory, then a female migrant who chose to leave should also elicit as much if not greater disgust which is not the case. Furthermore, the confidence on this result is on the lower

side (90%) and it is possible that, like the aforementioned explanations, the disgust is not directed towards the migrant in the treatment. It appears then that the findings about gender (in which one finding presents more disgust towards men who chose to leave than women who chose to leave; more disgust towards women who were forced to leave than men who were forced to leave), show no strong support for or against either of the gender theories.

An alternative and more plausible explanation for the conflicting findings may be found in the characteristics of the respondents themselves. Table 5.A finds that men were more willing to act to help a female migrant who was forced to leave than a male migrant forced to leave.

Personal choice had no effect. (See Table 5.B)

Table 5.A. Heterogenous Treatment Effect by Gender for Gender of Migrant: Male State + Female State

	Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
Men	MS	4.343	4.087	2.392	2.41		
	FS	4.303	4.172	2.602	2.686		
	Diff	0.041	-0.085	-0.210	-0.276		
	Sig	0.384	0.278	0.157	0.101		
Women	MS	4.518	4.473	2.167	1.911		
	FS	4.618	4.523	2.123	2.1		
	Diff	-0.010	-0.050	0.043	-0.189		
	Sig	0.223	0.350	0.437	0.233		
	Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute

Men	MS	3.167	3.510	3.480	3.814	3.941	3.363
	FS	3.56	3.856	3.768	3.896	4.208	3.672
	Diff	-0.393	-0.346	-0.288	-0.082	-0.267	-0.309
	Sig	0.015**	0.025**	0.055*	0.295	0.046**	0.044**
Women	MS	2.932	3.881	3.441	3.950	4	3.322
	FS	3.260	4.055	3.562	3.932	4.110	3.534
	Diff	-0.328	-0.173	-0.121	0.018	-0.110	-0.212
	Sig	0.099*	0.211	0.313	0.463	0.269	0.195

Table 5.B. Heterogenous Treatment Effect by Gender for Gender of Migrant: Male Personal + Female Personal

	Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
Men	MP	4.305	4.155	3.007	2.884		
	FP	4.176	4.225	2.876	2.638		
	Diff	0.129	-0.070	0.131	0.246		
	Sig	0.144	0.278	0.252	0.113		
Women	MP	4.186	4.138	2.905	2.779		
	FP	4.169	4.296	2.659	2.440		
	Diff	0.017	-0.158	0.246	0.339		
	Sig	0.459	0.139	0.157	0.085*		

	Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute
Men	MP	3.503	3.888	3.789	4.075	4.211	3.832
	FP	3.5	3.868	3.855	4.072	4.164	3.888
	Diff	0.003	0.020	-0.066	0.002	0.047	-0.056
	Sig	0.493	0.448	0.341	0.494	0.361	0.374
Women	MP	3.640	4.011	3.932	4.112	4.135	3.798
	FP	3.465	4.035	3.791	4.047	4.209	3.709
	Diff	0.175	-0.024	0.142	0.066	-0.075	0.088
	Sig	0.180	0.444	0.215	0.325	0.311	0.325

Table 6.A. finds that women on average felt more sympathy towards migrants than men confirming the hypothesis that women will feel more empathy than men. They were also more likely to feel sympathy at migrants forced to leave. Furthermore, men on average felt more anger and disgust towards those who chose to leave than women which supports the hypothesis that men are more likely to place internal attribution than women. However, even more interesting, is that men were more willing to help the individuals than women (See Table 6.B). This implies that significant emotional differences do not always lead to more willingness to act.

Table 6.A. Heterogenous Treatment Effect by Gender for Attribution Treatment: Female Personal + Female State

	Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
Men	FP	4.176	4.225	2.876	2.638		
	FS	4.303	4.172	2.602	2.686		
	Diff	-0.126	0.052	0.274	-0.480		
	Sig	0.160	0.336	0.087*	0.408		
Women	FP	4.169	4.296	2.659	2.440		
	FS	4.618	4.523	2.123	2.1		
	Diff	-0.449	-0.227	0.536	0.340		
	Sig	0.002***	0.0497**	0.016**	0.092*		
	Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute
Men	FP	3.5	3.868	3.855	4.072	4.164	3.888
	FS	3.56	3.856	3.768	3.896	4.208	3.672
	Diff	-0.06	0.012	0.087	0.176	-0.044	0.216
	Sig	0.365	0.468	0.298	0.102	0.379	0.101
Women	FP	3.465	4.035	3.791	4.047	4.209	3.709
	FS	3.260	4.055	3.562	3.932	4.110	3.534
	Diff	0.205	-0.020	0.229	0.115	0.010	0.175
	Sig	0.170	0.458	0.130	0.242	0.257	0.200

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 6.B. Heterogenous Treatment Effect by Gender for Attribution Treatment: Male Personal + Male State

	Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
Men	MP	4.305	4.155	3.007	2.884		
	MS	4.343	4.087	2.392	2.41		
	Diff	-0.039	0.068	0.615	0.474		
	Sig	0.386	0.313	0.002***	0.014**		
Women	MP	4.186	4.138	2.905	2.779		
	MS	4.518	4.473	2.167	1.911		
	Diff	-0.332	-0.335	0.738	0.868		
	Sig	0.023**	0.015**	0.003***	0.000***		
	Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute
Men	MP	3.503	3.888	3.789	4.075	4.211	3.832
	MS	3.167	3.510	3.480	3.814	3.941	3.363
	Diff	0.336	0.378	0.308	0.261	0.270	0.470
	Sig	0.041**	0.016**	0.045**	0.047**	0.035**	0.008***
Women	MP	3.640	4.011	3.933	4.112	4.135	3.798
	MS	2.932	3.881	3.441	3.949	4	3.322
	Diff	0.708	0.130	0.492	0.163	0.135	0.476
	Sig	0.001***	0.250	0.013**	0.166	0.224	0.021**

Finally, Table 7.A. presents the findings based on the political affiliation of the respondent. As expected, and confirming the corresponding hypothesis, liberals felt more empathy than conservatives but interestingly, as it related to willingness to help, rather than a binary of ‘help or not-help’, the findings were qualified by the type of help offered. Liberals were more likely to help through signing petitions and educating themselves whereas conservatives were more likely to volunteer or contribute (though the confidence level for the latter is marginal). This suggests that even the term ‘helping’ is subject to nuance by preference and political affiliation.

Table 7.A. Heterogenous Treatment Effect by Political Affiliation for All Groups: Liberals vs. Conservative

Emotion	Sympathy	Compassion	Anger	Disgust		
Lib	4.475	4.369	2.587	2.480		
Con	4.101	4	3.058	3.049		
Diff	0.374	0.369	-0.471	-0.569		
Sig	0.000***	0.000***	0.001***	0.000***		
Action	Volunteer	Sign	Repost	Buy	Educate	Contribute
Lib	3.442	3.963	3.867	4.051	4.279	3.755
Con	3.739	3.835	3.789	3.986	4.115	3.904
Diff	-0.297	0.128	0.077	0.065	0.165	-0.149
Sig	0.008***	0.116	0.258	0.253	0.039**	0.108

VI. Discussion

Summary of Key Findings

1. Respondents felt more sympathy if state-caused versus personal-choice
2. Respondents felt more anger if personal choice than state-caused
3. Respondents are more willing to act when personal choice than state-caused
4. Respondents more willing to act when female migrant was forced to leave than male migrant who was forced to leave
5. The gender of the migrant generally does not have a clear impact on empathy.
6. Female respondents felt more strong emotions, yet male respondents were more willing to act.
7. Liberals felt more empathy than conservatives, but liberals and conservatives were equally willing to help but on specified actions.

This is one of the first studies of its kind to examine the relationship between attribution, gender and present relevant and specific actions for collective mobilization. The implications from this study are invaluable to the non-profit sector—particularly towards migrants and human trafficking—for the following reasons.

First, this study finds that framing does affect emotions. People who perceived the individual to have more control were more likely to feel negative emotions (anger, disgust) than those who had perceived less control due to the state. Furthermore, some types of personal frames led to greater willingness to act. In this study, migrants who chose to leave were more helped than those who were forced. This presents an interesting situation that requires further study; despite significant differences in *negative* emotions towards those who chose to leave, people were more willing to help those individuals. This may have been for a variety of reasons

including the perceived ability to make a difference towards the issue or an undistinguished negative emotion towards other factors in the story. Further studies may explore the reason for this in depth. What is certain is that empathy alone does not necessarily trigger action and that certain frames lead to greater willingness to act.

Secondly, this study has interesting implications for migrants who are victims of labor trafficking. Both scenarios in this study represent real stories of individuals today. Labor trafficked migrants are often perceived as needing less help because of the relative degree of agency compared to other forms of trafficking such as sex trafficking. However, this study demonstrates that people are willing to help migrants even if they chose to leave (demonstrating more agency). Further studies may explore the impact of attribution between other forms of trafficking and competing human rights issues.

Lastly, this study reveals that including attribution in a story leads to a sizeable impact on emotions and willingness to act in some circumstances. However, in reality, organizations cannot control the cause for an individual's plight when sharing their stories. Thus, in terms of policy, organizations that advocate for migrants may best describe attribution and causes of an individual's plight in a way that paints a more holistic picture of the narrative and humanize their experiences. Furthermore, when the plight of an individual is due to a larger underlying issue, this study finds that providing specific ways to act is not sufficient to motivate people to act—thus organizations should emphasize the ability for the public to make a feasible and sizeable impact. (e.g. instead of fighting off state corruption, making the solution more tangible and describing how an act will contribute to the solution) and further studies may be conducted to affirm this.

Lastly, this study demonstrates that even within actions, they are highly qualified by the characteristics of the respondent. In this sense, providing a variety of ways to allow individuals to get involved in a certain human rights cause is essential.

In terms of the challenges from this study, there is a spectrum. On one end, there are design challenges that come from the specific situation of the subjects in question: measuring attribution using migrants who are trafficked is a real-world problem with real-attributable factors. Though the attribution in this study was specifically aimed at the voluntary or involuntary nature of the migration and not the trafficking, it is very well possible that individuals were unable to separate the empathy felt towards the individual who is a trafficking migrant as opposed to the empathy felt because they were forced to leave (the external attribution in question). Thus, future studies may improve upon this by examining a separate issue or replicating the present issue.

Tangentially, another challenge was capturing the treatment as best as possible. Though the external attribution and internal attribution were reinforced multiple times in the story, it is still possible that the desired effect did not take place due to the complexity of the actors interacting within the story. Once again, this challenge may require further studies or a more limited contextual scope for the design.

Another challenge was in the representativeness of the sample. Though still a sizable sample, there was a decrease in the sample size due to those who failed the attention check. Thus, increasing the sample size to account for those who fail to pass the attention check may also help reinforce the findings and generalizability of this study.

VII. Conclusion

In a world that is increasingly interconnected by globalization, trafficking continues to be a pressing human rights issue that encompasses all sectors of society. When it comes to framing the issue of trafficking, sharing it through the individual story has moved people to action. However, when it comes to the nature of the stories themselves, how they are framed also influences the emotions and willingness to help the individual in need. This study examines framing through the lens of the primary responsible actors. Through this frame, this study finds that the one with the least perceived responsibility and controllability led to greater empathy and the opposite, less empathy. However, as with all real-world questions, the answer was nuanced as it relates to the willingness to act as well as the specifics of the characteristics of the story. Furthermore, empathy on its own did not always lead to the corresponding helping action.

To explain the puzzling disconnect between emotions and actions, further studies could explore frames from other perspectives based on Social Learning Theory, Tension Reduction Theory, and Norms and Roles Theory (Batson et al., 2007). Social Learning Theory implies an egotistical standpoint that individuals are motivated to act under “mood-enhancing rewards” (Batson et al., 2007). Social learning occurs when individuals “associate particular mood-enhancing emotional rewards with helping as opposed to empathy...” Thus, in the face of negative-emotion-evoking frames (victims of human trafficking etc.), individuals will act (donate etc.) to mood manage. Similarly, Tension Reduction Theory asserts that negative frames or “mood-depressing stimulus” creates tension, so individuals will act to resolve current tension (independent of any learning). This theory also has implications for cognitive dissonance theories, where individuals seek to relieve internal inconsistencies in helping---one theory (Just World Hypothesis). Lastly, another theory which explains pro social action is norms and roles theories (social responsibility, reciprocity norms etc.). Such theories claim that individuals act

under compulsion of societal and personal norms as well as to avoid ‘sanctions’ from either actors (Batson et al., 2007).

This study finds that respondents who read larger state-scaled framed problems demonstrate less willingness to help than those that read stories attributed to the individual. In a society where there are often one too many actors to attribute the abuses and circumstances of society, concisely attributing blame may not be a simple task for civil societies to do when mobilizing individuals to act. However, what is hopeful from this study is that even when individuals were “attributed” to their migration which led to trafficking, individuals were willing to help them. In other words, despite an initial decision to leave (out of one’s volition), the negative emotions associated with internal attribution did not hinder individuals helping them. On the other hand, for those who were forced to leave, this study would greatly benefit from a corroborating study that examines to what degree framing for collective mobilization requires acts that are proportional to the problem at hand.

All in all, this study contributes to the literature by providing insight into the relationship between attribution, emotions, and helping behavior and the role they have on helping to alleviate problems with human trafficking through collective action efforts.

Appendix A Survey Consent

Thank you for your interest in our political-behavioral research study. We would like to tell you what you need to think about before you choose whether or not to join the study. It is your choice. If you choose to join, you can change your mind later on and leave the study.

The purpose of this study is to further explore how attribution of responsibility affect attitudes. The study is funded by the Department of Political Science at Emory University. This study will take about 5-10 minutes to complete.

If you join, you will be asked to answer basic demographic questions and pre-treatment questions. Through an auto-generated randomizer, you will see a short fictional story. Then, you will be asked questions about attitudes and your helping behavior. No participants will be deceived within this study.

All studies have some risks. In this study, the topics of the stories may touch on sensitive issues such as trafficking and human rights abuse. Furthermore, we take concerns about privacy very seriously. A breach of confidentiality is a potential risk, but all responses are anonymous and no identifying information will be collected. MTurk IDs are only collected for the purposes of distributing compensation (each respondent receives \$1 per 7 minutes; \$8.50/hr rate) and will not be associated with survey responses. Note that any work performed on MTurk can be linked to the user's public profile page. Thus, workers may wish to restrict information that they choose to share in their public profile. On this topic, Amazon provides the following information to workers: <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/contact> There is no direct benefit to participants, although they may learn more about labor trafficking through the survey. Furthermore, participants will be compensated via MTurk for completing the survey.

Your data from this study will not be shared with anyone outside this study. Access to the data will only be available to the student and the PI collaborators. Access to the data will also be password protected through Dropbox, and computers using DropBox will be password protected. There will not be identifiers associated with the data outside of MTurk. With MTurk, researchers will not be able to match individual IDs to names, addresses, or other identifying information.

We may also place data in public databases accessible to researchers who agree to maintain data confidentiality, if we remove the study code and make sure the data are anonymized to a level that we believe that it is highly unlikely that anyone could identify you. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Confidentiality

Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at study records. Government agencies and Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include [the Office for Human Research Protections, the funder(s), the Emory Institutional Review Board, the Emory Office of Compliance]. Study funders may also look at your study records. Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent we are required to do so by law. A study number rather than your name will be used on study records

wherever possible. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

People Who will Use/Disclose Your Information:

The following people and groups will use and disclose your information in connection with the research study:

- The Principal Investigator and the research staff will use and disclose your information to conduct the study and give you study related treatment.
- Sometimes a Principal Investigator or other researcher moves to a different institution. If this happens, your information may be shared with that new institution and their oversight offices. Information will be shared securely and under a legal agreement to ensure it continues to be used under the terms of this consent.

Contact Information

If you have questions about the study procedures or other questions or concerns about the research or your part in it, contact Claire Lee and Dr. David R. Davis at poldd@emory.edu This study has been reviewed by an ethics committee to ensure the protection of research participants. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have complaints about the research or an issue you would rather discuss with someone outside the research team, contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or irb@emory.edu.

To tell the IRB about your experience as a research participant, fill out the Research Participant Survey at <https://tinyurl.com/ycewgkke>.

Appendix B Demographic Questions

Q3 Which category below includes your age?

18 - 26 (1)

27-42 (2)

43-54 (3)

55 or older (4)

Q4 Which of the following describes your racial or ethnic identity? (You can select as many as apply.)

White (non-Hispanic) (1)

Hispanic/Latinx (2)

Black or African-American (3)

Asian or Asian-American (4)

Native American / American Indian / Alaska Native (5)

Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islanders (6)

Other (7)

Q5 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)

Q6 In general, how do you define your political ideology?

- Extremely Liberal (1)
- Liberal (2)
- Slightly Liberal (3)
- Moderate (4)
- Slightly conservative (5)
- Conservative (6)
- Extremely Conservative (7)

Q7 What is your highest level of educational attainment?

- Some high school (1)
- High school diploma or equivalent (2)
- Some college (3)
- Bachelor's degree (4)
- Advanced/professional degree (5)

Q8 What is your present religion, if any?

- Protestant (for example, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian) (1)
- Roman Catholic (2)
- Other Christian (for example, Mormon, Orthodox) (3)
- Jewish (4)
- Muslim (5)
- Eastern Religion (for example, Hindu, Buddhist) (6)
- Atheist, Agnostic or not religious (7)
- Other (8)

Q9 Apart from special occasions, how often do you attend religious services?

- More than once a week (1)
- Once a week (2)

At least once a month (3)

Only on special holy days (4)

Rarely or never (5)

Q10 Were you born in the United States or another country?

Born in another country (1)

Born in the U.S. (2)

Q11 Were either of your parents born in another country?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q12 Do you have any children? (of any age)

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q13 How much personal contact have you had with first-generation immigrants in the past year?
(*first-generation immigrants are those born in a country outside of the U.S.*)

A great deal (1) (1)

A moderate amount (2) (2)

Not much (3) (3)

None at all (4) (4)

Appendix C Treatment Questions

Attention Check

Which of the following best describes the fundamental reason why Pablo left?

Because he/she wanted a better job

Because economic instability in his home country collapsed the job market

How do you feel towards Pablo?(1= not at all and 5= extremely)

Sympathy

Compassion

Anger

Disgust

What would you be willing to do to help victims of trafficking like Pablo? (1= never and 5= almost always)

Volunteer at an anti-trafficking non-profit organization

Sign petition for increased rights for migrants who are trafficked
Repost information raising awareness about labor trafficking on social media
Buy certified fair trade goods that protect laborers
Educate yourself about the issue of trafficking
Contribute money to an anti-trafficking non-profit organization

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