

**For Sale**  
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## **Attestation of Authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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## **Acknowledgements**

*Tina Shaw*

*Thank you for your mentorship and guidance.*

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## **Abstract**

My thesis is focused on child sex trafficking, including online child sex trafficking. The research is mostly based on American statistics, setting, and real life events/victims, with the inclusion of other cultures and the different areas of human trafficking, such as slave labour and forced child labour. I have gathered research from online sources, documentaries, films, and other literature.

**Exegesis**

**Savannah Welsh**



My thesis 'For Sale' focuses on the subject of child sex trafficking, particularly in America. It follows a young female victim, Ava, aged 14, and how she was dragged into the horrible industry. I show her journey from her regular high school life with her best friend Sam, to abduction, rape, and abuse. Ava builds a relationship with another young victim named Jess. This relationship causes her to lose all sense hope due to having to see Jess being raped, abused, and fully drugged like the other victims. Ava is sold to various clients and ends up in a fake fostering company where the owners sell/rent the children out online. Here she meets children of both genders and all ages under 18, as well as different cultures. She learns their backstories of back in their homelands, poverty, and being trafficked to America. The fake fostering business evacuates due to a client being traced by the police so Ava is sold back to her original trafficking ring where she inevitably escapes with the

help of one of the traffickers from her first taking, Matt, where he is then killed for his actions.

Once Ava arrives home she suffers from PTSD and her parents Julie and Liam and her best friend Sam struggle to help her cope. You find out that the spotter for the trafficking ring is Ava's football coach and he's still helping them kidnap other young girls. Despite the detectives on-going investigation, the story ends with the traffickers still at large to show the reality of the industry.

I focus on showing the characters experiences through third person point of view, inner thought, memories, setting description, character relationships, and dialogue. Many events happen throughout the story and you get insight into the mental and physical state of the main character, as well as other victims she sees along the way. You see the terrible things that often happen within the industry, such as repetitive rape, extreme forced drug use, being sold/trafficked to various people and across various locations, as well as violence and death. I not only wanted to show what the victims go through, but also what goes on with the people running the businesses; people such as, the traffickers/pimps/spotters and the buyers themselves. This subject was an important topic for me to write about as I feel it isn't an area that is commonly spoken about, and I ultimately wanted to gain more awareness and knowledge on the matter. I felt even though this isn't as big of an issue here in New Zealand, it is still something happening far too much globally, and in Westernised countries.

As the topic is very dark and heavy, I needed to find elements that created a lighter tone to the story.

I wanted to include some sort of way to show hope for both the character and the reader.

Throughout the story I used dreamscapes and memories to show what made the character happy or comforted, such as childhood anecdotes/memories and I included items of importance that she had at home. I also included the relationships she had with her parents, as well as her friendship with her

best friend. These emphasised certain things about the characters personality and previous daily life, and shows her age and innocence.

The reason I chose to focus on this topic is because I felt as though it wasn't something people particularly know a lot about. I believe it is a subject that needs to be talked about more to grow awareness to what is happening around us, around the world everyday. I am extremely passionate about human rights, which is why I found this topic very interesting to write about and research. I like my writing to focus on topics that are able to create awareness that can help others and hopefully make a positive change and create conversation.

When it came to research, in particular statistics, I found it difficult to refrain from including so many within my writing. I wanted the reader to know all of the information I had gathered, but I also didn't want to draw away from the overall creative storytelling experience and for it to become too statistic orientated. Instead I attempted to include bits and pieces that enhanced the story without it becoming too much about facts and research. I did struggle when it came to showing and not telling the story, mainly due to it being heavily factually based. I found a lot of the time I was trying to tell the reader what was happening instead of showing them. After doing so much research around the topic, it was hard for me to then switch back into a creative mindset. This is something I think another draft or so would have made the story more complete as a work of fiction and build on the overall concept.

I personally haven't had any link myself to the sex trafficking industry, or had anyone I know go through any kind of situation like this. This was another reason I wanted to learn more about it to be more informed of the facts and different areas of the industry. I had to undergo a lot of extensive research and find many resources to help me gather information in order to create and write an

authentic story. I used online sources, such as websites and library databases, as well as reading non-fiction and fiction books. I watched various documentaries based on the topic as well as other films and TV series that were relevant in helping me gain as much information as possible.

In terms of decision-making, to begin with I set out a basic structure and a general idea of where I wanted my story to go. However, a lot of my development was done throughout my writing process. This was due to discovering things that best suited the story development and character development during my writing process and ways to enhance the story. Sometimes ideas would change as I wrote new segments and this would also cause me to go in different directions that I originally had not expected. I always allow for this when planning a story concept and outline, as this happens a lot when I write. I also found that as my character goes through different situations and experiences, I discover new options to how my character may behave and deal with these circumstances, as well as how they may begin to think and feel before, during, or after said experiences. Throughout the story I also ended up adding various different characters that I did not originally intend to have. Not only did these characters change parts of the story, but it also changed the original characters relationship and actions, as well as creating new conflicts. Some of these characters also introduced different cultures, which meant I had to do more research into these cultures and their religions, as well as the countries environment, and how the sex trafficking industry works within those countries, and how they would have been trafficked into America and sold to other traffickers. Some of these different cultures included Russian, Thai, and Somalian, which I chose for various reasons. Research showed me that Somalia is the worst country for human trafficking and I also found all of South East Asia had a lot of issues. It was interesting to figure out ways of communication with these characters and the original characters through the use of dialogue and how they may behave to the different cultures and backstories.

I gained a lot of inspiration and information through many different creative works. These different works provided me with various ideas that helped me build on the overall topic of sex trafficking, character development/relationships, setting and so on. I focus on various themes, such as sexism, stereotyping, and psychological state of characters, dehumanisation, different cultures, point of view choice, and inclusion of inner thought/narration.

For example, the documentary 'I am Jane Doe' (Mazzio, M. 2017) gave me insight into how young females are being taken and sold online for sex through basic websites that we use daily and not only through the dark-web. The documentary focuses on young girls who survived being sold on a website called 'Backpage' and the families were trying to sue the owners/founders of the website. After many court hearings, the court always came to the same conclusion, which was that the owners of the website could not be sued due to the sellers of the underage children being third-party sellers on the website, and could not be directly linked to them. The Communications Decency Act Section 230 also helped these owners get away with any ties to the issue. This act allows immunity for the owners and any users in having any kind of liability over the services or information that is published by others (Minc 2018). Ultimately the owners/founders of the website could not be held liable for the third party publishing due to Section 230 allowing for "freedom of speech online" (EFF 2018). During my research I did, however, find that the Senate Commerce Committee decided to approve a new version of the act. The modified act was titled SESTA (Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act). This is an addition to Section 230 of the CDA that helps create an exception to any laws that are relevant to sex trafficking online (Congress.Gov 2017). This helped me incorporate online sex trafficking into my work. I did extend on the concept, by making the disguised website within my writing to be something more relevant to children, that being a fostering company. I felt as though this side to the industry was something important to incorporate into my writing, as many people would assume this sort of thing wouldn't happen online, and only as an in-person situation.

This documentary caused me to research these different websites, the main one being Backpage as well as the CDA and different stories of victims that went through this type of trafficking.

Interestingly, during my time researching the CDA and Backpage, legal action has successfully been taken and the website has been seized by the FBI and the CDA is undergoing change to help prevent the cause and sale of children online, while keeping the positives of the act in tact for freedom of speech online (Backpage Seizure. 2018). The founder of Backpage was finally charged as a willing participant of a federal human trafficking investigation. He was charged with “pimping” despite not having direct contact with the trafficking, but helping with the pimping process on the website. Everything related to the case has been confiscated and the website has been officially shut down (Ruelas, R., & Cassidy, M. 2018). Over the years, before and during the time allegations were made against the company, they were given the chance to change the model of their website, but founders refused due to the profit that was being made. I am extremely happy that the ‘I am Jane Doe’ documentary and the families that fought for this have received a positive outcome and created a huge impact on helping diminish areas of the sex trafficking industry, particularly with online sale and in America. While researching online sex trafficking I was also surprised when I came across the article written by (Couch, R. 2017) stating that 70% of child sex trafficking is done online in the US. This was shocking to me as I also assumed most child sex trafficking was done in-person. This website explained that in the US in 2014 a minimum of 105,000 children were being exploited and the sex trafficking industry would earn approximately \$32 billion dollars each year globally with the numbers expected to continue to grow. Another study showed that in 2016, a staggering 300,000 children in the US are subject to sex trafficking and prostituted each year and that 2 million are victims each year globally (Huffpost. 2016). The growth within two years was tremendous and heartbreaking, which made me feel far more strongly about gaining awareness on the topic and help encourage change.

‘The Widow’ (Barton, F. 2016) is a novel that focuses on a man’s obsession with child pornography, which lead him to kidnap, rape, and murder a child. This concept was relevant to my writing in many ways as it showed a perpetrators motivation to choose and take a victim, as well as what it can lead to. I found this area was a good read and made me model some of my characters from the behaviour of the antagonist within this story. I was able to have a better understanding of how people fall into these obsessions and what causes them to act upon them. I also felt it gave me an understanding to how people that had relationships with characters like this had little to no knowledge of these characters intentions and how they behaved in daily life as well as if, or once they found out the truth. I was able to base characters behaviour from this concept with the clients in my story without directly delving into their backstories, but more so why they would choose to pay for these types of services within the sex trafficking industry.

‘Good Me Bad Me’ (Land, A. 2018), was a novel that shows the mental state of a child after experiencing a traumatic and unstable childhood due to having a serial killer for a mother. It shows how events can lead an immature mind to become unhealthy, which was significantly helpful with my protagonist. It helped show how her mental health could be affected due to the terrible experiences she has endured and also helped me when it came to writing her mental state during her time being trafficked. In ‘Good Me Bad Me’ the protagonist goes on to follow in the footsteps of the mother and commit the lethal crime of murder without remorse. My character didn’t go to this extent but instead struggled with the PTSD in a way that was more focused on having constant nightmares and memories of her experiences in the sex trafficking industry. She struggled to adjust back into her old/regular life and relationships with friends and family and her past. I felt it was important to give my character the support of these family and friends to show these relationships are important to maintaining a more positive life after said experiences. I also wanted to focus on the therapy sessions that involved the character having appointments with the psychiatrist alone, as

well as with her parents to both understand her experiences and coping mechanisms for them all, unlike 'Good Me Bad Me' where the protagonist ended up having an unhealthy close relationship with her therapist due to the fact he decided to foster her. I thought it was important to separate these relationships and keep the personal side separate to the professional side. 'Good Me Bad Me' helped with all psychological states of my protagonist. I was able to see the phases one may go through, throughout the traumatic experience, such as fear, anxiety, anger, grief, depression, acceptance, self-pity, paranoia, and PTSD.

'The Handmaids Tale' (Millar, B. 2017) is television series based on Margaret Atwood's novel of the same title. It follows the life of a woman who is living in a dystopian world that takes the few women that are still able to fall pregnant and force them to have wealthy people's babies. This concept helped my story as these women were taken and forced into sex, as well as childbirth and bad living situations. One of the main aspects I took from 'The Handmaids Tale' was the use of characters' inner voice/narration. This was extremely helpful to include in my writing as a lot of the time my character was under the influence of drugs, but I still wanted to give the reader insight to how she felt personally, but what she couldn't orally tell us. I also felt this was of relevance as a lot of victims of sex trafficking often become pregnant. Within my story this was shown with the pregnant girls being killed, as they were no longer relevant to the industry and what they were needed for. 'The Handmaids Tale' helped me change my writing from originally being written in first person to third due to the many benefits of my characters' lack of consciousness and stable mind. I wanted to be able to show what my character was going through while she was unconscious as well as through all of the drug use. I felt the use of inner thought helped me express my characters' feelings and emotions without being able to physically show them. I also felt it was imperative to show how other characters in my writing were acting and feeling that wasn't purely from the point of view of the protagonist. I showed this a lot through their backstories and



memories as well as first hand interactions with my protagonist. This helped show the reader why these characters were making decisions, such as becoming a trafficker due to lack of money, and go on to help the character escape due to guilt and compassion. The novel 'Never Let Me Go' (Ishiguro, K. 2009) was a similar concept in which children were raised purely for the use of their organs. I found that not only was this concept helpful with the forced living situations, but also the characters mental state and relationships they have growing up this way, similar to Ava's relationships with victim Jess and the kids at the fake fostering company.

The film 'Taken' (Morel, P. 2008) was a perfect example of a story that focused on the sex trafficking industry. It followed a young female that was abducted while on holiday and sold and sex trafficked. This was the most relevant concept for my writing as it fits the theme and overall concept most accurately. This story also included various cultures and characters, such as spotters, traffickers, clients, and high-level buyers. These were extremely relevant to my writing, as I needed insight to each of these to make my story more authentic. Even though 'Taken' is showing an American as a tourist that is trafficked, it was still very heavily American-based which helped with my work and building on my characters, and their life before and after the trafficking occurred. I found 'Taken' heavily focused on include stereotypes of traffickers, that being Albanian men. I wanted to shy away from this and show that quite often traffickers are also white Americans, therefore, I wanted majority of the traffickers in my writing to be American. This was with the exception of one Latino worker. I wanted to include this character to place emphasis on the fact he didn't want to be a part of the industry in general, let alone for the money. I wanted to have this character eventually help my protagonist escape, which was also to get away from the stereotype that certain cultures are often seen as antagonists or assumed to be part of gangs/mafias. 'Taken' originally gave me the idea to break stereotypes, as the leader of trafficking rings are mostly seen to be male. The TV series 'The Blacklist' (Bokenkamp, J. 2013) is the only resource I came across that

included an episode that had a female leader in a sex trafficking ring. I found that within that episode, the authorities, as well as the public were extremely shocked by this, making me want to include a female leader in my writing to change people's mindsets. I also decided to have my spotter be a white male American, to show everyday/regular men can be caught up in these industries and can also be someone that victims may know. This is why I also thought it would be more powerful to have this spotter have some kind of relationship and know the victims he is targeting for the sex traffickers, by having him as the protagonist's football coach. I did still decide to include other ethnicities to the victims that were caught in the disguised fostering business. I wanted to show that often children from these cultures are easier targets due to the poverty they are surrounded by in their home countries. This also caused me to implement new concepts of the various other areas of trafficking, not just sex trafficking, including, slave labour and forced child labour. I researched these different areas and found that the US Department of State (2018) had good descriptions of each focus, as well as the differences between them all. During writing about these characters I also thought it would be good to include male victims not just female victims. This was another way to break the stereotype that mainly victims of trafficking are females. As discussed by Butler, C. N. (2015) race plays a huge role in human trafficking. They state that children of a different race are also impacted differently because of subordination in the sex trafficking industry. Gender, class, and age also make a difference with race. They conclude that many children of a different ethnicity and colour are treated either more violently or are kept more so in other areas of the trade, such as slave labour instead. This greatly helped my decision to include other races within my work to show what they go through compared to white/American children within the trafficking industry. I felt I needed to include various backstories of kids of other cultures and how they got trapped and transported to America for various uses, and also use this to emphasise how the white/Americans are treated differently by traffickers, clients, and buyers as well as how children of other cultures are far less likely to escape the industry.

The book 'Room' (Donoghue, E. 2010) was a good reference for my writing as it focuses on a woman who was abducted and kept locked in a room. The character is raped and impregnated by her abductor and forced to raise her child within this room. This was a good concept that helped build on my writing while my character and other victims were forced to stay in a room environment during their time within the sex trafficking industry. I was able to gather different intel and ideas based on this, which helped me describe the environment they were kept in, as well as their mental state because of this. Being so restricted to one place helped me develop an in-depth description of the room and the emotions and relationships during my characters experience. I was also able to gain information as to how the victims were communicating, or lack of, with the perpetrators and the clients in my writing and how it affected them. Dehumanisation played a big role as a theme within both 'Room' and my writing as these environments forced the characters to lose themselves and face various mental states. The abuse they endured caused them to lose all sense of reality, as well as fell as though these new circumstances were a new and permanent reality for them.

'You' (Kepnes, C. 2015) was a novel that focused on a male that was obsessed with stalking females he wanted to have relationships with. This character helped me build on the spotters within the sex trafficking industry in my writing and how they go about the process of watching their victims and targeting the children they get the traffickers to abduct. It helped me get a sense of the perpetrators methods and thoughts, as well as the techniques and extent that they go to in order to achieve their goal. This novel also helped my get an understanding of the vulnerability of the victims and how easy it is for the stalker to go unnoticed while follow the victims and watching/keeping track of their every move.

In the TV series 'FBI' (Wolf, D. & Turk, C. 2018), episode three focuses on the concept of sex trafficking. This was extremely helpful as they episode shows how the traffickers dispose of the bodies of those who overdose, fall pregnant, and become ill. This episode gave me the idea to include this concept into my writing and have one of the traffickers bury the bodies in the middle of the woods somewhere. I also decided to follow in the footsteps of the TV series and have authorities find these bodies, which leads them into tying the bodies to the trafficking industry. I decided to make this clearer by having all of the victims hold the 'branding' mark of the traffickers embedded on their bodies.

The novel Red Sparrow (Matthews, J. 2013) was a piece of writing that encouraged me to be more explicit in my description of rape and abuse scenes. This novel is based on a female Russian spy/ assassin that has to personally go through rape and abuse to become capable of becoming whom her bosses need her to be in able to carry out her job requirements. These scenes were very uncomfortable as well as powerful and made me feel as though it was necessary to do the same in my writing to get the message across as to how real although negative the sex trafficking industry is. I felt as though being so descriptive with these scenes was important to show the reader what exactly happens within the industry and to the victims. 'Red Sparrow' also heavily focused on manipulation and brainwashing, which I found to be a good source of writing to help with my protagonist and victims in my story.

The potential audience for this piece of writing would be people aged 18 and over who are either interested in reading about crime or who have a strong interest in human-rights and the sex trafficking industry. The audience may find this piece of writing challenging to read due to the heavy subject matter and detailed explicit scenes. Some may also struggle with the fact it is mostly focusing on the negatives despite the main characters escape due to the common aftermath of PTSD

from the traumatic experiences. It may also be challenging because of the lack of a happy ending. I wanted the story to be as realistic as possible, and for me, and from the research I did, I found having a disappointing ending was far more realistic than having a happy ending purely to please the reader. I hope that the audience will find the authenticity of the writing to be interesting and informative to how the sex industry is in the modern world today.

I think my work may cause the wider creative genre to write more in-depth when it comes to scenes that are often viewed as too explicit to delve into description. This could be challenging for particular writers as it does restrict your work to a more compact audience as many readers don't feel comfortable with reading scenes that can be particularly uncomfortable and vivid, however, I do feel as though there is a select audience that appreciates the realness of this, and want to find more writing that isn't afraid to step out of the so-called norm and break some boundaries.

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