INTRODUCTION

Background
Both rape and sex trafficking are crimes of interpersonal violence. Approximately 1 in 4 women will be raped in their lifetimes (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006) and 27.5% of college women will meet the criteria for rape. Sex trafficking is an equally disturbing problem. Although it is difficult to assess the prevalence of sex trafficking, in 2016, the POLARIS Project reported 5,551 cases of sex trafficking from the national hotline (2017). The purpose of this study was to examine whether individuals believed that those who were being sexually trafficked were the victims of rape, their level of knowledge and their attitudes regarding the tactics used by exploiters. As well as if there were gender differences. We operationally defined rape and sex trafficking based on the federal legal definitions.

Rape: Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with or without the use of a sex organ of any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim (Uniform Crime Report, 2013).

Sexual Trafficking: Recruiting, keeping, transporting, supplying, or obtaining a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act by force, fraud, coercion or when the person is under 18 years of age (22 USC § 7102).

Hypotheses
>> Hypothesis 1: There will be gender differences in knowledge and attitudes about sex trafficking tactics.
>> Hypothesis 2: There will be gender differences in the perception of trafficked individuals as victims of rape during their commercial sexual exploitation, such that women are more likely than men to endorse these tactics as rape.

METHOD

Participants
- 154 undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at Kennesaw State University.
- Recruited using a convenience sample from SONA system and awarded course credit for participation.
- Age ranged from 18-41 (M = 20.06 yrs, SD = 3.33)
- Gender: 30% Men, 70% Women
- Race: Caucasian (57.1%) were the majority, followed by African American (17.5%), Hispanic/Latino/Spanish (7.6%), Multiracial (7.1%), and Asian (4.4%)

Materials and Procedures
- Participants who gave consent answered an online survey that asked questions related to their attitudes about sexual trafficking and rape myths
- 11 tactics items (α = .75)
- 3 rape items

RESULTS

Data were analyzed in SPSS 24 using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests.

Hypothesis 1: Tactics knowledge and attitudes by gender
- Males (M = 42.24, SD = 4.47) were lower than females (M = 43.7, SD = 4.82) on knowledge of sex trafficking tactics, resulting in a trend, t(150) = 1.74, p = .08.
- From the Tactics Scale, 3 out of the 11 items were significant or a trend for gender differences.
  - Force: If a trafficked person does not physically resist, then it is her/his choice to engage in commercial sexual activities [R]. Females had higher scores (M = 4.48, SD = .76) than males (M = 4.20, SD = 1.16), t(150) = 1.74, p = .08.
  - Coercion: Threatening to end their romantic relationship is a way to get someone to engage in commercial sexual activities with other partners. Females had higher scores (M = 3.73, SD = .95) than males (M = 3.40, SD = .99), t(150) = 1.93, p = .05.
  - Coercion: Sexually trafficked individuals often view their trafficker as a romantic partner. Females had higher scores (M = 2.97, SD = 1.08) than males (M = 2.56, SD = .97), t(150) = 2.24, p = .03.

Hypothesis 2: Sex trafficking tactics viewed as rape by gender
- Males’ Tactics Scale scores were significantly related to each of the rape victimization items, Force (r = .42, p = .004), Coercion (r = .32, p = .03), and Fraud (r = .31, p = .04).
- Females’ Tactics Scale scores were also significantly related to each of the rape victimization items, Force (r = .50, p < .0001), Coercion (r = .42, p < .001), and Fraud (r = .38, p < .001), but they were more strongly correlated than the males.
- There were no significant gender differences on any of the rape victimization items, as seen in Figures 1-3. Males and females were similar in their level of agreement for each of the items.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1 was supported. There were gender differences in knowledge and attitudes about tactics used, but less so with Fraud. Being tricked with false promises may be less understood than the other tactics or participants may not be as sympathetic those cases.

Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Males and females were equally likely to see the trafficked individuals as victims of rape.

Conclusions and Implications
Viewing an unwanted commercial sex act of a trafficked individual as rape is a first step in changing social norms that perpetuate the problem. The punishment for rape is much harsher than for solicitation, and could be a stronger deterrent. Increased awareness and education about sex trafficking could lead to greater change. However, given that this was a convenience sample of college students, results should be viewed with caution. Future research should investigate a community sample, gender differences, political affiliation, religiosity, and scenario-based materials.