Research exercise: Human Trafficking and Service Learning: Considering the Impact of Awareness-Raising Events on its Implementors and Audience

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Measuring the Affect of Awareness Raising Events
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Project Description: As part of our Politics special topics course on Human Trafficking, we learned that spreading awareness is a fundamental concern of modern abolitionists working to bring an end to slavery. We heard about the possibility of one such event, a flash mob, that was going to occur on campus. The event involved a group of about 20 students coming to a dead halt at noon, in middle of the Kennedy Union Cafeteria, to hold up barcodes in complete silence. Interested in the effect of awareness raising events on the people who facilitate them, as well as those who witness the event, we decided to participate in the flash mob and to gather reactions from this experience to help us determine its effectiveness at raising awareness.

Participator Response
To better understand the position of the participators we sent them an online questionnaire following the event.

Why did you choose to participate in this demonstration?:
“Thought it would be a good way to stir interest on campus.” - “I wanted to people to stop and ask about what our flash mob was all about…[to] reach out to someone just as passionate as us so they too can help join the fight against slavery.” - “I am a member of NAM.”

How did you expect this demonstration to impact others? How were.” your expectations met (or not met)?
“I thought more people would ask questions.” - “We expected people to be more receptive to our demonstration.” - “I was very surprised [at] how we were able to silence all of KU…” - “I didn't really expect people to be more impacted than they had in the past.”

In what ways did this experience make you feel empowered or dis-empowered. Please explain.
“…we were able to make a LOUD impact!” - “I felt like we helped others become aware of this huge problem…” - “I felt empowered because I was able to give a voice…” – “I felt empowered because we were able to create a visible reaction… on the other hand I still felt dis-empowered because, at least in my opinion, we still ran into the difficulty of moving people from outrage to action.”

Audience Response
To gain the perspective of the audience we interviewed individuals in the cafeteria using iPhone video cameras directly after the mob.

Initial Reactions and Questions:
“It was interesting how they were all silent because it sort of showed that they’re representing people in sex slavery that don't have a voice to speak out against the injustice that's done upon them.” - “I didn't know there were so many people that had been trafficked.” - “Where’s the slavery that you were trying to end, what's up with the barcodes?” - “I was a little confused.”

Are you inspired to take further action?
“I like that they did this to raise awareness, but what can I do?” - “I will probably check online to see what this is all about because I come from china and there not so many events like these on Chinese campus…It’s pretty new to me”

Conclusions
Members of the audience were engaged during the event.
Members of the audience were not inspired to follow up event with further research.
Members of the audience admitted to possibly being more receptive/aware to future attempts to inform them.
Participators largely participated because they were a member of a group (New Abolitionist Movement) or because they wanted to stir interest.

The majority of participators felt inspired or empowered after putting on this event.
All awareness raising events should be followed up with an announcement explaining the purpose of their actions.