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The Dark Side of the Super Bowl

Human trafficking is the second largest and fastest growing criminal industry in the world. Trafficking is an extremely profitable industry and has an estimated annual revenue of around \$32 billion dollars: more money than Google, Nike and Starbucks make in a year combined (Freedom Place). Sex trafficking is just one part of the human trafficking industry, and is considered the sexual exploitation of people through the means of coercion or force. Sex trafficking thrives for a few reasons, but most significantly the immense profits to be made. Whereas a drug can only be sold once, a pimp can sell a girl an average of 15 to 30 times a day (Freedom Place). Sex trafficking also thrives because our culture demands it to. We are a lust-obsessed society that demands sexual entertainment. Where there is a market, there will be a supply, and traffickers seize the opportunity to make big bucks meeting this demand.

Sex trafficking flourishes around the world but is also very prevalent in the U.S. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that around 100,000 to 300,000 American children become victims of trafficking every year (Freedom Place). These victims truly are children, given that the average age of entry into prostitution is around 13 years old (Freedom Place). The non-profit Freedom Place explains that “the majority of sex trafficking victims come from broken or unstable homes [...] and have a history of previous abuse” (Freedom Place). Children are often preyed upon by pimps when they are in vulnerable, compromising situations. For example, within 48 hours of running away from home an estimated one out of three children will be approached by a trafficker (Children at Risk).

Our culture is obsessed with sex, and it is also obsessed with football. It is only natural that sex trafficking would rear its head at one of our culture's most important sporting events, the Super Bowl. Given that sex trafficking is driven by profit and demand, it should not be surprising that the macho Super Bowl attracts more traffickers than any other event in the U.S. (Goldberg). In the advocacy world, the Super Bowl is commonly referred to as "the single largest human trafficking incident in the United States" (Goldberg).

Sex trafficking flourishes at the Super Bowl for a couple reasons. First of all, an estimated 15 to 20% of men in the U.S. have used a prostitute at least once (ProCon.org). Wherever the Super Bowl is held, there is an increase in men who are attending the game, which in turn increases the demand for paid sex in that city (Goldberg). In 2010 this resulted in an additional 10,000 prostitutes being brought to Miami for the Super Bowl (Goldberg). Second, according to Eleanor Goldberg of the Huffington Post, "the massive crowds [of the Super Bowl] allow for pimps and victims to essentially go unnoticed" (Goldberg). Traffickers interpret the large crowds and the sheer volume of men as a golden opportunity to do business. Pimps and traffickers capitalize on the Super Bowl, forcing girls like Clemmie Greenlee, a sex trafficking survivor, to sleep with around 25 to 50 men a day (Goldberg). Because the Super Bowl generates an increased demand for paid sex, it is the NFL's responsibility to discourage a culture of sexual objectification and take action to protect victims of sex trafficking at the annual Super Bowl.

A staple of the Super Bowl are the commercials. Companies pay millions of dollars for seconds of airtime, and many people watch the Super Bowl just for the entertainment the commercials offer. However the creative, funny commercials of yesterday have been replaced by commercials that emphasize "gender extremes" and use sex to sell anything and everything (Newsom). Yet some readers may challenge the view that all commercials are value laden,

insisting that we shouldn't be taking them too seriously. However, I believe that if we take a second look we will often notice the subtle messages being spoken through commercials. The Super Bowl encourages a culture of sexual objectification by featuring commercials that undermine the human dignity of women by demeaning them as objects to be "consumed."

The 2013 Super Bowl was full of commercials that negatively contribute to our culture's view of women and sexuality. Go Daddy stereotyped and made fun of women as well as men. 2 Broke Girls justified stripping and pole-dancing by saying, "it's the Super Bowl!" 2 Broke Girls, not so subtly, implied that the Super Bowl itself justifies sexually demeaning oneself. In the Audi commercial, a high-school boy drives dateless to the prom in his dad's Audi. He is emboldened by the Audi and struts into the prom, grabs the prom queen, and kisses her. After the kiss, the prom queen looks shocked but has a hint of a smile on her face. This is case of sexual assault, which is defined as "illegal sexual contact that usually involves force upon a person without consent" (Lawson). Despite this commercial portraying sexual assault, it tells the viewer: "gain confidence, forcibly kiss a girl, it will feel good, and she will *like* it" (Lawson). Go Daddy, 2 Broke Girls and Audi are just a few examples of how the Super Bowl is conducive to a culture that degrades women and is therefore tolerant of prostitution and sex trafficking.

It's the NFL's responsibility to discourage a culture of sexual objectification because many NFL players have contributed to a culture that undermines women's dignity. Football is one of America's great loves, and in turn our NFL players are often put on pedestals and treated like gods. Despite the fact some NFL players been charged with crimes against women, we continue to worship them, which justifies their behavior to our society.

Two specific NFL players that have negatively shaped our culture's view of women are Dave Meggett and Lawrence Taylor. Meggett, former NFL player and Super Bowl champion, is

currently serving 30 years in prison for sexual assault (Soltis). Meggett has a history of rape, sexual aggression, assault, and using prostitutes (Soltis). Taylor has led the New York Giants to Super Bowl victories twice and has been elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame (Klopman). However, in 2011 Taylor was registered as a sex offender after sleeping with a 16 year old victim of sex trafficking (Greenberg). The girl was a runaway from the Bronx and was coerced into the world of trafficking, forced to sleep with men such as Taylor (Greenberg). In a *Fox Sports* interview, Taylor essentially tells the audience: everyone uses prostitutes, prostitution is a legitimate profession and a convenient substitute for an authentic relationship and using women as commodities to be consumed is okay (Fox Sports). Taylor's view of prostitution and women is exactly what drives the demand for sex that leads young girls to be raped and exploited.

In the United States, football players are often stereotyped as the quintessential "man." Strength, competition and aggression mark football. Our American football culture, headed by the NFL, is a hyper masculine culture that is conducive to sexual violence. That might seem like a rash assumption, but Siebel Newsom of the Huffington Post states, "A sport dependent on the idea of dominating other human beings' bodies is bound to have a psychological effect on its fans, not to mention the larger culture. In hyper masculine culture, physical aggression is directly linked to sexual aggression and the two combined confer "manliness" (Newsom). Newsom asserts that the pressure athletes face to adhere to a hyper masculine ideal lead some to act out in violent ways (Newsom). Athletes' susceptibility to violence is evident in the case of Meggett and Taylor, the Penn State tragedy and most recently the Steubenville rape case (Newsom). In 2012, some of Steubenville, Ohio's praised high-school football players raped and humiliated a passed-out teenage girl. They proceeded to boast about it, inferring that "the

assault *proved* their manhood” (Newsom). Being immersed in a sports culture that praises aggression, it’s not surprising that three out of every four NFL players own a gun (Newsom).

Violence in sports, and particularly football, encourages violence and sex trafficking at the Super Bowl, and in society as a whole. Prostitution and sex trafficking are intertwined and violence is a daily reality for sex workers (Lowen). Around 80% of prostitutes say they have been physically assaulted and 68% have been forcibly raped (Lowen). In the same way, victims of sex trafficking are often controlled through violence or threat of violence. To address issues of violence in our communities, it’s essential to acknowledge the link between violence in sports, violence in media and violence in society.

People may say that prostitution is the oldest profession in the world and it is pointless to try and stop it. Although I agree up to a point, I cannot accept the overall conclusion that there is nothing we as a society can do to stop the suffering of sex-trafficking victims. There has been a recent surge in awareness about human trafficking as well as a movement to fight it. For instance, in 2012 President Obama gave a speech targeting the issue of human trafficking, and *USA Today* brought attention to sex trafficking on its front page.

The hyper masculinity of the NFL contributes to a culture of sexual violence and objectification, which encourages sex trafficking. Therefore, the NFL should be held accountable to discourage a culture of sexual objectification, and take action to protect victims of sex trafficking at the Super Bowl. At the same I believe pimps will just sell girls somewhere else if they can’t at the Super Bowl; I also believe that we should do everything in our power as a society to protect vulnerable women.

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