A Quantitative Analysis of Commercial Sex Advertisements During Super Bowl XLVIII

by

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Abstract

The Super Bowl is commonly known as the single largest human trafficking incident in the United States where an inordinate number of children may be trafficked in or around the host area to engage in commercial sex (Jee, 2011; Jervis, 2011). To examine this claim, our research team mined publicly available data from a major website known to host commercial sex advertisements for three months before and two months after Super Bowl XLVIII, held in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Introduction

A review of the existing literature base involving domestic sex trafficking shows a line of research in its infancy; there are very few empirical studies within the field in which to base proper theories or substantive understanding. The limited work that has been conducted generally involves two distinct research paradigms: the victim/survivor approach and the conduit approach. Both of these paradigms can encounter the same problem in research methodology, the potential for researcher speculation and potential bias. Literature as examined from the victim/survivor perspective often includes "calls to action" or "emotional appeals." The researcher generally gathers this information from advocacy groups, victim shelters or gatekeepers; therefore, the work cannot be assumed to be representative of the population of trafficked victims as a whole (Tyldum, 2010; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Fedina, 2014).

The victim/survivor method, a distinct paradigm of sex trafficking research, examines the specific scenarios the trafficker uses to build a stable, or an inventory of individuals to be sold for sex. This method includes three specific avenues of recruitment including the economic survival approach, the relationship approach,

and kidnapping. The economic survival approach of recruitment often begins as a consensual venture with the trafficker acting as a manager or pimp. The recruitment process generally begins in economically depressed, socially disorganized areas with promises of food, shelter, material possessions, and/or illegal drugs. Despite the initial willingness to participate in commercial sex, if there is any attempt by the victim/survivor to leave or change the agreement, the trafficker exerts control through methods of physical force, fraud, and/or coercion (Williamson, 2012).

The second approach of victim/survivor research examines the relationship between the trafficker and victim. This method is increasingly being used as modern Internet-connected technologies have given direct, unprecedented access to unmonitored adolescents (Laterno, 2011). During the relationship approach, a trafficker trolls social media looking for individuals who are online often and unlikely to be unsupervised (Malesky, 2007) In addition, they may have young sounding and/or provocative screen names that discuss or inquire about any form of sex (Malesky, 2007). The trafficker makes contact and conducts an online relationship, a period of conditioning where the victim/survivor becomes emotionally dependent on the attention. When the two meet in person, two differing scenarios can occur. The trafficker may ask to be repaid for the expenditure of financial or emotional capital via commercial sex, or they may use threats or physical violence against the prospect or their family (Skinner, 2009). Cialdini's (2006) reciprocity rule identifies that humans have been socially conditioned to repay a debt they feel that they have incurred and that by capitalizing on this, individuals can promote unequal exchanges by triggering a feeling of indebtedness. Feeling obligated by pressure to repay an imaginary debt, or fearing violence against themselves and/or their families, the victim of the relationship approach yields to being sold for commercial sex.

The final approach of victim/survivor research is kidnapping. The literature identifies that traffickers generally avoid kidnapping as a recruitment scenario as it often involves an immediate police presence and poor economic return on investment (Skinner, 2009). The sexual services of kidnapped victims cannot be advertised through local commercial sex markets, as they would most likely be identified. Additionally, a kidnapped victim must be controlled extensively through physical force or drugs and/or moved to an unfamiliar area to avoid escape. All of these items require an outlay of physical and financial capital and as such represent a low return on investment coupled with unnecessary risk of being caught.

The second paradigm of sex trafficking research, the conduit method, investigates the descriptive statistics and/or methods of communication between trafficker and consumer, also known as a "John". Researchers using this approach generally investigate Internet-based advertisements for commercial sex, believing

that trafficked minors are represented amongst the bulk of online commercial sex advertisements. The undetermined ontological and anonymous nature of the Internet (Berry, 2004) makes conduit research exceedingly difficult as advertisements involving willing commercial sex workers and trafficked victims are listed together. Deciphering between willing advertisements and forced advertisements for commercial sex involves a certain measure of speculation, which can potentially negate the validity and findings of the model.

Sex trafficking is an issue that is currently garnering attention from all sides of the political spectrum and the respective electorate. Generally, the conversation is supportive of efforts employed in anti-trafficking efforts; however, a vigorous debate is beginning to arise surrounding the rate of suspected sex trafficking around large sporting events. As of 2011, the Super Bowl has been commonly known as the single largest human trafficking incident in the United States where an inordinate number of children may be trafficked into or around the host area to engage in commercial sex (Jee, 2011; Jervis, 2011). In the three years since that observation numerous parties have used the Super Bowl as a yearly platform to promote or discredit anti-human trafficking work.

Involved in this debate is a general lack of quantitative research surrounding sex trafficking and major sporting events. It is exceedingly difficult to examine sex trafficking from a quantitative perspective as there is no census or survey developed that can be properly administered to those who are currently being sold for sex against their will. However, there is a small but emerging research base that investigates Internet-based advertisements for commercial sex in an attempt to discern the extent of sex trafficking.

In the near past, there has been some measure of speculation in deciphering advertisements for willing prostitution as opposed to unwilling, forced sex trafficking. It is our opinion that it is nearly impossible to decode, via quantitative means, an advertisement featuring a willing consensual prostitute acting of their own volition as opposed to one that contains an unwilling trafficked victim. It is for that reason that within this research project, we do not attempt to speculate in this line of research the difference between a willing and unwilling commercial sex worker; we are unable to do so. We are, however, able to state that advertisements for unwilling, trafficked victims are often posted together with ads featuring willing, consensual prostitutes and, by gaining a greater understanding of commercial sex patterns, one gains a greater understanding of sex trafficking.

Methodology

Over the course of five months, from 1 November, 2013 through 31 March, 2014, a team of 14 researchers engaged in a project that recorded the descriptive

statistics of advertisements for commercial sex in Manhattan and North New Jersey from backpage.com, a major national website that hosts such ads. North New Jersey is defined by backpage.com as including the cities/regions of Elizabeth, Hoboken/Union City, Jersey City, Newark, and Paterson. These particular areas were chosen due to their proximity to Super Bowl XLVIII, which was held in East Rutherford, New Jersey on 2 February 2014.

The researchers were each assigned a specific day and location (e.g., Tuesday in Manhattan, Wednesday in North Jersey) to log on to the specific website and record data in a collaborative spreadsheet. Researchers were expected to enter their data within 48 hours of the posted date (e.g., if an advertisement was posted on Monday, the researcher had until Wednesday to capture it). This was done with the expectation that advertisements for commercial sex would not be posted on the website for long, and the sooner the team could record them, the more accurate the data picture would be generated.

The researchers reviewed each advertisement for commercial sex in their assigned area and day of the week recording the following information within the collaborative spreadsheet:

1. Researcher initials	2. Day of the week
3. Date	4. Post ID
5. Phone number	6. Area code
7. Race	8. Face shown
9. Price incall	10. Price outcall
11. Number of people in ad	12. Secondary phone number

(1) Researcher initials were recorded as a matter of internal tracking and if the leaders of the project had any questions regarding the data. (2) The day of the week reflected the actual day assigned to the postings and not the day of recording (which could have been up to 48 hours after the day the advertisement was posted). (3) The date was the actual date that the advertisement was posted and not the day of recording (which could have been up to 48 hours after the day the advertisement was posted). (4) The Post ID was the unique identifier given to each advertisement by the website and was generally a six or seven digit number. (5) The phone number was the number listed in the advertisement one would call in order to schedule a commercial sex appointment; it was recorded area code first as xxxxxxxxxx. (6) The area code was recorded separately both as a measure of internal consistency to make sure that the phone number was being recorded accurately and to make a separate level of analysis easier. (7) Race was recorded by the researchers as "White", "Black", "Asian", "Hispanic", "Pacific islander",

"Indian", "Native American", "Other", and "None". It is very important to note that recording race did involve a certain measure of speculation by the researchers. While some advertisements specifically listed race within the narrative, others did not. Additionally, in a situation of trafficking, the individual may be intentionally concealing the identity/race of the victim. It is for this reason that our conclusions regarding race may not be highly accurate. (8) Face shown or not shown was a binary category where the researcher recorded if a face or identifying facial features were shown within the photograph featured in the advertisement. If a face was evident in the advertisement, the researcher recorded a "0"; if there was no photograph, or if the face was obscured, blurred, omitted, or otherwise not shown the researcher recorded a "1." (9) Price in-call was a unit of measure recorded that corresponded to the price per hour listed for in-call services. In-call is where the consumer travels to the commercial sex workers location to facilitate the transaction. Researchers listed the per hour rate for commercial sex as in-call if the advertisement specifically listed the wording or similar wording such as "at my place", "private and discreet apartment", or "in my home." (10) Price outcall was a unit of measure recorded that corresponded to the price per hour listed for outcall services. Outcall is where the commercial sex worker travels to or is taken to the consumer's location to facilitate the transaction. Researchers listed the per hour rate for commercial sex as outcall if the advertisement specifically listed the wording, or similar wording such as "at your place", "I travel to you", or "at your home." (11) Number of people in advertisement was recorded as the actual number of different people feature in the advertisement. If there was no picture featured in the advertisement it was recorded as 0. (12) Secondary phone number was listed as an area to be recorded as some advertisements featured more than one phone number.

Findings

Frequencies by Day and Date

The data was cleaned and coded in Microsoft Excel and then run through IBM's SPSS Data Analytics Software package to generate a descriptive statistics report. During the data capture period of 1 November 2013 thru 31 March 2014 there were a total of 35,199 advertisements for commercial sex placed (15,623 in North Jersey, 19,576 in Manhattan). On Mondays, there were a total of 3,492 advertisements for commercial sex in our observation area (2,261 in North Jersey and 1,231 in Manhattan). On Tuesdays, the research team recorded a total of 4,163 (2,551 in North Jersey and 1,612 in Manhattan). Wednesdays featured 3,489 (1,497 in North Jersey and 1992 in Manhattan). Thursdays held 4,885 advertisements

(1,761 in North Jersey and 3,124 in Manhattan). Fridays contained 6,816 ads (2,791 in North Jersey and 4,025 in Manhattan). Saturday showed 5,801 advertisements (1934 in North Jersey and 3867 in Manhattan) and Sunday had 6,553 advertisements (2828 in North Jersey and 3725 in Manhattan).
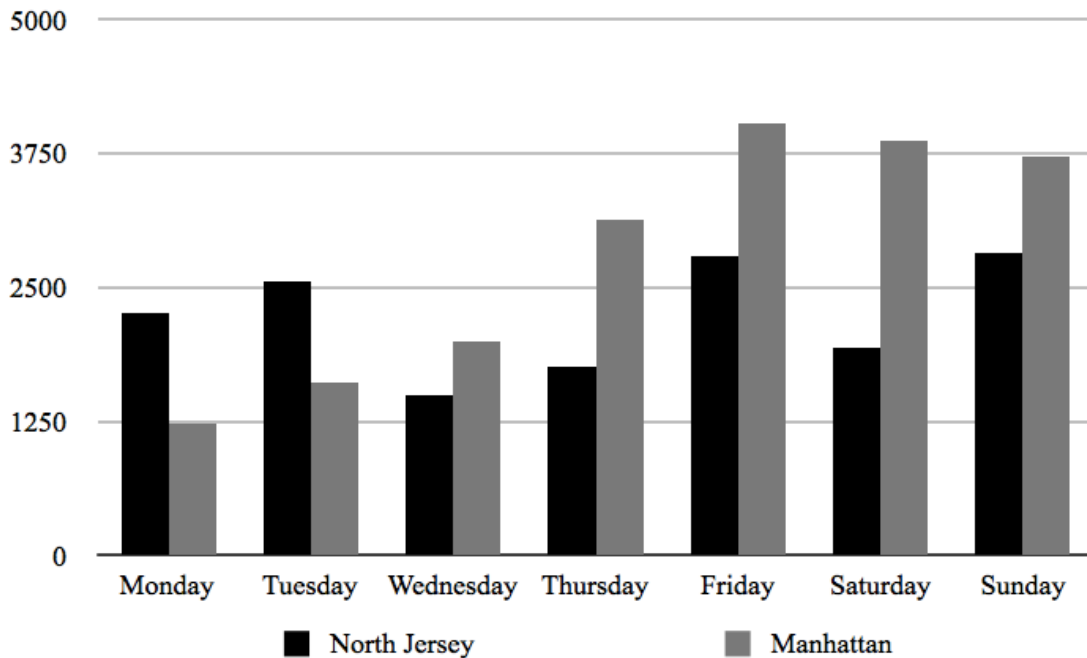

Figure 1
Frequency of Commercial Sex Advertisements Per Day in North Jersey and Manhattan

When the dates (rather than days of the week) are charted beginning with 1 November 2013 (the first day of data capture) and 31 March 2015 (the final day of data capture), we find overall posting frequencies ranging from 33 advertisements per day on 25 December 2013 to 192 per day on 2 July 2014 in North Jersey, and 11 advertisements per day on 25 December 2013 to 360 per day on 14 December 2013 in Manhattan. We calculated the mean of data values to establish a frequency baseline of commercial sex advertisements and established a North Jersey base of 104 advertisements per day (15,623 total advertisements / 150 days = 104.15) and Manhattan base of 130 advertisements per day (19576 total advertisements / 150 days = 130.50) for a total baseline of 117 advertisements per day (104 + 130 /2 =117).

During the week leading up to the Super Bowl, held on Sunday 2 February 2014 we recorded a total of 328 advertisements on Sunday 26 January 2014 106 on Monday 27 January 2014, 159 on Tuesday 28 January 2014, 50 advertisements on Wednesday 29 January 2014 268 advertisements on Thursday 30 January 2014, 328 on Friday 31 January 2014, 264 on Saturday 1 February 2014, 98 on Sunday 2 February 2014. The week following the Super Bowl we recorded 101 advertisements on Monday 3 February 2014, 164 on Tuesday 4 February 2014, 144 on Wednesday 5 February 2014, 121 on Thursday 6 February 2014, 371 on Friday 7 February 2014, 217 on Saturday 8 February 2014, and 310 on Sunday 9 February 2014. Figure 2 (below) identifies the totals for the two locations on each date.
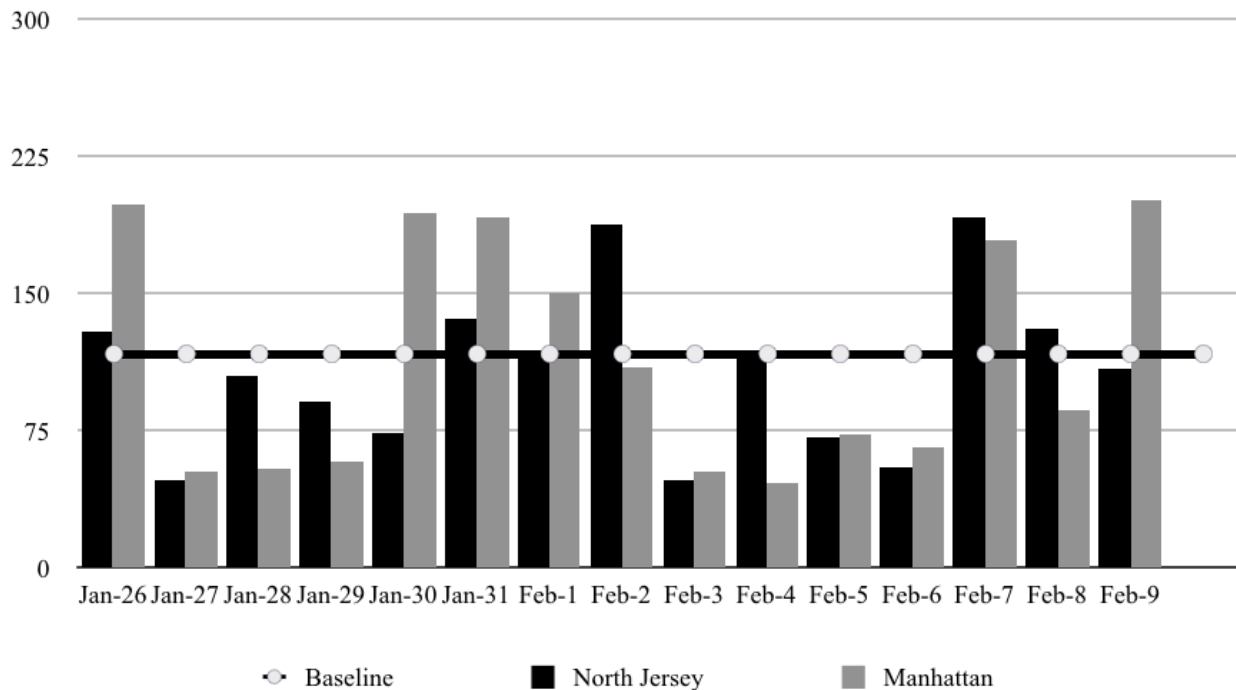

Figure 2
Frequency of Commercial Sex Advertisements During Super Bowl Week
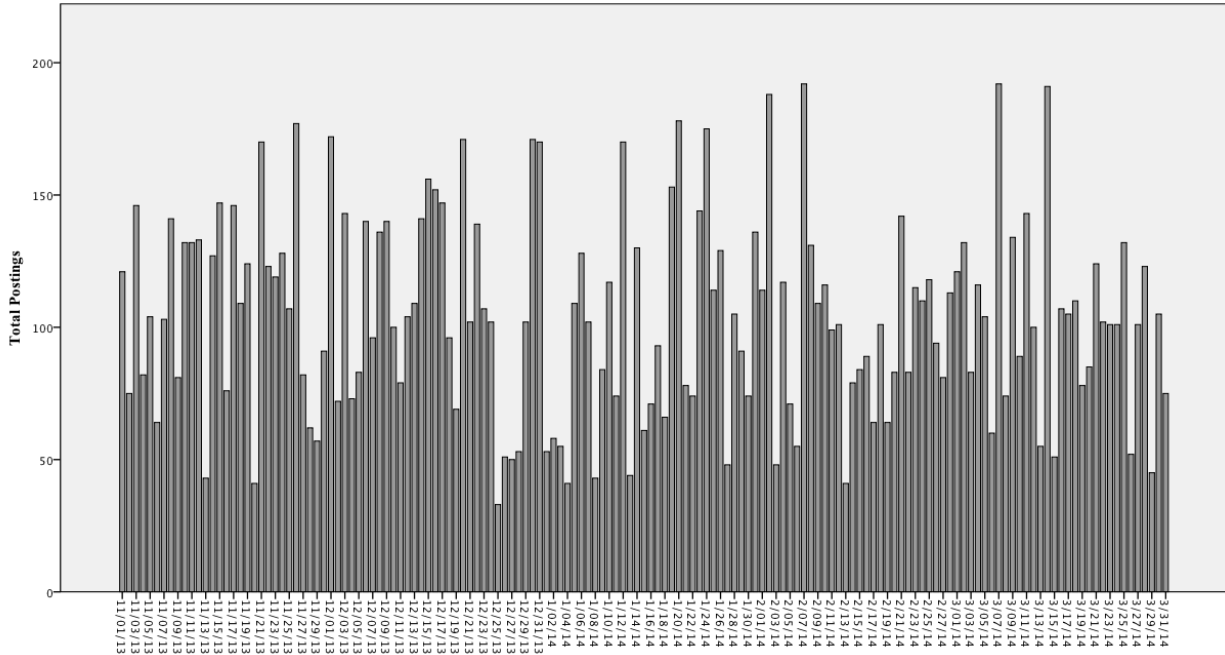
Figure 3
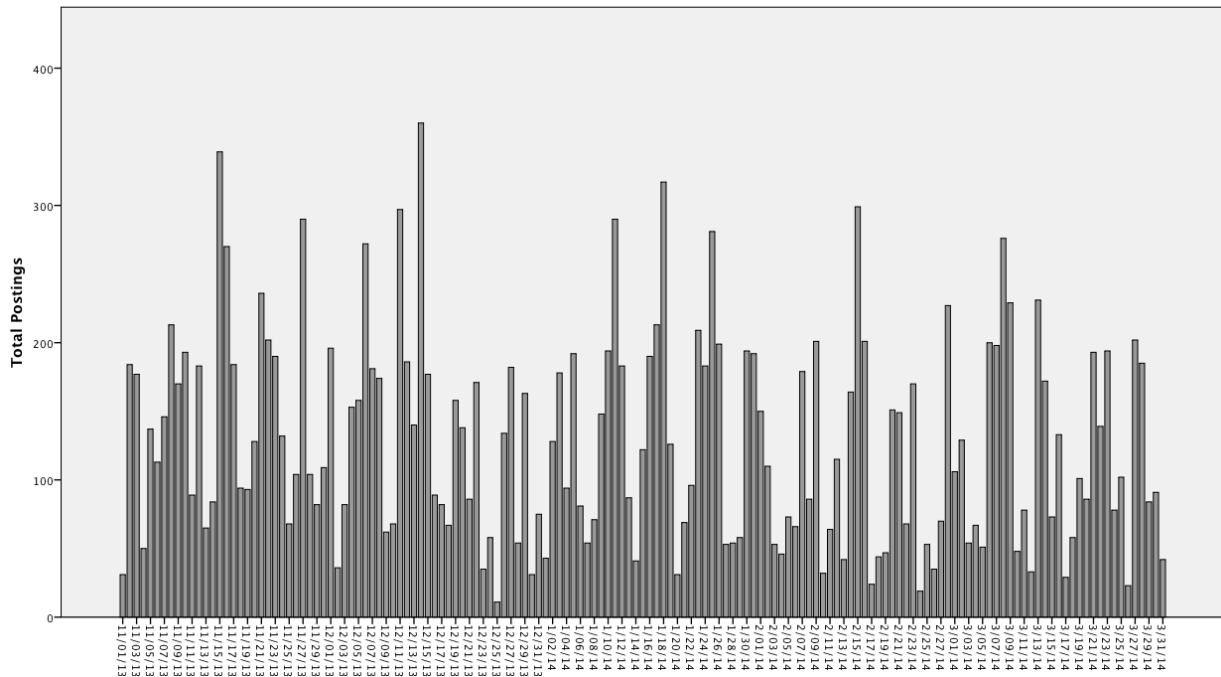*Overall Frequency of Commercial Sex Advertisements in North Jersey During Data Capture Period*

Figure 4
Overall Frequency of Commercial Sex Advertisements in Manhattan During Data Capture Period

Price Per Hour and People Per Ad

Advertisements, at times, contained varying numbers of individuals within photographs. The advertisements which contained identified races of White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic were generally lower in number, and contained only one advertised person. However, advertisements featuring Asian and Hispanic individuals often contained more individuals per ad than the advertisements featuring other races. Within North Jersey and Manhattan, Asian advertisements were much more likely to advertise three or more people per ad than any other identified race.

Within the accompanying data chart, there is a row stating "0" advertised. This was used when there was wording corresponding to race but no specific number of individuals within the advertisements (e.g. "All American White girls at your service"). Additionally, there is a column marked "none". This column corresponds to advertisements that contained no pictures but did have exact numbers of people featured in or mentioned in the ad (e.g. "four girls to meet your needs").

People Per Ad	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	Middle Eastern	Native American	Indian	None	Other
0	9 / 6	19 / 0	42 / 3	13 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	8 / 0	12 / 0
1	3902 / 7477	3585 / 2022	954 / 2164	2958 / 1732	8 / 15	24 / 70	9 / 5	53 /84	209 / 39	860 / 616
2	151 / 544	197 / 66	32 / 229	212 / 75	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 1	8 / 4	160 / 115
3	12 / 100	16 / 14	52 / 462	75 / 11	0 / 0	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	68 / 64
4	9 / 36	7 / 4	184 / 466	54 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 4	45 / 45
5	4 / 19	6 / 2	144 / 776	37 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 5	0 / 0	0 / 0	35 / 21
6	6 / 16	1 / 1	268 / 848	48 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 1	45 / 33
7	2 / 3	3 / 1	187 / 402	40 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	27 / 11
8	1 / 3	0 / 0	238 / 360	32 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	19 / 29
9	0 / 5	0 / 0	21 / 220	16 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	12 / 13
10	3 / 1	10 / 0	64 / 74	31 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	73 / 4
11	2 / 0	0 / 0	38 / 68	48 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	24 / 7
12	2 / 0	0 / 0	72 / 132	58 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	50 / 3
13	0 / 0	0 / 0	3 / 16	1 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2 / 2
14	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 9	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
15	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 13	1 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
16	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
17	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
18	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	5 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
19	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0

Table 1

People In Advertisement Subjugated by Race (North Jersey/ Manhattan)

Not all advertisements for commercial sex in our data sample listed a dollar amount corresponding to sexual services offered. However, there were a considerable number that did list prices; these particular advertisements constitute a distinct sample of our population. Our findings indicate an economic difference pertaining to race and region of sample. Without being separated by race, prices for North Jersey averaged out at $154.10 per hour for outcall (sex worker travels to consumer's location) services and $123.70 for in-call (consumer travels to sex worker's location) services. Per hour prices were considerably higher in Manhattan, averaging $175.21 per hour for outcall services and $205.97 for in-call. When accounting for race, individuals in the advertisements who self-advertised or who were identified by researchers as White had a higher per hour price in most categories. In North Jersey, White individuals performing outcall services held a mean per hour price of $175.57 and individuals performing in-call services held the highest per hour price with $166.21. In Manhattan, individuals who self-advertised as Pacific Islander held the highest outcall per hour price at $220.00; however, their population of 15 individuals somewhat skews these results. The second highest per hour price of outcall services in Manhattan were White individuals with an hourly rate of $212.63. Prices pertaining to in-call services in North Jersey and Manhattan were highest for White individuals at $166.21 and $266.19 respectively.

The lowest prices for per hour outcall services were Pacific Islander in North Jersey with $120.00, but, again, considering their low population size it is more feasible to examine the per hour price of Black individuals at $150.84. In Manhattan, individuals who self-advertised or were identified as Asian were advertised at the lowest per hour out call price at $121.67. The lowest price for in-call services both in North Jersey and Manhattan were identified as Asian, listing at $59.27 and $152.07 respectively.

Face Not Shown or Obscured

The absence of identifying facial features were recorded in our data as it would prevent the identification of a trafficked individual amongst the bulk of commercial sex advertisements. In North Jersey, 43.9% of the total individuals advertised within the postings had their facial features not shown, obscured or the advertisement did not contain a photograph. Individuals who self-identified or were identified by researchers as White had their facial features omitted 38.8% of the time; 48.3% Black facial features were omitted; 16.2% of Asian facial features were not shown; 53.5% of Hispanic facial features were absent; 50% of Pacific Islanders did not have faces shown; Middle Eastern facial features were omitted 48% of the time; Native American 77.7% of the time; 35.2% of Indians had their

facial features absent; and individuals who did not self-identify their race, or who were unable to have their race identified by researchers had their facial features omitted 60.1% of the time.

In Manhattan, 43% of the total individuals featured within commercial sex advertisements had their facial features not shown, obscured or the advertisement did not contain a photograph. Individuals who self-identified or were identified by researchers as White had their facial features omitted 37% of the time; 38.3% of Black facial features were omitted in the cases; 46.7% of Asian facial features were not shown; 49.5% of Hispanic facial features were absent; 40% of Pacific Islanders did not have faces shown; Middle Eastern facial features were omitted 58.3% of the time; Native American facial features were omitted 50% of the time; 61% of Indians had their facial features absent; and individuals who did not self-identify their race, or who were unable to have their race identified by researchers had their facial features absent 61.5% of the time.

	Total Commercial Sex Advertisements	Face Not Shown Or Obscured	Mean Price Per Hour Outcall	Mean Price Per Hour Incall
White	4100 / 8210	1594 / 3042	$175.57 / $212.63	$166.21 / $266.19
Black	3835 / 2110	1853 / 808	$150.84 / $158.15	$142.83 / $194.85
Asian	2299 / 6247	374 / 2924	$156.00 / $121.67	$59.27 / $152.07
Hispanic	3631 / 1821	1944 / 902	$157.17 / $186.41	$137.95 / $220.43
Pacific Islander	8 / 15	4 / 6	$120.00 / $220.00	$80.00 / $210.00
Middle Eastern	25 / 72	12 / 42	$150.00 / $154.62	$172.00 / $199.62
Native American	9 / 6	7 / 3	$0.00 / $0.00	$0.00 / $0.00
Indian	54 / 85	108 / 52	$113.33 / $185.33	$108.00 / $165.65
Other	1432 / 963	862 / 44	$171.78 / $168.15	$117.51 / $209.40
None	23 / 47	188 / 592	$192.22 / $170.00	$130.30 / $235.71

Table 2

Total Commercial Sex Ads, Face Not Shown or Obscured, and Mean Price Per Hour (North Jersey/Manhattan)

Phone Numbers and Area Codes

During our data capture period, there were 35,199 advertisements for commercial sex. However, within those advertisements, there were 5,831 unique

phone numbers represented (2389 in North Jersey, and 2992 in Manhattan). The phone numbers originated from a fairly diverse area. The phone numbers listed for commercial sex in North Jersey phone numbers contained 239 differing area codes and Manhattan advertisements had 225. The largest representations of area codes were generally local, coming from the state of analysis or adjoining states. However, some of the larger representations of area codes came from a distance including Florida, Nevada, and California.

	Area Code	Frequency	Origin Area		Area Code	Frequency	Origin Area
North Jersey	201	375	Brooklyn, NY	Manhattan	212	139	Manhattan, NY
	267	29	Philadelphia, PA		305	45	Miami, FL
	305	36	Miami, FL		310	38	Inglewood, CA
	347	225	Queens, NY		323	35	Los Angeles, CA
	415	31	San Francisco, CA		347	602	Brooklyn, NY
	510	29	Oakland, CA		415	58	San Francisco, CA
	516	25	Hempstead, NY		516	48	Hempstead, NY
	551	29	Hoboken, NJ		631	29	Holbrook, NY
	609	58	Trenton, NJ		646	415	Manhattan, NY
	646	110	Manhattan, NY		702	75	Las Vegas, NV
	702	64	Las Vegas, NV		718	84	Queens, NY
	718	34	Brooklyn, NY		786	29	Miami, FL
	732	113	Lakewood, NJ		818	29	Glendale, CA
	786	33	Miami, FL		914	36	White Plains, NY
	845	29	Newburgh, NY		917	428	Manhattan, NY
	856	30	Moorestown, NJ		929	46	Brooklyn, NY
	862	215	Morristown, NJ				
	908	115	Plainfield, NJ				
	916	25	Sacramento, CA				
	917	127	Manhattan, NY				
	973	259	Newark, NJ				

Table 3

Unique Area Codes Represented Over 25 Times in North Jersey and Manhattan

Discussion

According to Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), there were 45 people arrested and 16 juveniles rescued during the period of Super Bowl XLVII. The children ranged in age from 13-17 and included high school students and children reported missing by their families. The arrests and rescues are a result of "some 3000 law enforcement agents and civilians trained to spot people who might be the victims of human trafficking", and arrests were made and survivors were recovered in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut (Lopes, 2014). These arrests and rescues, while a very good thing, do not seem to correspond to the narrative surrounding sex trafficking and the Super Bowl, which suggests that up to 100,000 children are trafficked in for the event (Jee, 2011; Jervis, 2011).

When we began this project, we hypothesized that we would see frequencies of commercial sex advertisements corresponding to a somewhat normal curve when plotted with the high point occurring the day of the Super Bowl, pertaining to the belief that the Super Bowl was the leading sex trafficking event of the year. We did not find this. What we found was seemingly random patterns of frequencies that fluctuated from an average baseline. There were distinctive low posting days corresponding with the Christmas holiday (25, December 2013) Valentine's Day (14, February 2014) and well as several other seemingly random days 13 November 2013, 20 November 2013, 5 January, 2014) in North Jersey. However, there were also fairly high frequency days in North Jersey such as the day of the Super Bowl 2 February 2014, six days after the Super Bowl 8, February 2014, as well as 8, March 2014, and 14, March 2014. While the Super Bowl did represent a high day for overall postings, it was not that far out of line with some of the other high post days that we recorded. In actuality, there were 188 advertisements for commercial sex posted on the leading commercial sex website in North Jersey the day of the Super Bowl, only 84 ads above the averaged 104 advertisement baseline.

The frequency patterns were somewhat similar in Manhattan in that there were low points corresponding with holidays, Christmas (25, December 2013) and New Years Eve (31, December 2013) and unexpected high points such as 14, November 2013 and 14 December 2013. However, in Manhattan, there was not an increase in frequency during the Super Bowl as there was in North Jersey. Manhattan had an averaged base line of 130 commercial sex advertisements per day, and on the day of the Super Bowl, 2 February 2014, there were 110 postings; a decrease of 30 from the baseline.

Regardless of the minor increase in North Jersey and the minor decrease in Manhattan, we can say definitively that on the leading website for commercial sex,

during our data capture period, there was not a drastic increase in the frequency of commercial sex postings pertaining to the time around the Super Bowl. Critics of these findings may state that the increase in commercial sex postings could have been stymied by the presence of "3000 law enforcement agents and civilians trained to spot people who might be the victims of human trafficking" (Lopes, 2014), and that may be true. But the question that is also raised is one of correlation and causation. Would 3000 law enforcement agent and civilians working in concert to find trafficking victims find them in that area no matter what the time of year or event?

The larger issue found in this research is not what happened in or around the Super Bowl, but what happened during the other five months of our data capture period. There was a tremendous amount of human capital, financial resources, and awareness raising campaigns corresponding with the big game. However, this effort may take away from our more important findings, that there were potentially trafficked victims in our data every day, not just on 2 February. During the Super Bowl, there were roughly 198 advertisements for commercial sex in North Jersey and Manhattan. This pales in comparison to the 35,199 that were posted the other 149 days of our data capture period. We are concerned that linking large sporting events with sex trafficking may convince law enforcement, volunteers, and the general public that trafficking only occurs during specific times of the year or in certain areas. In short, the attention given to trafficking and sporting events may inadvertently remove attention from the trafficking that occurs every day around the country.

Limitations

Within this project there are several limitations to note. First, our team only researched one website; backpage.com, a major national website used in commercial sex. It is completely possible that traffickers may have used websites other than backpage.com. Additionally, researchers were allocated 48 hours in which to capture data. It is possible that individuals may have posted additional advertisements and deleted them prior to investigation. Our team also only investigated two sub-sections of the website corresponding to the proximity of the Super Bowl. It is not unreasonable to assume that other areas may have seen differing frequencies or patterns not visible in our data. Finally, pertaining to the costs associated with commercial sex, many advertisements did not contain pricing so our conclusions are based off of a small amount of advertisements that did. It is possible that the in-person price (non-advertised price) could be different from that contained within the published advertisement.

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