

Nothing But Hype: Sex Trafficking and the Super Bowl

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December 17, 2021

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Women's History
Sarah Lawrence College

Introduction

According to the International Labor Organization, it is estimated that there are 40.3 million victims of human trafficking globally. 75% are women and girls 1 in 4 victims of human trafficking are children. Many men, women, and children are forced into human/sex trafficking in the world at present. To the mainstream of society, human servitude is a

concept that took place many years ago and was later abolished. In all actuality that is not the case. There is a financial market for these horrendous acts against humans.

Sex trafficking has been deemed a major problem worldwide and nonprofits, governmental agencies, and think tanks have dedicated their time and money towards ending this epidemic. Sex trafficking is just one of the subsets under the umbrella of human trafficking and it is a very broad and intense topic. To spotlight its complexity, my focus will be on the American sporting event of the Super Bowl and the mythical ties to sex trafficking. Based on the evidence and research I conducted for this thesis, I argue that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this claim or even prove there is an influx in sex trafficking during the Super Bowl. Furthermore, I argue that debunking this myth is crucial to addressing this crime against humanity.

To explain human sex trafficking, and the steps that can be used to combat it, I have included the most accurate data possible. However, a small caveat is that the data may not be as accurate during this research due to the nature of the information and how it's collected. The arguments about sex trafficking vary because of the specialized agendas of certain groups and governmental agencies. By dissecting the arguments for and against the alleged increase in sex trafficking during the Super Bowl, I will be able to clarify some of the discrepancies. In addition, historical analysis and the laws behind human trafficking will assist in the understanding of what is being done by multiple agencies and parties to stop this epidemic thus protecting women, men, and children around the world.

Some of the resources obtained for this thesis are from the think tanks who have done extensive research in this field along with conferences held by the member countries of the

United Nations. Additional sources I have used are the reports from the United States Government including the Trafficking in Persons Report by the Department of State. My last set of sources consist of law enforcement agencies reports on Sex trafficking and and other trafficking in persons.

What is Sex Trafficking?

Sex trafficking is a form of human trafficking and is defined as the coercion, deceit, or use of force against an adult or child in which they are led to prostitution—or maintained in prostitution through one of these means after initially consenting to sexual activity or to move from one place to another state or country to the next. . It is a transnational crime that is often highly debated and divides public opinion in many countries. For example, activist organizations such as ProCon.org argue that sex workers, who believe that their work should be recognized as labor, sometimes resent the fact that their labor is often lumped together by anti-trafficking advocates, who assume that anyone who engages in prostitution has been trafficked.

Several actions distinguish what qualifies as sex trafficking: First, there is the act of coercion. Coercion is the criminal method behind sex trafficking which can take many forms, such as: “promised marriage, promise to care for the victims’ family, and even the aid or promise of helping the victim migrate to another country. Another well-known means of coercion is to offer the victim or her family housing or services and to then demand rent repayment of those services, which, according to the trafficker, can only be repaid by the prostitution of the young, female family member.”

Another action central to sex trafficking is transporting the victim to the areas in which they will perform acts of sexual servitude. Under such circumstances, perpetrators involved in

recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for that purpose are responsible for trafficking crimes. Sex trafficking also may occur as a form of debt bondage, as women and girls are forced to continue in prostitution using unlawful “debt” purportedly incurred as a result, of their transportation, recruitment, or even their crude “sale”—which exploiters insist they must pay off before they can be free. No matter the definition used, trafficking remains a crime against humanity.

Agencies and Bodies of Law

Laws combating crimes against humanity have been drafted and utilized as far back as the Hammurabi era, around 1755-1750 BC. “I establish these laws to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak.” (Hammurabi, King of Babylon) Several millennia later, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, part of the Geneva Convention of 1949, aimed to further humanitarian laws to protect women and children from torture, persecution, and degrading treatment of violence stemming from the effects of war. This declaration created a legal framework to support and protect trafficked victims, resulting in at least 100 countries creating laws to punish those involved in trafficking persons for sex work.

Initially, the Geneva Convention focused on four points. Convention 1 was for the “protection for those injured during wartimes, ensuring humane treatment, and prohibiting torture, and providing proper medical care.” Convention 2, an extension to Convention 1, “extended protections to shipwrecked soldiers and naval forces, in addition to hospital ships.” Convention 3 clarified what it meant to be “a prisoner of war and the protocol to provide information when captured, removing the use of torture to extract information.” Convention 4 created the “protections afforded to civilians from inhumane treatment and the

same protections as soldiers wounded during times of war and detailed how occupiers should treat a conquered population during times of war.” Currently the focus has changed to regulations on commerce, migration or regulation of prostitution and more on the victims’ rights and survivorship rather than prosecuting and imprisoning them.

In order to expand supports provided by the Geneva Convention, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies came together to create new laws in an effort to curb all forms of human trafficking. The Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA) was enacted by the United Nations Trafficking Protocol in 2000. The TVPA created the Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) in order to provide law enforcement and UN agencies with a consistent tool to globally assess the status and severity of the extent of human trafficking in any given year. It is also the world's most comprehensive diplomatic tool to assist foreign governments in their fight against human trafficking by highlighting governmental anti-human trafficking efforts, documenting the nature and scope of trafficking in persons, and clarifying the broad range of actions put in place by numerous governments to confront this crime.

In addition, the Palermo Protocol, named after an international conference that took place in Palermo, Italy, in December 2000, created stricter laws for the protection of trafficking victims by furthering the implementation of the International Instrument Against Transnational Crimes. The Palermo Protocol was separated into three sections, but my focus is placed on the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children. Countries that ratified this protocol have agreed to take measures against international and domestic crime by implementing laws to punish those (especially highly organized criminal syndicates) who violate this protocol.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also played a major role in the fight against sex trafficking. One example is The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). This is an organization of over 100 nongovernmental organizations, working together to promote the rights of women, migrant workers, and trafficked persons. GAATW advocates for the incorporation of human rights standards in all anti-trafficking initiatives, including the implementation of the Trafficking Protocol, Supplementary to the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. And governments such as the U.S. have adopted “The Three P’s” against sex trafficking: Preventing the act, Protecting the victims, and Prosecution of the perpetrators.

While these organizations’ efforts are helpful in trying to document the extent of the problem, member organizations highlight that human trafficking with the goal of sexual exploitation is an international problem, hidden in plain view. It is alleged that “millions of women, men and children are forced into this multi-billion-dollar industry.” Critics argue that sex trafficking creates public health costs, damaging victims, tearing apart families, and placing a strain on the criminal justice system.”

The Super Bowl Hype Problem

Does sex trafficking increase during major sporting events, such as the Super Bowl? Consider this news headline heralded by CNN: “*The 2019 Super Bowl has drawn thousands of people to the host city of Atlanta, but not everyone’s in town to join in on the festivities*”. This headline suggests that fans are in town for criminal reasons, including sex trafficking and prostitution. Advertisements amplify that sports fans should be aware of their environment and mindful that women and children are being trafficked during this major sporting event. In fact, it is very rare that someone meets a victim of sex trafficking or someone abducted into the world of

sex trafficking during these sporting events or specifically for the purpose of performing sex work during the Super Bowl. Ongoing propaganda about this increase has been unsubstantiated, and these claims have done more harm than good. These scare and stigmatization tactics perpetuates the myth of the Super Bowl as a powerhouse for sex and detracts from supporting the millions who are forced to work in the sex trade every year. The hype around the Super Bowl is unfounded.

Collecting reliable data to dispel the myth around the Super Bowl continues to be challenging. Some of the limitations that task forces faced were gathering information, working with communities, collaborating among the states, and the use of technology. Law enforcement agencies together with nonprofit agents argue that these limitations persist and those involved in human trafficking are rarely caught.

Regardless of its unreliability, the U.S. Department of State estimates that 16 million people worldwide were victims of forced labor in 2016, leading to only about 1000 prosecutions. The Department of State continues to argue that when the victims are brought to testify, they often refuse out of fear and intimidation. As a result, those cases are thrown out of court and the trafficker goes free. One is inclined to ask: With no witnesses, no cases, and no testimony how can this governmental entity determine a number? But they do.

In the U.S., there are two main federal databases that record and track U.S. crime data, the Uniform Crime Reporting Program and the National Incident-Based Reporting System. These numbers are used to further their agenda for funding and their mission of criminalization of sex trafficking. Unfortunately, this false reporting has negative effects on the real work that needs to be done. Anti-trafficking campaigns can have severe effects on certain groups that they are trying to help. These effects range from wasting resources, misrepresentation of the ongoing

situation, undermining the efforts of anti-trafficking groups, increased criminal penalties directed towards victims, and human rights violations against trafficked sex workers. In some cases, the hype leads to restriction and control in order to prevent women from traveling.

One of the largest nonprofit agencies and think tanks in the fight against sex trafficking, The Polaris Project, agrees that the U.S. government efforts are driven by funding. Polaris has issued many statements, held many conferences, and continues to collect data in the fight against sex trafficking. They stated that “there’s no obvious roadmap for this work, but our detailed analysis of how trafficking operations work in the United States and how they intersect with the legitimate worlds of business, finance, government, and society, gave us a baseline.”

The Polaris project has also issued many statements on sex trafficking producing facts to corroborate their findings. Polaris has created the largest known database on human trafficking in North America, which grew out of more than a decade of operating the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline. They stated in one of their reports that, “Internally, we scour the data for patterns and other information that form the underpinning of our pilot programs, policy decisions and long-term strategies. We make findings from the data set available to others in research, academia and the anti-trafficking movement because the more we all know, the faster we can end it.”

Polaris Project’s reasoning for this statement is based on the data: There are approximately 25 million people around the world today living in a situation that would be considered human trafficking under U.S. law. Of those, the best estimate is that 16 million of them are experiencing labor trafficking in industries including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, mining, domestic work, and more. Most important, their data suggest that the

numbers remain the same for all forms of trafficking. It does not increase for sporting events. A blog post by POLARIS states that “the myth about sex trafficking increasing exponentially in the city hosting the Super Bowl has become as common this time of year as chips, wings ... and, (like it or not), the New England Patriots.”

Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) is a think tank based in New York City and a staunch believer in the importance of ending sex trafficking. GEMS is the only organization in New York State specifically designed to serve girls and young women who have been forced into prostitution. GEMS was founded in 1998 by Rachel Lloyd, a young woman who had been sexually exploited as a teenager. Since that time, GEMS has helped hundreds of young women and girls, ages 12–24, who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking to exit the sex industry and to develop to their full potential.

In their research, GEMS reported that, with respect to sex trafficking, the same discrepancies are found with the data provided by law enforcement, resulting in the perpetuation of the Super Bowl myth. GEM’s argument is also supported by the Federal Agency National Institute of Justice. A research study by the institute shows that the numbers being reported on sex trafficking cases are insufficient and there isn't enough data to support any arguments made about the Super Bowl. This report shows that law enforcement does not label the cases as sex trafficking. In some cases, there are even law enforcement officials who are not skilled enough to notice a trafficking victim.

In order to provide empirical data supporting their arguments, a few anti trafficking NGOs have embarked on their own research of major sporting events, illustrated in the table below.

Below is a chart with these claims and the evidence that denies such claims:

Events:	What was predicted:	Evidence of what actually happened:
2010 World Cup- Africa	40K foreign sex workers and trafficked women for the event – an explosion in human trafficking	South African Department of Justice and Constitutional development did not find one case of trafficking during the event
2010 Olympics - Canada	40K foreign sex workers and trafficked women imported for the event	Preliminary reports suggests no trafficking cases were identified and business fell for sex workers
2006 World Cup Germany	40 K foreign sex workers trafficked women would be imported for the event	5 trafficking cases were found to be linked to the World Cup
2004 Olympics - Greece	Increase in trafficking for prostitution	No instances of trafficking for prostitution were linked to the Olympics that year
2008, 09 and 11 Super Bowl- US	10-100K sex workers invading flooding the area or trafficking for the event	Law enforcement observed no increase in sex work related arrests during the event

As per my review of numerous sources and statistical compilations, this table illustrates that numbers predicted prior to these sporting events were astronomically higher than what actually happened during these events. However, for purposes of this thesis and specifically regarding the Super Bowl, there are now several examples produced by the FBI.

The term 'sex work' is proper in its inclusivity. 'Sex work' was considered as a non-slandering term, without the spoil of the word's "prostitute" and "whore." The purpose of the term was to pass on the demonstrable skill of the sex laborer as opposed to her absence of worth. Shared knowledge and legislative action on human trafficking have increased immensely since Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000. In 2009, an upsurge of activists and Attorney Generals organized and succeeded in pressuring Craigslist to remove its “adult services” section of its website on the grounds that the website was used to traffic women and youth for sexual exploitation.

Human trafficking prosecutions such as this one is a top priority of the Department of Justice. In the last seven fiscal years, the Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorneys' Offices nationwide have increased by nearly seven-fold the number of human trafficking cases filed in court as compared to the previous seven fiscal years. In the fiscal year 2007, the Department obtained a record number of convictions in human trafficking prosecutions. But very rarely are these cases tied to major sporting events.

Many anti trafficking groups suggest that the focus on the Super Bowl serves to stimulate outcry among the general public. State, the city, and federal representatives together with public figures, such as the New Jersey 4th District US Representative Chris Smith and Cindy McCain, wife of former Arizona Senator John McCain, are well known for their involvement in anti-trafficking initiatives. Smith and McCain, for example, have described the Super Bowl as "the largest human-trafficking venue on the planet". Senators stand together and proclaim task forces being set up during the Super Bowl, yet there are no persecutions following all the claims of an increase. Kate Mogulescu, the founder and Supervising Attorney for the Trafficking Victims Advocacy Project at the Legal Aid Society in New York City, sheds light on the fact that the reports of an increase in sex trafficking is unsubstantiated and is made believable by repetition that it is happening. Laura Augustin, a sociologist who studies and blogs about migrant myths argues that "No one is quite sure where the number originated. But in the past few years, whenever a place holds a great sporting event the rumor of a flood of prostitutes soon blossoms. And for some reason, that number is 40,000." Statements like these surface because they make for good news stories and press conferences by elected officials, capturing the public's imagination and typically promoted by anti-prostitution organizations.

In an Op-Ed, the award-winning *Washington Times* journalist Deborah Simmons states that sex trafficking takes place year-round, but she argues that sex and the Super Bowl are natural attractions. Within the Op-Ed, she describes a girl in a box that looks like a Barbie doll



bearing a sign 'for sale ages 10 to 17. See image 1:

Girl in a Box.

Image #1

These fake for-sale models serve to remind the public that children are not toys and that sex trafficking is not an adult only crime. According to FBI sources, she argues, over 293,000 children in the US are at risk of exploitation and sex trafficking.

While abolitionist feminists have worked alongside conservative evangelicals since the early 70's to craft state-centered solutions to human trafficking, other feminists have opposed criminal justice approaches to trafficking that do not address structural economic and social factors that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Understanding feminist examinations on human trafficking is important because these debates reveal fundamental conventions about sex, gender, sexuality, race, and the idea of human trafficking. In addition, research and public policies reveal why this issue has risen to importance at this historical moment and what's really at stake in these debates.

The labor groups who defend sex trafficking will argue that this data is not substantiated and as a result government have been able to use it to apply it towards their mission of criminalization of sex trafficking. For example, this led to the European Parliament agreeing on a resolution “falsely claiming that major sporting events result in a temporary and spectacular increase in the demand for sexual services”. Nonprofits and the public who rally together to stop sex trafficking has placed blame on groups including the media, prostitution abolitionists groups, faith-based groups and law enforcement agencies, and many other organizations for statements made in reference to an increase in prostitution and trafficking due to the Super bowl and other major sporting events. These groups continue to argue that even though trafficking is a serious degradation of human rights and deserves attention and care, these numbers are far below the projected values that have usually been promoted by anti-prostitution groups.

American society has had a strong hold on sports and sporting events that go way back as the early 1800's. They enjoy sports such as Baseball, Hockey, Basketball, and Football which was officially Rugby and developed into Football in 1876. Sports was highly dominated by males and differentiated by race. Some races were not even allowed to participate in sporting events. These men displayed athleticism and power which was said to attract all types of women to whatever sports they participated in. During a conference addressing sex trafficking, Senator Tom Kean (D-NJ) argued “anytime there is a mega event, trafficking increases because the demand increases.” In other words, anytime men travel to a place where they enjoy a degree of safety and anonymity, they are more likely to pay for sex. Kean's statement relies on problematic assumptions about masculinity, business practices within the sex industry, and the root of trafficking.

Gail Bederman depicts this in her book, *Manliness, and Civilization*. She describes the the social construct of the earlier generation and their reaction towards sports as one in which women were drawn to the athletes. As explained in earlier discussions that during this period women were deemed as powerless and attracted to these powerful athletes. Hence the reason why there are arguments against sex trafficking indicating that sex workers choose to be in this profession versus the alternative arguments which is sporting events tend to bring men towards these arenas and provide a cover for sex trafficking taking advantage of women and girls.

Bederman explains that this is a cultural history in the United States in which men claimed their manliness. This is also true for men feeling the freedom to be able to pay for and engage in illegal sexual activity. Two of Bederman's arguments detail how manliness, male power, and domination can be reinforced by society and the justice system. In fact, they can be intricately linked. In the early Victorian era, she described American culture as one in which men showed restraint, strong characteristics, and a powerful will. This gradually gave way to a glorification of "masculinity," a word which only in the late nineteenth century began to suggest "aggressiveness, physical force, and male sexuality".

This lack of self-restraint has been brought up by anti-trafficking groups over and over again. Men are depicted a bare chested, guzzling down beers, drinking in excess, surrounded by sex symbols and the availability of sex makes them insatiable. Thus, the idea is that events like the Super Bowl allow these men to become more indulgent and one of these indulgences is sex. American men tend to see this as an accomplishment and tout their conquests and powers by embracing this illegal act of sex trafficking.

Other evidence of this is from the early 1950s in which men considered leisure as something that must be incorporated into their routines. As a result, these men sought sexual

freedom and sports as part of their leisure time. They envisioned themselves as being like these athletes who were portrayed as gods and having numerous sexual conquests. In turn the men at home idolized these athletes and began to believe they too could achieve this sexual power. They began reading magazines with centerfolds first published by Hugh Hefner in which sexual pleasure was defined. Barbara Ehrenreich describes this as the era in which men sought to revolt from women and become irresponsible and indulgent. The reasoning behind this was because they claimed that they worked hard and needed leisure time and time to enjoy their money.

And then there was Nipplegate.

Super Bowl XXXVIII February 1st, 2004, was broadcast live from Texas on CBS. This halftime show was noted for being the most controversial halftime show in American Super Bowl history. Janet Jackson's left breast was exposed during a performance with Justin Timberlake. On her nipple was a nipple shield, which covered that part of her breast, but that was not enough. Because this happened during primetime television, the media made this into a big deal and named the incident "Nipplegate". This incident was extensively talked about by many media outlets and became known as the most searched Super Bowl controversy of all time.

There were varied opinions of what took place that day in February. In ESPN magazine Martin Cogan stated that "this was one of the shows that created "mass hysteria". He goes on to discuss that this was the time America lost its mind. It is interesting that a magazine such as ESPN which has photos of scantily clad cheerleaders could so easily place blame on Janet Jackson for a mere incident that was less than two minutes long on live television. He also provides his readers with an interview and behind the scenes look at the producers who indicate that they had no idea this was supposed to happen or thus take no responsibility for initiating the ideas of having Timberlake "make [Janet Jackson] naked by the end of this song".

Cogan seems enthralled by the depiction and blame being placed on Janet Jackson with little regard or blame placed on her male counterpart. This is a prime example of the argument made by anti-traffickers: that men are not being blamed nor do they take responsibility for their actions during occurrences that involves sex and other lewd behavior during the Super Bowl. Meanwhile, Justin Timberlake was free to continue his life while mainstream media and the world lashed out at Janet Jackson for this incident. He also depicts the bias of the media in this case ESPN, which is one of the biggest broadcasting and profiting companies during the Super Bowl. Adam Levine performed shirtless during the Super Bowl in 2019 and he did not suffer media consequences nor was his reputation tarnished as Janet Jackson's.

Brent Bozell, the writer for MediaResearch.org, discusses the incident during the halftime show. He sarcastically describes how Americans can be hypocritical. Bozell states that, "sports are supposed to remain as an inspirational oasis in our culture. In recent years, as professional sports have grown massively popular, the gap between athletic performance on the field and athletic misbehavior off the field has widened into a chasm". He basically means that this is what the sport has turned into, mere nudity and outright sex.

Bozell also discusses the huge companies that broadcast these sporting events and their awareness of a fan base and what these fans expect. He puts into words what no one else will: That during and after the "Nipplegate" controversy – "No one this side of third grade ought to imagine this was an unplanned mistake." He makes a few good points in his argument that these performances should not be shown on television, because families were watching at that time. Nonetheless, he constantly calls out the networks for producing sleaze that we all know is seen on an everyday basis all over television and the media. These things don't only happen during

the Super Bowl. That blame tends to go as far as inside the huge corporations that create a sporting entertainment world for its viewers.

It is much easier to pass the buck instead of taking responsibility for what they have created and again blame a woman and life goes on. This same mentality applies to fans who care less about the woman that is being victimized during a sexual encounter or the little girl who does not have a choice but is performing as her pimp demands her to do. This type of horror takes place in many forms and in order to combat it, the hype needs to be toned down so the real agencies and groups can fight against sex trafficking without confusion.

In addition, Bozell explains that there is the double standard that men are not held to as high a standard as women when it comes to sexuality and questionable behaviors. For example, the Adam Levine Super Bowl performance. Several social media users, including celebrities, questioned “why it was OK to see his top half and not Janet’s. Society deems it acceptable for him to be shirtless during the halftime show and Janet Jackson was chastised because her top half was accidentally exposed at the same event. #doublestandards,” A tweet by Breslin, reads “It’s unfair that she was ridiculed for an accident that wasn’t even her fault, but a man can take his shirt off on stage and it’s no problem...I’m saying neither should be fined. Or both should be fined. It’s not fair an accidental slip is a cause for a fine but a man ripping his shirt off on stage is chill. It should be a fine for both or a fine for none.” The media censorship is working diligently but what does it say here to the women who are chastised like Janet, to the young girls who are trafficked into the sex industry?

Conclusion

Instead of considering the Superbowl as a power house for sex, society would be better served by supporting women who are forced to work in the sex trade. GAATW suggests other

ways to act effectively instead of spreading rumors about the increase in trafficked victims during the Super Bowl. Some of those suggestions include addressing other forms of trafficking (such as labor trafficking) connected to large sporting events and collaborating with groups affected by trafficking including trafficked victims and migrants. The consensus is that activist groups should raise awareness among the public about sex workers' rights and options. They should encourage more analysis and public discussions about trafficking and sex work. These discussions should be based on anti-trafficking efforts and evidence, not on fear, misinformation, or pity.

Similarly, The Polaris Project stance is, "this spread of misinformation has real and detrimental impacts on the ability of the anti-trafficking community to protect those who have or are currently experiencing human trafficking and to bring traffickers to justice. It is imperative that the public fully understand the negative effects that spreading and acting on these rumors and misinformation can have on service providers, victims and survivors, and the broader anti-trafficking field."The Department of Justice reported that it has awarded nearly \$101 million, through the department's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) in funding to combat human trafficking and provide vital services to trafficking victims throughout the United States. Another Governmental Agency, The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) awarded over \$97.4 million to state, local and tribal jurisdictions, service providers, and task forces all over the country, while OJP's National Institute of Justice awarded the remaining \$3.5 million to support research. Let's put that money to good use and end the scourge of human sex trafficking.

Thank you, page,:

I would like to say a very special thanks to three wonderful compassionate women: my thesis Advisors (Mary Dillard and Nadeen Thomas), Second reader (Tara James), and the Graduate Studies Director (Mary Dillard) and all the other women from Sarah Lawrence who has assisted me in reaching my goal.

It has taken me years to complete this thesis, and it has not been easy. I suffer from depression and major anxiety disorder, and there were times I wanted to give up. I would have never seen this thesis come to fruition. However, there were two women who totally believed in me and gave me so many chances which at times I too thought I did not deserve. There are days I would wake up and could not put pen to paper to make this thesis come to life. There are days especially after COVID that my depression was so severe I would lay in bed and cry and think of so many ways to quit.

Nadeen, Tara, and Mary are very special and dear to my heart, even though I have never met Mary and Nadeen in person. They understood my struggle not only as a minority student with other responsibilities but as a woman who suffers from impairments. They both worked very closely with me and always checked in on me when I went silent. They encouraged me to complete this THESIS and gave me feedback and hope that I too could do this.

People who know me can attest to the fact that I work hard. It's in my DNA, but it took everything in me to get this completed. When I realized that this was crunch time, I gave it my all and here I am today with my Thesis. This is truly a proud moment.

Nothing has been more of an accomplishment in my entire life than completing this.

Thank you so much.

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