The Influence of Social Status and Power on the Sexual Behavior of Male Collegiate Football Athletes

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The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived influence that status and social power have on the sexual behavior of 15 male football players at a Southeastern university. Participants were individually interviewed and findings revealed four major themes concerning college football players: (a) they have a polarizing image among women, (b) their status influences their self-perception and behavior, (c) women are attracted to their status, and (d) they believed women perceived benefits in having sex with them. Understanding the lived experience of college football athletes can aid in further studies of their behaviors as well as the development of programs and services focused on at-risk behavior prevention.

KEYWORDS male athlete, sexual activity, college football, football players

In February 2009, professional athletes were documented as being involved in misbehavior 22 days of the month, the majority of which were reported as criminal misconduct (Young Kim & Parlow, 2009). Athletes and at-risk behavior is an area of contention; some are perceived to be prone to criminal behavior, but others insist it is simply growing public and media scrutiny (Young Kim & Parlow). At the college level, athletes have reported higher levels of at-risk behaviors than non-athletes in areas such as sexual activity, alcohol consumption, and substance use (Leeper, 2006). Alcohol consumption, for example, is higher among college athletes than non-athletes, even among high education institutions with severe sanctions such as Christian-affiliated colleges (Frye, Allen, & Drinnon, 2010).
The sport of football has become the most popular in America (Harris Poll, 2009), and along with its growing visibility, there has also been an increasing awareness of at-risk or negative behaviors committed by those who participate. Sports participation studies have yielded both positive and negative findings for those involved in sports (Baghurst & Lirgg, 2009; Hartmann & Massoglia, 2007). Studies have shown that when compared to non-athletes, college athletes have demonstrated more at-risk behaviors such as alcohol, drunkenness, violence, sexual activity, sexual behaviors, and drugs (Leeper, 2006). They pose significant challenges to college athletics leadership, as the deleterious outcomes can impact a variety of stakeholders (Baghurst & Parish, 2010).

To date, no studies have considered status and social power when researching the at-risk, deviant behaviors of athletes. Deviant behavior emerges when component elements of social and cultural exist in contradiction, which consequently places pressure on an individual to engage in a form of illegitimate conduct (Merton, 1957). This type of behavior is more likely to occur in societies where emphases on cultural goals are disproportionate to the available means to achieve those goals (Parnaby & Sacco, 2004).

American society has developed an obsession with individuals who have celebrity type status (Sheridan, North, Maltby, & Gillett, 2007) and are idolized from adolescence (Hyman & Sierra, 2010); consequently, society perceives, values, and treats athletes differently (Thirer & Wright, 1985). As celebrities, athletes experience cultural norms different from those who are non-athletes, potentially conflicting with societal norms when status is not recognized (Kurzman et al., 2007).

College athletes face the challenge of being perceived negatively on their campuses because of the supposed preferential treatment they receive (Jolly, 2008; Simmons, 2007). In addition, they engage in more at-risk behaviors than non-athletes (Leeper, 2006), and are more sexually active outside of committed partner relationships (Vail-Smith, Whetstone, & Knox, 2010). If sports participation is the cause of both increases in status and negative perceptions, the conflict of celebrity norms and societal norms will continue to grow, resulting in increased deviant behaviors from those who participate in sports (Merton, 1957).

Although studies have discussed possible reasons why college athletes engage in high at-risk behaviors, no studies have investigated athlete-specific characteristics that could potentially influence their behaviors. High status and social power have been recognized as characteristics associated with athletic participation (Thirer & Wright, 1985), which may influence the at-risk behaviors of male football players, specifically sexual behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how status and social power influence the sexual behavior of male college-football athletes. The research questions were developed through a reflective process of allowing the initial research inquiry to provide general questions about the phenomenon (Agee, 2009) and included:

R1. How does athletic status influence how male college athletes experience perception and treatment by women?

R2. How does athletic status influence how male college athletes experience sexual attractiveness or activity with women?
Method

Participants
Participants were 15 male junior and senior college-football athletes who had spent at least two years competing at a Southeastern NCAA football bowl subdivision (FBS) university. They were selected from the active travel roster of the participating team, and non-travel and practice team players were excluded from participation. All participants were single, and 13 of the 15 participants identified themselves as African-American.

Instruments
Qualitative measure instruments are typically in the form of interview questions and observations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The two research questions were developed from a combination of the theoretical framework and literature review (Hartmann & Massoglia, 2007; Wetherill & Fromme, 2007). Seven interview questions were developed from the research questions with the purpose of understanding how being individuals of high status and social power influences participants’ sexual behaviors.

Procedures
Following IRB and head coach approval, potential participants met with the primary researcher who provided an overview of the study. Fifteen participants who met the inclusion criteria agreed to participate. Participants were interviewed by the primary researcher in a private setting where interviews lasted between 60–90 minutes. Research data were collected using an audio recording device and handwritten transcripts. Each participant was asked the same seven open-ended interview questions. Follow-up questions were asked of participants when clarity or more insight into responses was needed. Interview participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and to maintain participant confidentiality. Audio recordings were transcribed and entered into NVivo 10 software.

Analysis
The current study applied van Manen’s (1990) six activities of hermeneutical research whereby isolation of thematic statements were derived. The transcribed text was read several times and initial themes were developed by looking at words, phrases, sentences, blocks of dialogue, and the transcript as a whole. Statements that appeared to be related to the phenomenon were highlighted, and themes were developed from the highlighted phrases or sentences within each interview. The process was followed by reflection and more questions (Hein & Austin, 2001) until sensible meanings of the experience were reached that were free from inner contradictions (Laverty, 2003) and themes could be coded. The coding process consisted of: (a) categorizing the data highlighted, (b) interconnecting the categories for commonalities to develop themes, and (c) connecting the interrelationship of themes to the phenomenon being studied (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Triangulation in qualitative research aids in the strengthening of research validity (Shank, 2006) through the use of multiple methods or data in the corroborating of
evidence (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). It minimizes the possibility of chance
associations or systematic bias, thus increasing confidence in the analysis and
interpretation of the data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech). In the current study, triangu-
lation occurred through the collaboration of participant interviews, recordings,
and emerging thematic analysis (Golafshani, 2003). Each data collection source
mentioned in triangulation were assessed and compared to see if the multiple data
sources arrived at the same conclusion.

Results

The analysis process led to the emergence of four major themes: (a) participants have a
polarizing image among women, (b) participant status influences their self-perception
and behavior, (c) participants felt that women are attracted to their status as college
football players, and (d) participants felt women perceived benefits in having sex
with them. Subthemes are described within the discussion of each major theme.

Theme 1: College Football Players Have a Polarizing Image Among
Women

Eleven of 15 participants commented on how they were viewed, perceived, or
treated by women as a result of their status as college football players which resulted
in three subthemes. Only 6% of participants reported being viewed or treated posi-
tively, 20% reported being viewed or treated negatively, 27% reported being viewed
or treated in a combination of positive, negative, and normal, 20% reported being
treated both positively and negatively, and 27% did not report a specific view or
treatment by women.

Subtheme 1: Normal Perception and Treatment

Some participants shared that their perception and treatment from women was
normal or in the same manner as non-football playing college males. This occurred
when women were not aware of their status as athletes, but when known they were
treated with what they considered to be either extremely positive or extremely
negative.

Colin stated, “Some will treat you just regular. I usually don’t tell them I am a foot-
ball player to see how they act when they do find out you play football.” Several par-
ticipants stated that perceptions would dramatically change after learning of their
status as football players. Derrick added,

Very rarely will they see you as a normal person and then find out you are an athlete and
have the same behavior toward you; it’s either going to be a positive upspring or the
other way around. It doesn’t really stay the same once they find out.

Subtheme 2: Positive Perception and Treatment

Participants reported treatment by women as better than the treatment given to indi-
viduals who are not college football players. Example statements included “They’re
(college football players) treated like complete gods and women want to please the
athlete” and “They (women) treat you good... They just treat you like royalty, that’s
how they act.” Such treatment included, “... cooking, back massage, wash your clothes, clean up your room, wash your dishes, or something like that.”

**Subtheme 3: Negative Perception and Treatment**
Sixty-seven percent of participants commented on being viewed or treated negatively by women because of their status as college football players. Participants expressed that some women were not attracted to their status and preferred to not associate with college football players. Fred stated, “Being an athlete can work against you... some girls don’t like to get caught up in their feelings and don’t want to get hurt from talking with a football player because he might be messing with other girls.”

Derrick expressed his concern about the negative perception that some women have of football players. “Talking to females they tend to see us as dogs and players, womanizers and stuff like that... Guys like me are stuck under that bubble even though it’s not the case in our specific situation, but that’s just what I’m faced with.”

Several participants shared that after learning that participants were college football players, some women immediately began to view and treat them negatively. George stated, “I’ve tried to tell someone (a woman) I’m on the football team, and I instantly get told, ‘Oh you’re no good, you’re just a whore because I know you mess around with a lot of girls’”. Derrick added, “I’ve seen a football player talking to a girl and she found out he was a football player and she just doesn’t talk to him at all anymore.”

**Theme 2: The Status of a College Football Player Influences Their Self-Perception and Behavior**
All participants commented on the influence status can have on the behavior of college football players. Five subthemes were identified: (a) a sense of invincibility, (b) a sense of being better than or above others, (c) can get what they want, (d) special treatment, and (e) treatment of women. Forty percent of participants mentioned a sense of invincibility, 80% mentioned how athletes treat women; 80% mentioned a sense of entitlement among college football players; 80% mentioned how athletes can get what they want, and 87% mentioned special treatment for athletes.

**Subtheme 1: Sense of Invincibility**
Participants mentioned a sense of invincibility influenced their behavior by having no fear of their actions, believing there was nothing they could not do, convinced that nothing could happen to them, and believing they are indispensable. Bryce shared, “Some feel they can get away with stuff because they feel needed...like I can do what I want and not get in trouble for it or not receive as much trouble for it as I should.” Colin stated that people allowed athletes to “break the rules or get around anything.”

Eric also discussed the sense of invincibility from college football players when it comes to sexual activity with women. He stated,

Some people don’t think about those consequences like sexually transmitted diseases. Some people think they are invincible to it and they can’t get them, when in actuality,
you can get them. Being a football player, you can go out and meet a girl and that same night you can have sexual intercourse or sexual activity with them. You don’t know anything about the girl. You don’t know if she has kids or STDs, but you’re in the moment, so you just go do whatever it is and don’t think too much about it.

Subtheme 2: Sense of Being Better Than or Above Others
Participants shared how the status of being a college football player can influence an athlete and have them become what is referred to as bigheaded. According to Jerry “You kind of like distance yourself from others; like from normal people. You feel like you can’t be around them because of status and everything. You feel like you are this one individual that is on another higher level.” Michael supported these thoughts: “Obviously we think of ourselves as the bosses around here. As they say, we are the BMOC’s, the big men on campus. Everybody knows it.”

Subtheme 3: Football Players Can Do and Get What They Want
Joseph referred to the ability as college football players have sex with women whenever they wanted as a “wicked power” to have. He added, “It can be easy to have sex with women and multiple women at any given time… The danger in it is that you have the ability to manipulate women at your own will.” According to Michael, “We do because we can; because it’s there and we don’t have to try for it… It’s too easy! Do we get laid more than any other college student? Absolutely… we don’t have to try, and we can even share a girl (sexually) if we wanted to and that can work.

Derrick shared how he believes this mentality could be the reason for alleged or confirmed rape cases among athletes and women.

If you take it that you can get any women you want, it will give you a false confidence that’s not real… I feel like the reason the cases (athlete rape cases) are true or are available is because when an athlete builds that mindset in their head that they can have any woman they want… that day comes when you meet a women that just can’t be had by anyone and she’s hard to get; you try to force things. That’s how those cases can start, just by not being realistic.

Subtheme 4: Special Treatment
Most participants agreed that college football players were treated or had the opportunity of being treated in privileged ways because of their status, which included special treatment from women. Joseph stated, “Some (college football players) are treated like a God to them (women).” Leroy shared, “A girl will be down to do anything just to keep you happy. They’d probably do things out of their element that they really wouldn’t think they’d ever do just because you are a football player.” Several participants shared that women would do things for them such as wash their laundry, clean their dorms, buy them food, take them to dinner, do their school work, and have sex with them. Joseph said,

You do have girls out here that just want to chase athletes around and that will just do anything for a football player. … They don’t care who it is, as long as you play football, they’re chasing that jersey, and as some would say, ‘cleat chasers’.
Subtheme 5: Treatment of Women
Many of the participants viewed some women as sex objects. “You make it known that you are a football player and a lot of girls would want to sleep with you just because you’re a football player, and it’s a lot easier just because you have that status,” said Robert. Participants also felt with so many women wanting to have sex with them, there often could be no emotional or intimate attachment, but rather merely a transactional relationship sexually. Eric explained, “I think sometimes the mentality is ‘I’ll have sex with you’. There can be no emotions or anything; just ‘you look good and we can have sex’.”

After engaging with sex, some participants expressed becoming disinterested and distanced themselves. Following sex, Fred explained that you can “…act like you don’t know her, and you’d probably been with her (had sex) last night.” Michael added,

I know this is bad but even if you one night stand these girls, they don’t care. They’re so thrilled with the fact that they got to hook up with you, it doesn’t matter to them that you don’t talk to them anymore (afterwards)...Just the fact you are a football player it makes it all okay.

One participant shared how engaging in sex with women was a means of competition with his teammates. “Some guys even try to compete, to see who can get more the easiest. It’s sad in some respects but I guess it’s just the way it is.” Colin also mentioned how common it was for college football players to have multiple women as sexual partners. “If one isn’t treating you right, you just get rid of her. You don’t keep her around. This becomes their motivation; that you’ll get rid of them if they don’t act right or treat you right.” Fred added, “When I was a freshman, all I had to do was to send out one text...then choose who I wanted to come over (for sex) because they all would respond.”

Theme 3: Women are Attracted to the High Status of College Football Players.
All 15 participants commented on women being drawn to college football players because of their status. Two subthemes were identified: (a) status makes college football players more attractive to women, and (b) women pursue college football players’ sexually. Each subtheme was supported by 87% of participants’ comments.

Subtheme 1: Status Makes College Football Players More Attractive
Participants expressed that being a football player in addition to having a higher status increases women’s attraction to them. Eric stated, “As your status increases as a football player, women want you more,” and Fred added, “The guy that’s a superstar, he can have anybody he wants basically.” Greg furthered this thinking:

Being a football player makes you look nice (even though) you may not look nice. Being that star athlete makes you look real handsome and everything...It is definitely the status that makes a football player look more attractive...Sometimes, just being honest, some girls find out you’re a football player and they might want to do something (sexually) with you for that reason.
Subtheme 2: Women Pursue College Football Players Sexually
Participants commented on how they felt women would often times be the initiator or will pursue them for sex because of their status as college football players. Joseph stated, “You do have girls out here that just want to chase athletes around and will just do anything for a football player.” Michael shared, “It’s almost like we (football players) don’t even have to do anything...We don’t have to go and pursue women, man, they literally do pursue us.”

Participants felt unable to turn down attractive women offering to have sex with them, as there were no reasons to refuse. Jerry explained,

We are put in more situations than it’s hard to get out of, like if a girl is just throwing themselves at you; a beautiful girl too. You’re not just going to deny it or just turn it down...we just don’t want to turn it down. Who wants to turn down sex? That’s not the norm.

Leroy added that “A girl wants a man with status...they are going to throw themselves at you and I don’t know one of my teammates who is going to turn it (sex) down. You’re giving it; we’re going to take it.”

Theme 4: Women See Greater Benefit in Having Sex With College Football Players
Fourteen of 15 participants commented that women experience benefits from having sex with college football players. Five subthemes were identified: (a) physically attractive, (b) sex with a football player seen in a positive way, (c) potential financial security, (d) opportunity to experience the lifestyle and potential future success, and (e) increase in status of women.

Subtheme 1: Physically Attractive
Participants discussed how they perceived that women preferred more athletic men as sexual partners. Greg explained that “A lot of girls look at body type, and what position you play. In football, people look at body type and size. Football players are very big and they’re muscular, and that’s 9 out of 10 of what women like.” Colin stated that, “Many (women) do tend to like football players or athletes more (than regular male college students). Some dudes (athletes) look like models so you’re not going to be out of shape. Women do tend to love that.” Eric added that, “As a college football player some females see you as eye candy.”

Subtheme 2: Sex With College Football Players Seen in a Positive Way
Participants believed that women who had sex with them thought more positively of the experience than if they had engaged in sexual activity with a non-athlete. For example, Michael shared, “Unless you’re a successful student who has something going for him, girls aren’t really going to be attractive to that stuff. What’s the benefit for being with this (regular) guy?” Robert stated, “I guess a woman would want to have sex with you just to say she had sex with a college football player”, and George believed having sex with a football player “makes the girl feel good
about what she’s doing because she’s saying I am not just having sex with any type of
guy.” Michael thought that it was “…cool to them; it’s the cool thing to do, to have
slept with a football player. It’s fun to them; it makes them feel better about
themselves.”

**Subtheme 3: Potential Financial Security**
The potential for financial security, possibly by having children, was mentioned
among participants as a reason women desired and pursued having sex with
college football players. Fred talked candidly about how believes women may see
financial gain as a benefit from having sex with college football players. He
stated, “Women see an opportunity to make money…Women have always been
going after athletes because they’ve got a chance to make it and they trying to
look for the easy way out. They’re just looking for the next dollar.”

Several participants mentioned a term they referred to as “getting trapped” where
they believed women intentionally pursued unprotected sex in hopes of getting preg-
nant. George shared:

They kind of see their prince charming taking them away from whatever life they’re
living now. Sometimes they don’t even do it for the love of the person; they do it for
the pursuit of his money; if he gets it one day. So they try to stick with them, even if
they may not like this person; even if they don’t care for this person that way.

**Subtheme 4: Experience the Lifestyle and Potential Future Success**
Participants talked about women desiring to be with them sexually, partly motivated
by the lure of experiencing the lifestyle that comes with the player’s status. Dillon
stated that by being with an athlete, “…you get attention, and women, they
thrive for the attention that the athlete gets that comes with being an athlete.
They want to be seen in that atmosphere of an athlete.”

Bryce explained that they seek marriage “…so they can have what you have, like
the money and the stuff that comes with being in the pros; the fame.” Eric shared
that with respect to sex, “Maybe if I do this for him (have sex), maybe in time
he’ll give me something in return. They see us as kind of a meal ticket.”

**Subtheme 5: Increase in Status of Women**
Interestingly, participants shared that some women were perceived to pursue college
football players sexually because it could increase their status within their own social
circles. Participants also believed that as a woman’s status increased as a result of
being sexually involved with a college football player, she could become even
more attractive and desired by other males. Colin stated that women having sex
with college football players put women “…on a pedestal and makes them feel
they’re important.” Jerry shared that women would “actually brag about” having
sex with college football players. Michael supported these comments:

It makes them more popular…to be able to say you have had sex with a football player…
it raises their status as a female that they feel more special about themselves knowing that
they slept with somebody who is looked up to, somebody who is in a high aspect of life.
Eric referred to a TV celebrity who gained fame from her relationships with athletes:

All I see is she had sexual intercourse with a famous person. That intercourse hit the web and ... she starts becoming an icon... the only thing she’s done is dated famous people and she’s gotten money off of it. She’s started her own clothing line, perfume, all of these things ... because of one or a couple people she had sexual intercourse with.

Discussion

This study explored how status and social power is perceived to influence the sexual behavior of male college-football athletes. Participants’ responses confirmed the study’s literature and theoretical framework, as status and social power was shown to influence social exchange and sexual interaction. This was supported by all participants who also suggested that it can potentially create an entitlement mentality among college football players. Also, participants noted that women were commonly known to “throw themselves” at college football players with some women being given the label of “cleat chasers.” A majority of participants noted “sex was easy for college football players”, and the pursuit of college football players sexually by women was a key reason why participants believed that they had more sex than their non-athlete male counterparts.

Theme 1: College Football Players Have a Polarizing Image among Women

Women were perceived to view college football players mostly with either extreme positive or negative perceptions which contributed to two subthemes of (a) women preferences, and (b) the lifestyle associated with having a relationship with a college football player. Participants believed some women like the popular, celebrity type lifestyle of a college football player and willingly accept the transactional type sexual relationship a player may have with women. Football athletes receive treatment within society unique from those who do not have the same level of recognition or status (Thirer & Wright, 1985). Being given preferential treatment supports the celebrity attachment, and in some cases the celebrity worship that participants expressed receiving from women which in extreme cases has been found to correlate with addiction (Sheridan et al., 2007). Participants discussed experiencing women who displayed worship type behavior toward them; referring to a deep devotion to do whatever they could to please the athlete. Derrick shared that athletes are, “… treated like complete gods, and women want to please athletes.”

As it relates to the current study, women were reported to give preferential treatment to athletes in the form of increased attention and sexual favors. Participants felt women showed them more attention as a result of their status. Kurzman et al. (2007) discussed women known as groupies whose goal is to be available for sex when professional athletes ask, because of their celebrity status. These women are similar in nature to the women participants referred to as cleat chasers. With participants having a celebrity type image among some women, they believe their status has
had a major influence on the behaviors of these women; in particular their sexual behaviors toward them.

**Theme 2: The Status of a College Football Player Influences Their Self-Perception and Behavior**

The perceived superior status can develop a glorified self through the attention college athletes receive from society (Kurzman et al., 2007). Because of the preferential treatment from women, participants reported that players developed a “big head” mentality that created a sense of superiority, entitlement, and invincibility. This allowed players to have little or no fear of consequences for their actions or behaviors. Some participants shared that this mentality can be developed as early as youth football, and came from a culture of special treatment they received from parents, family members, coaches, and the community. This supports findings that high school athletes report higher at-risk behaviors and lower perceived risk than non-athletes (Wetherill & Fromme, 2007). Participants shared repeatedly how easy it was for them to have a woman they wanted sexually. This supports the reported link between social power and sexual activity, which provides power to induce goal pursuit (Smith & Bargh, 2008). Goal pursuit is associated with the approach system theory of behavior whereby goal pursuits by individuals of high social power are induced because of the increased opportunities for them to obtain their desired goal, while greatly lowering their potential risks and consequences (Smith & Bargh). The higher an individual’s status and social power the more inclined they are to pursue their desired goals, as individuals with high status and social power are given greater opportunities to obtain goals and have lower risk or potential consequences because of their status and power.

One participant shared how their status as college football players was a “wicked power” to have because they had the ability to manipulate women which many players regularly used. This supports Kipnis’ (1972) early work on how power impacts the power holder. Power increases the likelihood that the individual will attempt to influence and manipulate others, and the control of power appears to facilitate the development of a cognitive and perceptual system that serves to justify the use of power. For example, participants reported how often and easy women could be had for sex, and were then dismissed or made to keep their distance.

Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, (2003) developed the behavioral approach/inhibition system to convey their theory explaining how power influences the behavior of power holders. It was posited that individuals with elevated power would display an increase in positive affect, sensitivity to reward, automaticity of social cognition, socially inappropriate behavior, and approach related behaviors. The behavioral approach/inhibition system supports the seemingly automatic nature of college football players’ sexual activity with women.

Participants expressed how college football players will engage in sex with random women despite the risks of sexually transmitted diseases. Participants also admitted that even though they believed some women were having sex with them to possibly get pregnant and for other personal gains, it did not stop them from having sex. The more power an individual possesses, the more likely they are to
engage in unprotected sex (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). In addition, behavior approach/inhibition system supports the comments of participants that their status and power can also lead to potential trouble when an athlete is convinced he can have any women sexually. When a woman refuses, the athlete may still try to pursue sex.

**Theme 3: Women are Attracted to the High Status of College Football Players**
Participants commented at length on how their status made them more attractive to women than non-athlete college males. Thirer & Wright (1985) reported that women ranked athletes the highest when attributing social status ranking to males. Participants acknowledged that the higher the status of the football player, the more attractive and desirable that player was to women in comparison to other football players with lower status. As one’s status increases, so does the attraction of others (Miller, Sabo, Farrell, Barnes, & Melnick, 1999).

**Theme 4: Women See Greater Benefit in Having Sex with College Football Players**
Participants believed that women found it more beneficial to have sex with college football players as opposed to non-athlete college males, for it made them feel good about themselves. Cultural resource theory explains that, “Convention instructs girls to be attractive to males and in part measure their self-worth on the basis of the status of the males they attract” (Miller et al., 1999, p. 367). Young women are said to develop sexual identities that conform to traditional gender expectation in which they learn to see themselves through the eyes of men and not their own feelings. Also with their development of attraction to males, girls began to measure their self-worth by the type of males they attract (Miller, Sabo, Farrell, Barnes, & Melnick, 1999).

The notion that women would have sex with college football players just to be closer to them or a part of their social circle supports status value theory, which suggests that individuals can transfer status to other characteristics or goods such as male gender (characteristic) and sex with males (gifts or goods). Participants believed women would have sex with college football players because of their status. Female resource theory predicts that men will give other resources in exchange for sex with women (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). In this study, sex is seen as a female resource that is given (Baumeister & Vohs) and status is seen as an equitable received resource (Miller et al., 1999).

Women also were said to pursue sex with college football players because of the potential for financial security as well as an opportunity to experience their lifestyle. Studies have shown that women’s physical attractiveness, submission, and gratification are often exchanged for a man’s wealth, protection, and social standing (Fogarty, 2009; Miller et al., 1999; Rijt & Macy, 2006). In sexual relationships, sex is sometimes exchanged for other resources such as intimacy, favors, money, and love (Sprecher, 1998). Participants expressed the belief that women would not engage in sex with them the same if they did not have the status as college
football players, and that some women want to have sex with them just to be a part of their lifestyle or for potential financial security. As a result they believe this is why sex with women comes easy for them, and they take advantage of it to have sex with many women.

**Significance and Implications of Findings**

The findings of this study demonstrate the potential influence that social power and status can have on college athletes, and provide possible transference to other sporting situations, such as male athletes who compete at the professional level. Scrutiny of athlete behavior is high which translates to high expectations of personal conduct. Athletes today cannot afford to continue to engage in such behaviors without jeopardizing their professional futures and the public image of the organizations they represent. As a result, behavioral management must now become an essential component of organizational and personal development at all levels.

With a stringent National Football League (NFL) conduct policy, athletes transitioning to the professional level will need to have the necessary resources and behavioral skills to sustain appropriate behavior more than ever. Players will need to be prepared for the change, prior to entering professional sports. Behavioral awareness and management programs would aid athletes in understanding the influence status power can have on their behavior both socially and professionally. Such programs can be incorporated as an introductory or orientation development resource at both the collegiate and professional levels. At the college level, athletic programs can incorporate such programs as a mandatory training for all incoming freshman, with ongoing support resources provided through qualified personnel. At the professional level, rookie orientations or symposiums could serve as a place to implement such programs. Policies can also be put in place to require certain developmental trainings for athletes and organizational staff to attend relative to the behavioral/conduct needing to be addressed. Such policies and programs can help better educate and prepare both athletes and organizational staff on how to prevent the negative conduct that can exist within high status cultures such as the sports industry.

With research showing that leaders are recognized for having certain levels status and social power (Schaubut, Donnay, & Thompson, 2006). The findings from the current study can lead to research that further investigate power’s influence on the sexual behavior of male organizational leaders in particular. Cases have been reported where women felt attracted and drawn to their male bosses sexually because of their boss’s status, or have been pursued by males in positions of status and social power sexually (Licney, Berry, & Whelan-Berry, 2009). Findings can also help prepare male leaders on how to navigate the influence their status and social power can have on female subordinates in efforts to establish professional working environments for themselves as well as their female subordinates. Developing training might warranted, so that organizations can better educate and minimize workplace relationships, which have the potential to lead to sexual harassment, loss of organizational productivity, perception of favoritism on sexual relationships, and workplace violence (Licney et al., 2009).
The higher the status and power of individuals, the greater it influences their behaviors (Thye, 2000) and the behaviors of subordinates in social exchanges (Thye & Witkowski, 2003); therefore, organizations could use this information to develop or enhance their organizational ethics training for all employees and organizational leaders. Such trainings could educate both leaders and subordinates about the potential influence status and power could have on their social interaction. Training could serve as a balancing of power in organizations by providing subordinates with the tools and procedures to address unethical behaviors by those in positions of power while minimizing fear of consequences for such actions. Similar training can be conducted specifically for organizational leaders to educate them of the potential influences their roles or status could have on themselves and their subordinates and how to handle their influence in ways that protect their personal integrity and professionalism as well as the integrity and professionalism of their organization.

Limitations and Future Research
Findings of the present study should be considered in light of their limitations, which provide opportunities for future research. The study was limited to 15 male college football players, predominantly African-American, at a Southeastern university. Thus, it would be interesting to determine whether findings would be different at other institutions and levels, such as Division III where sports are not as emphasized, as well as with other ethnicities. Also, it should be recognized that these findings, particularly about what women think about the participants, were derived from the participants rather than the women being referred to. Findings cannot be interpreted as the views and thoughts of women, but only the lived experiences and views of the research participants. Therefore, future studies should consider investigating the female perceptions of how the status and social power of college football players influences their sexual behaviors towards male athletes.

Conclusion
This study’s findings have provided insight into how differently college football players perceive that they are viewed and treated because of the status and social power they have. Sexual interaction is the most intimate level of social interaction within society, and to be able to gain insight into how status and social power changes social interaction at such an intimate level provides an understanding of the significant influence on sexual behavior that status and social power have. The insights gained in this study further support the need to continue investigating status and social power in ways that progress beyond the current research that exists.

References


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