

# “Cleat Chasers”: College Football Players Talk about Women and Sex

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## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the ways that the high social status gained through sports participation, and the competitive pressures surrounding hypermasculinity and male bonding influenced the behavior and attitudes of college football players in their sexual relationships with women. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 male college-football athletes at a Southeastern NCAA football bowl subdivision university. Findings indicate that the college football players feel a sense of sexual power over women, which fuels their sense of entitlement to do what they want with women, and get what they want from women. Many of them viewed women as sex objects, and discussed how common it was for them to have multiple women as sexual partners. Their reference to women as “cleat chasers”, “hunters”, and “gold diggers” further suggests that they may be

adhering to a traditional masculine script in which they believe that women use their sexuality as a resource to help them gain status and financial stability.

**Keywords:** masculinity, gender, sexual activity, athletes, college football

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between college athletics and sexual attitudes has been widely studied (e.g., Curry, 1991; Gage, 2008; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Many of these studies have been spurred on by the number of high profile incidents where male athletes have been accused of sexual assault on women. These include the high profile cases of rape charges being made against four Vanderbilt University football players (Bishop, 2013), and the federal lawsuit that was filed against the University of Colorado by two women who felt that the university encouraged an atmosphere that led to their being sexually assaulted by university football players (Abbot, 2005).

Despite these and other high profile incidents, athletics at all levels remain extremely popular (Dabbs, 1998; Gage, 2008; Madigan & Sink, 2004; Meadows & Thomas, 2006). Accordingly, society lavishes upon athletes many privileges which aid in reinforcing their superior status and view of self. These privileges are especially evident in college athletic programs throughout the United States (Jackson & Davis, 2000). College athletes experience high exposure on their campuses, which affords them more opportunities than non-athlete students in not only the athletic domain, but also in many other aspects of their lives. For example, many NCAA Division I schools offer student-athletes a number of exclusive privileges, such as better housing, food, medical care, academic services, and financial scholarships (Jackson & Davis). Other perks such as scholarships, alumni gifts, stipends, and leniency in their academic standards may increase the feelings of self-esteem and entitlement among college athletes (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). The popularity of student-athletes often extends outside of their college campuses to a level of national recognition. As a result, the increased social status gained through sports participation can have significant influence on an athlete's behavior and attitudes, such as their sexual relationships with women. Furthermore, the competitive pressures surrounding hypermasculinity and male bonding also influence the attitudes that male athletes hold towards women. Male athletes often talk about women in the context of their being objects and sexual conquests (Curry, 1991).

Sports participation reinforces traditional gender roles in males while de-emphasizing or contradicting traditional scripts for females (Miller et al., 1999). Grossbard et al. (2007) investigated the sexual activity motives of male athletes and found that their motivations for sex were associated more with status enhancement than they were with intimacy.

The status that come from athletic success is often correlated with the characteristics of control, domination, competitiveness, physical strength, and aggressiveness (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Prior studies have suggested that the domination and aggression that is admired in one area of life - such success in sports - can shift over to other parts of life, such as sexual relationships (Brown, Sumner, & Nocera, 2002). For example, some research has suggested that successful athletes transfer the model of competition they use for their sport as a problem-solving mechanism in their interpersonal interactions (Gage, 2008). Other research has found that reinforcement of masculine gender norms through strict football rituals in team practice follows the player off the field and into their personal relationships with others (Sabo & Panepinto, 1990). Since male-dominated sports such as football place such a high

emphasis on hypermasculinity, there is an inherent devaluation of women and anything that is seen as being feminine. Therefore, the subordination and sexualization of women may be an acceptable attitude in the world of male sports (Curry, 1991).

This article reports on findings from a research project that sought to explore the sexual attitudes and behaviors of college football players. Within these findings emerged a set of perceptions that the football players held about their relationships with women, and the ways these perceptions manifested within their sexual behaviors with these women. Through an analysis of narratives of college football players, the findings focus on several themes including the ways that the football players feel that their status and power influences their sexual relationships with women, the attitudes they hold towards women and sexual relationships, and the perceptions they have about how their enhanced status as athletes is the main motivating factor for women's pursuit of them.

## **2. Literature Review**

The continued growth of media exposure has positioned football as the most popular sport in America (Harris, 2009). With the rise in its popularity comes a significant increase in the revenue generated from the sport, as well as the salaries of those in the profession (Harris, 2009; Simmons, 2007). As a result, football players have also risen in popularity and notoriety. At the more advanced levels, society views both college and professional football players as high status or celebrity individuals (Kurzman et al., 2007), where football players receive unique treatment that is commonly reserved for those with high status (Thirer & Wright, 1985). The preferential treatment received from society lends support to athletes reporting higher levels of self-esteem and social connectedness than nonathletes (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009). As celebrities in the sporting arena, athletes live and function within a set of cultural norms that are different from those who are nonathletes (Kurzman et al., 2007). Messner (2002) suggests that the characteristics of these cultural norms are contingent on the sport's historical impact within society, and the university. Football is a sport with a long tradition in the university structure, where norms of masculinity have been reinforced. College football has a long historical connection to funding sources, institutional ties, and social traditions.

As a result, college football players may become isolated from outside regulation, and protected from social control. This, in turn may allow football players to take greater sexual risks with women, and view them in ways that would otherwise be seen as deviant to social norms, while greatly lowering their potential consequences of this treatment. For example, a recent government report on sexual violence on college campuses found that many college institutions use different adjudication procedures for student athletes who are involved in sexual misconduct cases, than they do for non-athlete students. More than 20 percent of the colleges surveyed in the national sample give the athletic department oversight of sexual violence cases involving student athletes (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Financial & Contracting Oversight, 2014).

Smith & Bargh (2008) suggest that once the risk and consequences of an activity are minimized, those with high status are more inclined to engage in behaviors that lower status

individuals would not. Therefore, the more social power an individual has, the more justified they are in the use of their power to achieve their pursuits (Kipnis, 1972). The social power of college football players greatly influences their sexual activity and sexual relationships. As status increases, power increases. With increases in social power comes greater engagement in behaviors associated with goal pursuit (Kipnis, 1972).

### *2.1 Sports Participation and the Amplification of a Traditional Masculine Gender Script*

Increase in social power also allows for hypermasculine subcultures among football players to emerge and flourish (Gage, 2008). Messner (2002) suggests that since football generates high revenue at the university level, the media reinforces that football players be dominant, aggressive, and subscribe to a hegemonic masculinity. Because of the revenue and status that football brings to the university culture, college football players are often protected from external pressures that would normally discourage deviant behaviors and attitudes, and encourages them to bond over the norms of this hegemonic masculinity. Sports are a particularly well suited environment for the perpetuation of male bonding (Messner, 1987). Furthermore, sports participation may legitimize male domination over women (Bryson, 1987; Farr, 1988), and provides an ideal forum for young men to display masculinity in a socially acceptable forum (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Some of the behaviors and attitudes over which college football players bond are negative towards women. In his study on locker room talk, Curry (1991) found that when male athletes talked about women as persons rather than objects they were ridiculed by their teammates in the form of male posturing, joking, and put-downs. Therefore, to avoid this, “..the athlete may choose to present his attitude toward women in a different way, one that enhances his identity as a ‘real man.’ The resulting women-as-objects stories are told with braggadocio or in a teasing manner...” (Curry, 1991, p. 128).

Research has looked at the association between participating in college athletics and male attitudes associated with sexual relationships with women. (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Miller, et al. (1999) found that male athletes began having sex earlier, had more partners, and had more sexual encounters than nonathletes. Male football players may exert their status to fulfill the expectation that they engage in sexual relations more than non-athlete students, and compete with each other to be the most sexually active. Jackson and Davis (2000) found that student-athletes often brag with one another about their sexual conquests or ‘notches on the bedpost’. Since athletes have their choice of sexual partners, they feel they don’t have to form emotional or intimate attachments with women. Rather, sexual activity is seen as a transient, relationship, or as a means of competition with their teammates. In many ways, the use of women’s bodies as sexual objects is more important to the football player than knowing them as people (Curry, 1991).

Athletes have conflicting social norms they face on a continual basis. On the one hand they are expected to act in ways that legitimize hypermasculine behaviors and attitudes. However, at the same time, they face negative perceptions due to several highly publicized events that highlight negative treatment and attitudes towards women (Jolly, 2008; Merton, 1957; Simons, 2007). The insights gained from the current study may provide an understanding of

the perceptions and behaviors of college football players, which could aid in the development of resources to help college athletic programs prepare their athletes to better navigate the complex social norms they face. Such resources may be able to help mitigate the level of deviant and at-risk behaviors of college athletes towards women.

### **3. Methods**

In this study, qualitative phenomenological research methods were used to explore the ways that status and social power influence the sexual behavior and attitudes of male college-football athletes. The current study was used to understand how the status and social power of individuals could influence their engagement in sexual behaviors.

#### *3.1 Participants*

The participants in this study consisted of 15 male college-football athletes at a Southeastern NCAA football bowl subdivision university. They were upperclassmen college-football players who have spent at least two years on the team. Non travel squad and practice team players were not included in the study. Of the 15 participants, 13 identified as African American, one identified as White, and 1 identified as mixed ethnicity. Seventy-three percent of the participants were starters on their football team, meaning that they participated the most in the games and were the most visible and recognized players on the team. All participants were unmarried.

#### *3.2 Data Collection and Analysis*

Data was collected through individual interviews with the 15 study participants. Audio-taped interviews were conducted in an individual, face-to-face format, ranging from 60-90 minutes in length. The tapes were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology by applying van Manen's six activities of hermeneutical research: (1) Turning with commitment to an abiding concern; (2) investigating the experience as it is lived; (3) characterizing the phenomenon using themes; (4) describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a strong, oriented stance toward the question; and, (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (van Manen, 1990, p. 93).

Using NVivo data analysis software, the data was analyzed by isolating thematic statements according to van Manen's (1990) processes of holistic and selective highlighting. The collected data was transcribed into verbatim text that was read several times by the researcher. Initial themes were developed by looking at words, phrases, sentences, blocks of dialogue, and the transcript as a whole. The process continued until sensible meanings of the experience were reached that were free from inner contradictions (Laverly, 2003). Themes from each interview were compared to look for similarities and differences, as well as overall themes that describe the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). The developing of emerging themes was accomplished through a coding process that categorized the highlighted data; interconnected the categories by commonalities to develop themes; and, connected the interrelationship of the emergent themes to the phenomenon of the research topic of the status and power of college football players.

Triangulation was utilized in order to maximize the validity of the data analysis, and to minimize the possibility of chance associations or systematic bias, thus increasing confidence in the analysis and interpretation of the data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Triangulation occurred through the collaboration of participant interviews, recordings, and emerging thematic analysis (Golafshani, 2003). Each data collection source was assessed and compared with the others to verify that the multiple data sources arrived at similar conclusions on how status and social power may influence the attitudes that college football players hold towards women.

#### **4. Results**

The concepts of power, status, and entitlement were powerful themes that emerged from the data. These concepts influence the perceptions that college football players hold about their status, especially in the ways they manifest in their treatment of women, and women's treatment of them. While the participants acknowledged that there were some women who were not interested in them sexually due to negative perceptions of college athletes, the findings reported here are their attitudes about women who were. We begin with an analysis of how the college football players feel that their status gives them sexual power over women. Furthermore, this power fuels their sense of entitlement to do what they want with women, and get what they want from women. Finally, we discuss the perceptions that college football players have concerning the motivations that some women have for being with them sexually, especially in their attitudes of women as gold-diggers and groupies.

##### *4.1 The Perks of Being a College Football Player: "You Can Do Whatever You Want to Do and You Don't Care"*

All participants in the current study commented on how the status of being a college football player allowed them to do whatever they wanted and get whatever they wanted from others, most specifically women. They felt their status as football players accorded them special treatment by others. Having sex with women they barely knew and sharing women with other athletes were experiences expressed by some participants. Derrick shared,

You kind of have the power to do want you want in this society...You can end up making choices that can affect you and the people around you if you tend to set that tone about yourself and show people that you can do whatever you want to do and you don't care.

Participants further believed that their status as college football players increased their physical attractiveness to women, and that women were more drawn to them than they were to non-athletes. They expressed how the higher a player's status, the more women that would be attracted to that player. They also felt that women become more physically attracted to them after learning that they were on the football team. Accordingly, the football players leveraged their increased attractiveness into opportunities for sex with women. Greg shared,

Being a football player makes you look nice. You may not look nice but being a football player or having certain things make you 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.

Michael shared the following experience:

The way they call it here, it's a panty dropper. I don't know why but this one time I was at the club just a random night and some girl came up to me and asked me who I was... the minute I told her (who I was) and I kid you not, she literally dragged me into the girls bathroom and she just kind of had her way with me. She was like I always wanted to be with a football player like you... That was what we call "Cleat Chasers." That's the term we have among football players when we know all you have to do is talk to that girl and its game over.

Participants also believed that women were drawn to them as a result of their physical appearance. When asked why he felt college football players were able to have more sex than non college football playing males, Joseph responded, "Because of the fact that women like more men who are athletic and in shape; that can be a reason." Participants expressed how they believed women were more physically attracted to college football players or athletes in general than they were to regular nonathlete college males. George mentioned how he felt it would be tougher for regular college males than college athletes to get women when it comes to physical attraction. He said,

For a regular college kid it can be tougher to get a girl. Most girls they like athletes; guys who are in good condition, shape, are bigger, and taller. Most football players are bigger and taller than most of the regular students on campus. Eric added, "As a college football player some females see you as eye candy.

Kurzman, et al. (2007), found that college athletes often develop a glorified sense of self due to the attention they receive on campus and in society. As a result of the preferential treatment they receive, some participants felt that their status and power led to some players getting a "big head", including a sense of superiority, entitlement, and invincibility. As it relates to the current study, women in particular were reported as giving 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. Jerry added, "You get more attention than like regular students; like ladies just throw themselves at you sometimes. That's happen to me a couple of times before. You get a lot of love."

Another recurring theme in their discussions were of women finding them desirable due to their power and status as football players. They shared their experiences of women who were willing to give them whatever they wanted due to their athletic status. Leroy said, "Women want a person with status...they are going to want to be with you, doing your homework, give you whatever you want, give you money, buy you clothes, have sex with you."

Accordingly, there was a shared perception among the participants about the ease of football player's having sex with women. Michael candidly shared that, "You can pretty much do what you want ... but as far as women; that the easy part of it... If you want a girl and you are a football player you are going to get a girl. It's pretty dang close to inevitable."



Participants also expressed experiencing almost worship-like treatment from women because of their status as college football players. 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 as some would say, cleat chasers.” Colin added, “You got some (girls) that go out of their way for you, above and beyond what you never would think people would do just because you are a football player or player in general...I don’t think it would be the case if you were not an athlete.”

Michael was laughing as he shared the following experiences about getting special treatment from women:

I’ve never been treated to more dinners by a female since I’ve been here... They want to be the one to say yeah I got him to come out with me and I got him to do that. I’ve been taken out to a lot of places (by women) and I didn’t have to pay a dime...I don’t know, I guess it makes them feel better, but they do it! They are like hey let’s go do this and I’ll pay for everything, that’s hard to resist.

Participants felt that they not only got what they wanted from women, but also discussed the ways that they were able to treat women because of their status as college football players, especially from a sexual context. Many of them viewed women primarily as sex objects, and discussed how common it was for college football players to have multiple women as sexual partners. They felt that the high number of female sexual partners they have is largely due to the high number of women who pursue them sexually. Colin shared, “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.”

Participants also shared that they engaged in sex with women as a means of competition with their teammates. Michael said, “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.”

#### *4.2 “Hunters” and “Gold Diggers” - College Football Players’ Views on Women*

Another recurring theme that emerged from the data was the football players attitude that women pursued relationships with them in order to benefit their own financial and social status, and as a way out of financial hardships. They further expressed that women would try to get purposely get pregnant by them as a way to gain financial security. As a result, participants said that some women would pursue or attempt to have unprotected sex with them. Fred mentioned, “She says, ok I want to have sex with him (athlete). Maybe if I have sex with him, maybe he’ll be with me when he goes to the (NFL) draft and maybe the NBA... Maybe he’ll like me if I give it (sex) up to him; that’s how girls think.”

Many of the participants associated having children with financial obligations to the women for child support. George shared, “A girl sees a guy doing well in football; she’ll try to have intercourse with him and try to eventually get pregnant by the football player...It will give her a way that he has to be around forever as far as the kid growing up. For the women, I

think they think having unprotected sex with a football player is definitely worth the risk.” Leroy added, “Some may try to trap you with pregnancy. To some of the girls you just a paycheck really... To get the money or whatever you are going to be in life.” Colin referred to these types of women as “gold diggers” because of their pursuit of financial wealth from college football players who may go to the NFL. George believes “the NFL means millions to many girls.”

In addition to financial perks, participants felt that women pursued them in order to experience the fame, notoriety, high status, and preferential treatment that may come with their being in a relationship with a college athlete. Participants believed that women desired the drama of a life that comes with being a well-known college football player. Joseph added, “A lot of these girls might say they don’t want or like drama, but a lot of them feed off of it and thrive from it. They see it and think that’s the life and the way to live and that’s what they go after.” Participants further suggested that some women were willing to do anything to form a romantic or sexual relationship with a college football player so they can experience the lifestyle that goes along with being in a relationship with someone of high status. Michael added, “Everybody wants what you have and some girls are willing to sleep with you to try to get it.” Participants believe women even pursue marriage or long term relationships with them in order to inherit the celebrity type life style associated with high status football players. They mentioned several reality television shows that focused specifically on women who were in relationships with celebrity athletes. They believed the potential to be in the media spotlight was a motivating factor on some women’s desires to pursue relationships with them.

On TV now you see the shows like Basketball Wives or Real Housewives. The only reason they are on those show is because they are either the wives of a famous person or the wives of somebody who plays a sport. Women see that ‘hey this guy on the team looks like he’s going to be pretty successful so I’m going to try to talk to him, try to get to know him. 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 (Eric).

George shared that some women are “hunters” when it comes to their desire of the lifestyle they see that college football players can potentially provide. He added the following thoughts:

Think about what girls are learning their whole life. They watch the Disney channel movies and they see the little girl who didn’t come from much and come see the big prince take her from her bad situation and bring her somewhere better. It’s instilled in a girls mind early in life that if you luck up, you may find that one guy who will take care of you and you don’t have to do much.

Participants believed that women wanted the popularity and status that comes from being in a relationship with a football player. They expressed how some women made their sexual activities with them public in order to enhance their status in their own social circles. They also believed that as a woman’s status increased as a result of being sexually involved with them, she would become even more attractive and desired by other males; including males of

higher status. Jerry mentioned,

If it was a regular student, the identity would be secret and they wouldn't tell anyone about it. As a student athlete- depending on your status, they feel like they have to tell someone else to make their image look good. It helps their status more by having sex with a football player...From a football player's perspective we don't see it as an upgrade in status, but I guess ladies see it as an upgrade in status.

Bryce stated, "I think women probably see more benefits, as bad as that sounds, to having sex with an athlete as opposed to a regular student." He continued, "I think a woman's status can increase by having sex with an athlete...The fact that they are around the athlete more and the chance that others will see them around with the athlete is how sex can indirectly help increase the status of women who have sex with athletes."

Eric believed that a woman can have sex with somebody with high status and as a result her status increases. With her newly increased status, she is now able to attract men of higher status, further increasing her own status. He added, "They [women] are living off other people to get their status higher and they're making money from other people; that's how I see it. I can go on with different female stars that are stars because the people who they had sex with were stars."

The perceptions and experiences expressed from participants was a result of their social status among women, and their sexual behavior with women. When women were said to view and treat participants with special treatment it was believed by participants to be because of their high status. This celebrity-like perception from women often led to sexual encounters for participants. Participants expressed that their status as college football player can have an influence on their self- perception and behavior. College football players were said to become "big headed," which refers to developing a larger than life mentality about themselves. This mentality were said to frequent result in college football players believing they could obtain anything they desired and pursue those desires with little or no fear of potential consequences. Women were said by participants to be treated often as sex objects or objects of personal desire or gratification. As a result of their status, participants expressed that college football players often believed that they could have sex with the women of their choosing and rarely think they would not be able to do so.

## **5. Discussion**

The college football players in our study felt that most women were drawn to them due to their athletic status, and that this attraction resulted in increased sexual activity with women. They further believed that because of their participation in college athletics and the notoriety and popularity that comes with it, women were more attracted to them they were to non-athletes. As a result they felt that most women actively and often aggressively pursue college football players for sex.

These finding can be supported by existing scholarly research that suggests that men who play aggressive and competitive sports are rated by women as being more attractive and desirable for dates and sexual relationships than men who do not play sports, or who play

sports in a non-aggressive way (Brewer & Howarth, 2012; deBlock & Dewitte, 2009; Snyder et al., 2008). For example, Brewer and Howarth asked women to rate both the attractiveness of males and their level of desire to enter a relationship with them. They found that women rated men who did not participate in sports as the least attractive. They further found that women rated men that played aggressive, competitive sports as most desirable for both long and short-term relationships. This may be because desirable physical traits, such as body size and strength, are consistent with aggression and dominance (Archer & Thanzami, 2007; Snyder, et al., 2008), which has been found to be associated with increased male attractiveness (Sadella et al., 1987). Simply put, women find athletic physiques more attractive (Dixon et al., 2003; Li & Kendrick, 2006).

Participants also believed that most women saw having sex with college football players as more beneficial than having sex with non-athletes. They felt that in addition to women seeing college football players as more physically attractive, the lifestyle experience that would come from being sexually involved with a college football player was also appealing to women. In their own social circles women were said to gain status and positive recognition from having sex with a college football player as opposed to someone who did not have the same level of notoriety or popularity. Women were said by participants to feel better about themselves when engaged in a sexual relationship with someone of higher status as opposed to someone with lesser status on campus.

Several theories have been put forth on the relationship between social status and sexual selection. Some theories are based on Darwinian evolutionary theory that suggests that it is genetically hard-wired into women to seek out men in high status positions because social status is a cue to the male's ability to control resources (Buss, 1990; Miller, 2000). Therefore, the preference of high status men by women is independent of the power that women have gained in society. Other theories are based on rational choice where sexual relationships are seen as an exchange between men and women, where women bring youth and physical attractiveness to the relationship, while men bring wealth and power. Alternately, Martin (2005) suggests that status may not be something that women find attractive in men per se. Rather, status may be something that compensates for lack of physical attractiveness. This is often exemplified through the stereotype of the young, beautiful woman married to the older wealthy, powerful man (Martin, 2005).

However, a likely explanation for the participants' attitudes may be the result of their socialization to the cultural ideal that women's physical attractiveness, submission, and gratification can be exchanged for a man's wealth, protection, and social standing (Fogarty, 2009; Miller et al., 1999; Rijt & Macy, 2006). Baumeister and Vohs (2004) refer to this as female resource theory which endows female sexuality with economic value, where women trade sexual favors for other valued goods and services. Further, this theory suggests that this is a one way exchange - male sexuality cannot be exchanged for other goods. This leads to the dichotomous relationship of women being the suppliers of sex, and men being the demanders of sex. Therefore, sex becomes a female resource for which men must offer a price. "The price of sex (so to speak) may vary widely. To commence a sexual relationship with a particular woman, a man may have to offer her a fancy dinner, or a long series of

compliments, or a month of respectful attention, or a lifetime promise to share all his wealth and earnings with her exclusively” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004, p. 343). This theory may offer one explanation as to why participants held the belief that women would not engage in sex with them if they did not have the status as college football players, or their perceptions that some women only want to have sex with them to be a part of their lifestyle or for potential financial security.

However, other studies suggest that the football players may hold an erroneous perception of the women in their lives. For example, Stanick and Ellsworth (2010) found in their study on the correlation between a woman's intelligence and her emphasis on status and wealth and choosing a mate that women with access to education, career opportunities, and higher intelligence affects the characteristics they look for in a mate. Their study of college women found that as a woman's education and intelligence level increases, her desire for traits in a long-term partner, such as status and wealth decreases. Therefore, women may be more flexible in prioritizing what they seek in a mate than what has been suggested in the past. This is particularly relevant for our study, as it is assumed that the majority of the women that are mentioned by participants in this study are their fellow college students. Also relevant is Stanick and Ellsworth's further finding that as a college woman's educational and intelligence level increased, she had more options for pursuing short-term partners. Since educated women have less fear that sexual partners will not be able to provide for them in the case of a pregnancy, they feel freer to pursue more short-term sexual relationships. Therefore, while the football players may perceive their status as what is attracting women, it may just be that these educated women feel freer to pursue many sexual relationships.

Other recent studies have found that the effect of sport participation on female mate preferences was modest at best (Schulte-Hostedde, Eys, & Johnson, 2008). Schulte-Hostedde, Eys, and Johnson (2008) found that while women did have favorable views on athletes in general compared to non-athletes, they found no evidence that females perceive male athletes as better long-term mates. Furthermore, they found that women did not distinguish between the financial prospects of athletes and non-athletes. “It appears that there is no effect of sport involvement on perceptions of earning ability by potential mates” (p. 91). Thus, participants may have wrongly assumed or overestimated the role that their status plays on their sexual relationships with women (Martin, 2005).

## **6. Research Limitations**

Future study is necessary to understand the influence that status and social power has on sexual behavior. Additionally, conducting a study from a women's perception of how the status and social power of college football players influences their sexual attitudes and behaviors towards them would give more insight into this issue from both perspectives.

The study was limited to 15 male college football players at a Southeastern university who were primarily African American. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to universities in other regions of the country, male athletes from other sports, or other division levels. The lack of ethnic diversity among the participants may also be considered a limitation. Furthermore, the perceptions of women who have relationships with college



football players were not gathered for this study. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to be the same as the perceptions and experiences of the women themselves.

## **7. Recommendations**

The findings of this study may be able to aid the leaders of athletic programs by demonstrating the potential influence social power and status can have on college athletes. As this study found, the sexual behaviors and attitudes of male college football players is influenced significantly by their status and social power. The combination of the ease at which they are able to obtain sexual goals, as well as the pursuit of women wanting to engage college football players sexually creates a culture of increased sexual exchange.

After their interviews, several participants expressed that they had not considered the significance of the influence their status had on their sexual attitudes. Some mentioned that they intended to be more aware of their actions and how their status influences them and others around them. The development of programs aimed at education and awareness of the significance of how status and social power can influence athletes and potentially influence how society treats athletes may help the leadership of sports organizations to better prepare their athletes at various levels of sports participation. At the higher levels of sports such as the college and professional ranks, such programs or resources could potentially aid sports organizations by minimizing potential behavior that could negatively affect public image, team performance, and ultimately organizational profits. Such programs could be incorporated into already developed player development programs provided for athletes by their organizations

Knowing the influence that status and social power has on the sexual behaviors or mentality of male athletes, as well as female subordinates can aid athletic organizations in their attempts to provide a safe and ethical culture within their organizations. Developing training programs for college athletic organizations that is supported by sound research in the area of the influence of status and social power on sexual behavior can provide a training tool that allows organizations to better educate and minimize negative sexual behaviors and attitudes, which have the potential to minimize issues of sexual harassment, and sexual violence. The insights from the current study can potentially help athletic organizations more effectively address issues where individuals may behave adversely when status and social power is obtained or increased (Schaubut et al., 2006).

## **8. Conclusions**

High status football players are seen as leaders among their peers and in society, as well as models of emulation for youth and fans. The findings from this study provide a good insight into the ways that college football players perceive their relationships with women based on the status and social power they hold. These perceptions suggest that they adhere to a traditional masculine script where they believe that women use their sexuality as a resource to help them gain status and financial stability. It is interesting to note that none of the participants viewed their relationships with women as being equal, loving, or nurturing.

Adhering to these hypermasculine notions may cloud these young men's abilities to view women as being able to attain status and success through their own achievements. In his 1991 study, Curry suggested that the attitudes that college students learn through masculine athletic bonding may create barriers to these young men ultimately accepting women in the workplace or in positions of power. Since that time, women have made great strides in gaining power in the workplace and other professional settings, yet many of the attitudes expressed by these college football players towards their relationships with women seems to be mired in the past.

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