

FAILING AT SUCCESS: A DURKHEIMIAN ANALYSIS OF ANOMIE AND  
DEVIANT BEHAVIOR AMONG NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE PLAYERS

by

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B.A., Carson Newman College, 1999

M.A., Marshall University, 2001

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

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Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work  
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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2006

## ABSTRACT

This exploratory research project has utilized a mixed-method (Seiber 1973; Creswell 1994, 2005; Jick 1979; Dexter 1970) approach to examine why some NFL players participate in deviant, and sometimes law breaking, behavior and others do not. Using Dexter's (1970) qualitative technique of elite and specialized interviewing along with Schatzman's and Strauss's (1973) naturalistic field method, access was gained into an exclusive group of current and former NFL players. The qualitative findings in conjunction with Durkheimian theory provided the conceptualization of a quantitative instrument. Through a nonprobability snowball sample (Babbie 1986; Berg 2001), 104 NFL players were interviewed. A series of quantitative analyses were run to describe and assess relationships within this study group. In essence, this study has entailed a series of steps that could be represented as a cumulative progression.

From the qualitative data, the three core themes that emerged were (1) deviance, (2) anomie, and (3) social ties. Within the study group, a substantial number of players had prior experience with deviant and illegal behaviors. Many reported problems coping upon entering the NFL and sought to find personal fulfillment and happiness despite wealth and fame. It appeared that some level of anomie was present in a number of these players' lives. However, players that had strong ties to various social groups appeared less likely to succumb to anomie and deviance.

Supporting the qualitative data, the quantitative findings revealed that anomie was one of the significant predictors of law breaking players. It would therefore appear reasonable to suggest that some of the players were involved in behaviors that could be labeled *anomic deviance*. Furthermore, the findings supported the primacy of social

ties/support in combating anomie and deviance in the lives of NFL players in the study group.

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Major Professor  
Dr. Robert Schaeffer

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my Father...

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

This exploratory study takes an in-depth look at 104 current and former National Football League players regarding the effect of sudden economic change on their personal and professional lives. Most professional football players go from being a non-working college student to a highly paid, visible professional when they sign their first contract. For many people, this is a dream come true which should bring prosperity, wealth, and a lifetime of economic security. Yet, almost daily, the sports pages contain negative stories about the criminal activities or social behaviors of professional football players (Benedict & Yaeger 1998). According to Starr and Samuels (2000), “these athletes are crashing and burning in front of our eyes” (56). Troubled by this kind of deviant behavior, Starr and Samuels (2000) observed:

The recipe for trouble has always existed in professional sports: ill prepared young kids ushered too quickly into the spotlight, bathed in adoration, showered with riches, surrounded by hangers-on. But the money and media attention has intensified the pace of it all. One pro athlete understands it well: “Things come at you so fast sometimes you don’t know what to do. We’re only human.” (57).

If one can secure a better life through success in one’s profession, then why do professional sports players experience different kinds of turmoil and trouble? More specifically, why is deviant behavior among many NFL players so common despite the prosperity and economic well-being available to them? Why do some players become law breakers and others law abiders? Are there identifiable characteristics that help

players adapt to the pressures of professional football? Are there characteristics that encourage players to fall victim to deviant and, sometimes, illegal behavior?

The proponents of social control (Hirschi 1969), social support (Vaux 1988), and anomie (Durkheim ([1897] 1951; Merton 1938; Parsons 1937) theories have offered plausible explanations of social deviance. These theories come out of the sociological work of Emile Durkheim ([1893] 1933; [1897] 1951; [1925] 1961). Durkheim's classic study of suicide ([1897] 1951) first showed how diminished social ties contributed to the loss of clear social roles and norms (Parsons 1937; Merton 1938).

Moreover, Durkheim ([1897] 1951) analyzed forms of deviant behavior brought about by social change and first introduced the theoretical and analytical term *anomie* into the study of sociology. Anomie represented a real social phenomenon documented by Durkheim and many others (Parsons 1937; Merton 1938; Srole 1956; Clinard 1964; Orru 1987; Passas & Agnew 1997; Adler & Laufer 2000) since his early research. In essence, anomie describes the impact of sudden economic change and the subsequent loss of social bonds on human beings. The current research will rely on Durkheim's framework to ask the question of whether anomie exists among professional football players who have experienced sudden wealth. If so, does this result in deviance? And, what are the factors that contribute to anomic conditions and deviant or criminal behavior?

### *Importance/Significance of the Study*

The deviant and sometimes criminal off-field behavior of NFL players has been the subject of much controversy (Benedict & Yaeger 1998; Blackshaw & Crabbe 2004).

In most of American life, one might believe that wealth would bring happiness, satisfaction with life, and greater financial and even emotional stability. But, when many NFL players sign their first contract, their bank accounts become large, their egos become inflated, and they begin to turn their lives upside down. Instead of increasing satisfaction and stability, wealth and fame often increase deviant behavior (Benedict 1997; Benedict & Yaeger 1998). And, rather than being stigmatized as are many social deviants, these professional athletes are cheered, idolized, and highly paid (Sage 1998; Benedict & Yaeger 1998).

According to research done by Benedict and Yaeger (1998), one out of five NFL players has been charged with a serious criminal offense. In 1999, Blumstein and Benedict found that of the 509 NFL players they sampled, 109 had been arrested (21%). Many of these players had been arrested more than once (the 109 players had 264 arrests between them). To top it off, a number of players publish lucrative autobiographies (Green 1996; Taylor & Serby 2003; Romanowski, Scheffer & Towle 2005; Owens & Rosenhaus 2006) that have provided evidence of a wide array of deviant activities, both by the authors and by other NFL players. As a result, scholars, fans, sports organizations, and policy makers have become concerned about the behavior of professional athletes (Sage 1998; Eitzen 1999; Lowry 2003; MacCambridge 2004). Various organizations have voiced concern for the negative role models these players are providing for other athletes, particularly younger ones. The concern has far reaching implications that are affecting more areas of American society than just football.

Moreover, the association of NFL players with an array of deviant behaviors such as illegal drugs, alcohol abuse, prostitution, and sexual misconduct begs for a research-

based explanation. The circumstances surrounding the arrests of high profile NFL players appears to be consistent with a growing trend toward various forms of deviance and illicit sexual behavior among players. These athletes' eccentric social environment, which produces numerous opportunities for players to deviate from traditional norms has been noted as a possible source of their deviance. But are there other factors we need to take into account? According to Benedict (1997), "The temptation to indulge becomes acute for players who are routinely relieved of responsibility by their coaches and agents, while simultaneously being lauded and rewarded for doing what they desire most—to play ball" (63). Moreover, the sudden wealth and notoriety NFL players acquire further isolates them from society's established and traditional norms.

This study uses a blended methodological approach (Campbell & Fiske 1959; Sieber 1973; Bauman & Adair 1992; Creswell 1994, 2005; Jick 1979; Dexter 1970). Using Dexter's (1970) qualitative technique of elite and specialized interviewing in conjunction with Schatzman's and Strauss's (1973) naturalistic field method, access was gained into a select group of current and former NFL players. The qualitative findings in conjunction with the theoretical framework provided the conceptualization of a quantitative instrument. Through a snowball sample (Babbie 1986; Berg 2001), 104 NFL players were interviewed. A series of quantitative analyses were run to describe and assess levels of association within this sample.

Access to professional athletes such as the 104 represented in this study is extremely difficult to obtain. These athletes' private and professional lives are continually subject to criticism and embarrassment by peers, fans, the news media, and management during the normal course of their professional careers. They are subject

daily to intense and critical scrutiny. For these reasons, as well as high levels of security, entrée typically cannot be gained without the help of informants (members of that social group) and the continuous establishment of reciprocity. In other words, not just any individual can walk into a team's facilities, practices, locker-rooms, and hotels and gain access to players for in-depth interviews. One must have informants, subsequently followed by establishing relationships with members of the study group. In essence, trustworthiness is a necessity, as in this case, the researcher must be viewed as one of the "boys."

Although there are limitations to this study, the findings are representative of these 104 players. Generalizations about the larger NFL fraternity should not be made from this study. However, this research provides interesting and possibly insightful associations found to be present within these data. Moreover, these data allow for the formation of additional questions which could affect policy decisions concerning both the lives of professional football players and related areas for future research.

#### *Objectives and Scope of the Study*

This research project concentrates on three key questions for those NFL players who agreed to participate in this study. First, what are the factors that contribute to law abiding NFL players, who have not been arrested, and what factors contribute to illegal behavior among players who have been arrested? Although "deviance" does not necessarily mean "breaking the law," much of the questionable behaviors can be operationalized through this dichotomy. The second key question is whether levels of anomie can be measured among NFL players, and if so, what factors are associated with



anomie. Third, and most important, are the players who reported themselves as law breakers the ones who exhibit anomic characteristics?

Data for this study were collected from the 2001-2005 time-period. Qualitative and quantitative data were taken from 104 NFL players in six states (Ohio, Kentucky, Kansas, Missouri, Texas, and Florida). The three significant data collection periods included a training camp, interviews before and after games during the season, and interviews at team hotels during the Super Bowl. Additional interviews were collected at various times during a five year period. Data intake methods included one-on-one interviews, group interviews, and phone interviews, as well as the completion of the structured interview guide (questionnaire).

## Chapter Two

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In reviewing the multiple theories and perspectives concerning social deviance, two broad categories (Park & Burgess 1921; Cohen 1955; Coser 1977; Turner 1974) will be reviewed. First, this thesis will examine perspectives based on culture and subculture (Cohen 1955; Cloward & Ohlin 1960; Wolfgang & Ferracuti 1967) along with elements of learning theory (Sutherland 1947) and strain theory (Merton 1938; Agnew 1992; Messner & Rosenfeld 1994). Initially, during formative stages of the qualitative field work, it was thought that these perspectives, which concentrate on examining the subcultural and group behavior, would provide theoretical insight into the various forms of deviance exhibited by the NFL players studied. As discussed later, other perspectives emerged as more compatible with these data.

The second group of perspectives has their origin in classical Durkheimian theory and can be termed theories of social disorganization (Park & Burgess 1921; Coser 1977; Turner 1974). These include classic anomie theory (Durkheim [1897] 1951), social control theory (Hirschi 1969), and social support theory (Vaux 1988; Cullen & Wright 1997). Although each of these theories and perspectives provide insights into various aspects of deviance and deviant behavior (Hendershott 2002), they have their origins in the classic research and writing of Emile Durkheim (Park & Burgess 1921; Parsons 1937; Merton 1938; Clinard 1964; Coser 1977).

Today, many of the paradigms concerning deviance (Chambliss & Seidman 1971; Spitzer 1975; Leonard II 1993; Crutchfield, Bridges, Weis & Kubrin 2000; Blackshaw & Crabbe 2004) do not explicitly rely on the classical work of Durkheim.

But, while no doubt great advances have been made in our theoretical understandings of deviance (Passas & Agnew 1997; Adler & Laufer 2000; Hendershott 2002; Blackshaw & Crabbe 2004), much of our comprehension of social deviance rests in the formative works of Durkheim. Issues have been debated concerning appropriate levels of abstraction (macro versus micro) in regards to various aspects of Durkheimian theory (Parsons 1937; Marks 1974; Abrahamson 1980; Orru 1987). In essence, this debate points to whether or not Durkheim's theory is compatible with micro level data. This debate does have some utility. However, in an attempt to better understand Durkheim, it should not overshadow his ability to understand the impact of social change and social forces and move one's comprehension beyond mere individualistic (psychological) explanations of why deviance occurs within certain social groups (Kornhauser 1978; Marks 1974). Most of Durkheim's research illustrates how social forces and structures influence the very nature of a given society. This contribution cannot be overstated (Clinard 1964). It is perhaps one of the most important distinguishing findings in the history of social research and sociology in particular (Clinard 1964; Pope 1976; Thompson 1980).

However, Durkheim understood that these macro social forces left a definite impact on communities and individuals (Parsons 1937; Srole 1956; Marks 1974). This work will apply Durkheim's theoretical insights (Kornhauser 1978; Hirschi 1969) about deviance to the study of contemporary professional athletes in the NFL. Just as Durkheim's ([1897] 1951) empirical research examined subgroups within French society, this thesis examines a contemporary subgroup in American society. In Durkheim's ([1897] 1951) analysis of suicide, he identified microsociological effects as a result of

social change (Parsons 1937; Marks 1974). In a similar fashion, this study attempts to identify the microsociological effects of social change on NFL players.

Additionally, a close look at Durkheim's ([1897] 1951) *Suicide* exposes a "multilevel theory of society that far surpasses its empirical foundations" (Thorlindsson & Bjarnason 1998: 94). Some scholars (Lukes 1972; Thorlindsson 1983) have argued that the reason Durkheim adopted a macrosociological approach to suicide was largely due to the aggregate nature of the data. But, "when Durkheim goes beyond the data to formulate a general theory of [anomie], he locates the major theoretical elements at the level of social relationships" (Thorlindsson & Bjarnason 1998: 94). Thus, one could argue that Durkheim, in his macro-level analysis, presupposes a social psychological perspective that he never "clearly" outlines.

#### *Deviance Theories Based on Cultural/Subcultural Learning Theories*

Before examining Durkheim's theory and its derivatives, the researcher should note that the initial assumption during the early stages of the field research was that culture/subculture played a key role in shaping the NFL players' deviant behaviors. The researcher thought that perhaps NFL players learned deviance from other players in a deviant subculture. In other settings, scholars have theorized that culture presupposes a strong influence on individuals' behaviors and that "goals of action are set by culture" (Kornhauser 1978: 165). Moreover, the researcher thought that differential association (Sutherland 1947) and aspects of strain theory (Merton 1938; Agnew 1992; Messner & Rosenfeld 1994) could be valuable and compatible perspectives for this study.

*Subcultural Theory:* Proponents of subcultural theory typically assert that deviance is the result of a cultural system of values and beliefs that is more favorable to the use of deviant means than is the wider dominant culture (Wolfgang & Ferracuti 1967). Proponents assert that deviant subcultures emerge in response to unique issues that individuals of mainstream society typically do not face. Those immersed in a subculture of deviance engage in more pathological behaviors because the individuals and the group define deviance as *appropriate* in more situations than do those who ascribe to the dominant culture's beliefs, norms, and values view as inappropriate (Crutchfield, Bridges, Weis & Kubrin 1996). Thus, people learn deviant behavior from deviant subcultures. If an individual is highly integrated into a deviant subculture, there is a higher probability that he/she will conform to the subcultural norms and values. In essence, the likelihood of "criminal [or deviant] behavior reaches its highest potential with the proliferation of subcultures, or subdivisions with beliefs and values at odds with the dominant culture" (Adler 2000: 280) (for further discussion of subcultural theory, see Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967).

*Differential Association Theory:* Edwin Sutherland (1947) argued that deviance is learned and results from learning generally positive meanings of deviance through interaction with others, particularly intimates. This theory is based on the social environment, the individuals within that social environment, and the values those individuals acquire from others in the social environment. According to Sutherland (1947), an individual becomes deviant due to an excess of definitions and meanings favorable to violation of the law or dominant social norms over definitions and meanings

unfavorable to these violations. In essence, this theory focuses on “the connection between delinquent peers and the individual’s delinquency” (Costello & Vowell 1999: 818) and the assumption that deviance is “explained largely in terms of positive relations with [deviant] others or others who present [deviant] patterns (model [deviance], present [deviant beliefs], and/or reinforce [deviance])” (Agnew 2000: 126) (for further discussion of differential association theory, see Sutherland 1947; Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill 1992; Akers 1985).

*Strain Theory:* The basis of strain theory has roots in Durkheim’s ([1897] 1951) theory of anomie. But a close examination reveals that the two are actually quite different (for further discussion of this debate, see Kornhauser 1978; Bernard 2000). The core idea behind strain theory is that individuals are *pressured* into deviance (Agnew 1992; Agnew & Passas 1997). There are typically two defining characteristics of strain theory. First, most “strain theorists argue that [deviance] results when individuals cannot get what they want through legitimate channels” (Agnew 2000: 113). Second, theorists argue that “frustrated wants *pressure or force* the person into [deviance]” (Agnew 2000: 114).

Robert Merton (1938) argued that this pressure comes from within a culture/subculture. In his classic paper, “Social Structure and Anomie,” Merton argued that “our primary aim is to discover how *some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconforming rather than conforming conduct*” (Merton 1968: 186). Moreover, according to Vold and Bernard (1986) “strain theories propose that there are certain socially generated pressures or forces that drive

people to commit crimes [or deviance]” (185). In essence, subculturally prescribed goals and norms are key influences on individual behavior (for further discussion of strain theory, see Merton 1938; Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Agnew 1992, 2000; Messner and Rosenfeld 1994).

*Incompatibility of Subcultural and Learning Theories with Durkheim’s Conception of Anomie*

For purposes of this study, based on qualitative data and theoretical inconsistencies, the researcher decided that the subcultural and learning theories were not appropriate frameworks from which to interpret deviance among NFL players. Once the researcher decided Durkheim’s ([1897] 1951) theory was more applicable, it was determined that it would be difficult to merge subcultural and learning theories with the original sociological conception of anomie. For Durkheim, anomie is not “the result of strongly defined [sub]cultural goals” (Kornhauser 1978: 165). Anomie is not produced or created by culture or subculture. It is instead produced by the weakness or *absence* of culture. For Durkheim, deviance does not result from strain but from “the absence of strong social bonds or effective cultural regulation” (Kornhauser 1978: 165). According to Kornhauser (1978),

Anomie...does not refer to a culture characterized by strong goals and weak means; it refers to a weak culture that fails to define the goals of human endeavor. Culture does not enjoin man to have limitless aspirations. Man’s limitless aspirations are given in the human condition. We are all strained. Culture *limits* aspirations. A culture characterized by anomie no longer supplies the limits to

aspiration (165-166).

If culture fails to demarcate the goals of healthy economic endeavor, the result is unlimited yearning and greed. When passions are given free rein, the definition is typically a state of strain, as these unleashed passions are not capable of being fulfilled. Few individuals know when they have earned enough money or gained enough status and power. The failure of a culture “to relate these values to other values, in an appropriate *hierarchy* of value, is the root of anomie” (Kornhauser 1978: 166). Thus, culture is not the cause of strain, as Merton would have us believe.

When a culture is weak or nonexistent, the “strain that inheres in the human condition becomes manifest” (Kornhauser 1978: 166). For if success goals, whether they be deviant or mainstream, were effectively defined, they would not cause strain or anomie. However, “when anomie unleashes strain, it brings men to an anguished confrontation with meaninglessness. Since desire that has no [or clear and achievable] goal can ever be satisfied, the endless striving to achieve gratifications that recede in their consummation is meaningless” (Kornhauser 1978: 166). For Kornhauser (1978), then, an appropriate conceptualization of anomie is meaninglessness. One who lacks meaning is despondent, which is a reflection of the emptiness created by action that has no clear or achievable goal. Thus, in many cases, the end result of despair or anomie is deviance.

### *Deviance Theories Based on Social Disorganization*

After deciding that a subcultural approach would not be fruitful, the researcher examined several other perspectives. Aspects of social control theory (Hirschi 1969) and social support theory (Vaux 1988; Cullen 1994; Cullen & Wright 1997), which are



Durkheimian in nature, are consistent with Durkheim's ([1897] 1951) conception of anomie and helped make sense of the qualitative data. These perspectives incorporate factors (social support/ties) the researcher thought were important for addressing the deviant behavior of the NFL players in the sample. In essence, the inductive nature of the research helped to identify and specify the appropriate theory.

*Anomie Theory:* In short, anomie can be described as a state of *deregulation* and *malintegration* (Durkheim [1893] 1933; [1897] 1951), and at the personal or individual level, a state of meaninglessness or unhappiness (Durkheim [1897] 1951; Srole 1956; Powell 1970; Marks 1974; Kornhauser 1978). This state is typically brought about by sudden economic change. In essence, an individual becomes lost in a void of meaninglessness. According to Parsons ([1937] 1968), "*Anomie* is precisely this state of disorganization where the hold of norms over individual conduct has broken down" (377).

*Social Control Theory:* Social control theorists (Hirschi 1969) assert that deviance results from the absence or breakdown of positive relationships with other conventional individuals and institutions (Agnew 2000). Individuals that do not have *ties* to other conventional individuals or institutions are not forced or pressured into deviance, as strain theory argues, but are *free* to deviate. Thus, they often engage in deviance "as they seek to satisfy universal human needs [and wants] in the most expedient manner" (Agnew 2000: 118).

Travis Hirschi ([1969] 2005) played a key role in the development of this theory in his classic work *Causes of Delinquency*. He credits “important elements of the perspective to the likes of...Durkheim” (xv). Hirschi maintains that *conformity* must be explained rather than crime or deviance. Hirschi ([1969] 2005) refers to the forces controlling or influencing deviant behavior as the *social bond* and notes that this perspective “starts from the straightforward assumption that deviant behavior occurs when the bond of the individual to society is weak or broken” (xvii).

Social Control theory “assumes the existence of a common value system within the society” (Hirschi 1969: 23) and argues “that if social control institutions, that is, the various mechanisms by which behavior is organized and channeled into the requirements of the social order, remain intact, they can serve to maintain a stable social order despite social change” (Adler 2000: 276). When social control is unsuccessful (the breakdown of social institutions or there is a weak culture/subculture) its proponents expect that rates of deviance or unlawful behavior will rise.

For Durkheim ([1897] 1951) who is largely regarded as a social control theorist (Kornhauser 1978), rapid social or economic change creates the deregulation and malintegration of the social group and is the basis of disorder and pathology in society. In a stable and regulated culture/subculture, individuals are immersed in a “secure environment with familial, religious, economic, and communal social controls firmly intact” (Adler 2000: 278). But when rapid social or economic change occurs, the common rules and norms of the group are thrown into disarray. Thus, “individual desires are no longer regulated by a moral force provided by the ‘collective conscience’” (Adler 2000: 278). For Durkheim ([1897] 1951), human wants and desires are boundless, an

“insatiable and bottomless abyss” (247). In essence, it is social rules and norms that keep human aspiration in check. These regulations are internalized “into the individual conscience and thus make it possible for people to feel fulfilled” (Adler 2000: 278).

*Social Support Theory:* A close relative of social control theory (Vaux 1988), social support theory is concerned with the importance of social ties. Durkheim ([1897] 1951), in his classic study of suicide, highlighted the significance of weakened social ties to family, community, and religion. He argued that in times of rapid social or economic change, if social ties or bonds were weak or diminishing, a state of anomie could ensue. This resulting state of anomie, he argued, led to deviant forms of behavior such as suicide and found that suicide was most common among groups with weak social ties.

Later, the “Chicago School” of sociology (Park, Burgess, and Mckenzie) reiterated the view that disrupted or weak social ties led to social-psychological and social problems. This Durkheimian based work which linked social disintegration to social-psychological disorder set the stage for the contemporary work on social support and “the idea that morale and well-being are sustained through primary group ties, the absence of which may result in a loss of identity, confusion regarding norms, and despair, echoes the contemporary discussions of social support” (Vaux 1988: 2).

John Cassel (1974), Gerald Caplan (1974), and Sidney Cobb (1976), who laid the groundwork for contemporary social support theory, argued that social support works to buffer the individual from the adverse effects of stress and social change. Social support provided by primary social ties/groups can serve “an important protective function, ‘buffering’ or ‘cushioning’ the individual from the...psychological consequences of

stressful experiences” (Vaux 1988: 6). The social ties important to social support range from social integration to intimate relationships to social networks (for further discussion, see Vaux 1988).

In relation to social support and anomie, “the existing evidence suggests that social support has direct and buffering effects on [deviance]” (Cullen & Wright 1997: 194). Recent research (Wright 1996; Wright, Cullen & Wooldredge 1995) has shown that family structural variables such as parental or spousal supports, poverty, and “broken homes” have an influence on deviance. Thus, a person’s social ties provided by the relationships found within the family and community, religion, marriage, and education are thought to influence (or buffer) the likelihood of anomie and deviance.

Lin (1986) describes social support as “the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners” (18). Thus, according to Cullen and Wright (1997), anomie does not “lead ineluctably to ill-health, for effects might be diminished if a person were to be enmeshed in social relationships that provide support” (193). In essence, these support factors provide social ties that appear to create some sense of boundaries and limits for behavior. On the other hand, the lack of social ties and bonds supplied by a support system appear to provide the opposite: weakened structures, few boundaries, and few limits; hence anomic conditions.

### *Overview of Anomie*

Do social ties buffer the effects of rapid life change? What does sudden wealth have to do with professional athletes’ propensity for deviance? In order to address these

questions, an in-depth look at what Durkheim ([1897] 1951) conceptualized as anomie is warranted. Anomie is an absence, breakdown, confusion, or conflict in the norms of these NFL players' social environments and personal lives—a state of deregulation and malintegration, while on the individual level, a state of meaninglessness or unhappiness. For Durkheim, anomie was a “corrupted and pathological condition” (Orru 1987: 4) of a normal social system, a social institution/group, or an individual. Anomie is thus “both a social condition and a psychic state, a general aimlessness accompanied by feelings of emptiness” (Powell 1970: 8).

### *Anomie: The Concept*

First, it is important to take a brief look at a core concept of modern sociology—*anomie*. Despite the fact that this concept is quite recent, its roots go back more than twenty-five centuries. The concept of *anomie* (*anomia*) is Greek in origin and, in essence, means absence of law (Orru 1987). The meaning of *anomie* varies greatly throughout the literature and reflects the specific concerns of different time periods and cultures.

For example, *anomie* means “ruthlessness and *hybris* in Euripides, anarchy and intemperance in Plato, sin and wickedness in the Old Testament, unrighteousness or unwritten law in Paul’s letters, irregularity or formal transgression in Bishop Bramhall’s treatises, a positive characteristic of modern morality in Jean Marie Gayau’s works,” (Orru 1987: 2) and a human state of insatiability and the absence of social restraints on human aspirations in Durkheim ([1893] 1933, [1897] 1951). For more contemporary thinkers, it indicates a conflict of belief-systems in a society or “separation anxiety” (de

Grazia 1948: 47-76), “social and emotional void” (Wirth 1951: xxv), the imbalance between cultural goals and institutional means at either the social or individual level or “normlessness” (Merton 1938), “the nightmare *par excellence*, in which the individual is submerged in a world of disorder, senselessness and madness” (Berger 1967: 22), a social-psychological condition of malintegration and self-to-other alienation (Srole 1956), or even “meaninglessness” and unhappiness (Powell 1970: 8). For an excellent historical analysis of the meanings of anomie, see Marco Orru’s *Anomie: History and Meanings* (1987). For this study, however, the core conceptualization of anomie that will be applied is that of Durkheim.

#### *Durkheim’s Conception of Anomie*

Durkheim ([1893] 1933) first used the term anomie in *The Division of Labor in Society*. In this work, he was concerned with the problem of how a society with a high degree of social differentiation was able to maintain social cohesion (Clinard 1964). The concept of a “division of labor” in society contributed greatly to our understanding of social differentiation. He argued that an “increasingly complex division of labor would make social relationships so unstable that society could only be held together by some external mechanism” or form of social control such as the state or other social structure (Clinard 1964: 3).

In assessing this problem, Durkheim ([1893] 1933) distinguished between two types of unity in a society: the *mechanical solidarity* of simpler societies and the *organic solidarity* of contemporary, complex, Western societies (Clinard 1964). Organic solidarity was a result of the nature of people’s relationships in a society having a wide-

ranging division of labor, centered on “specialization of function and resulting differences among individuals” (Clinard 1964: 4). It was important, however, that extensive contacts between diverse groups in a society emerge in order to attain a degree of organic solidarity. One would associate this type of society with the industrialization and increasing urbanization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Durkheim argued that, “in undifferentiated societies characterized by mechanical solidarity, a single *collective conscience*” based on likeness and common interests directs most individuals (Clinard 1964: 4). Such societies were rural and agricultural in nature. Durkheim believed that in the more differentiated societies where the division of labor and organic solidarity abound, the collective conscience weakens and individual differences are supported (Clinard 1964; Pope 1976).

Durkheim ([1893] 1933) also identified three *abnormal* forms of the division of labor. In connection with these, he introduced the concept of anomie (Clinard 1964). One of these forms was the forced division of labor, in which the allocation of occupations does not follow the allocation of talent or skills. In a second type of situation, the division of labor does not generate solidarity because the functional activity of each worker is inadequate; the worker does not acquire a sense of participation in a common endeavor. The third and predominant abnormal condition, however, he characterized as *anomic* (Clinard 1964). This indicated a lack of integration or adjustment of functions arising out of industrial crises. Anomie or anomic conditions arise “because the division of labor fails to produce sufficiently effective contacts between its members and adequate regulation of social relationships” (Clinard 1964: 4). In other

words, as worker specialization increased and economic changes continued, people felt “without regulation;” life itself has changed and appeared to be in constant flux.

Anomie played a reasonably small part in Durkheim’s theory of the division of labor. He used it simply to describe one of the “abnormal forms that resulted in imperfect organic solidarity” (Clinard 1964: 4). It was in his classic study of suicide that anomie took on its great theoretical importance. This is where Durkheim ([1897] 1951) formulated his idea that deviant behaviors, such as suicide, were related to anomie and where he made his case for the explanatory role of anomie. For Durkheim, the great variations in the rate of suicide were associated with the business cycle. But, while the likelihood of suicide during an economic depression might appear easy to explain, the increase of suicide during periods of unusual or sudden prosperity was a much more difficult task. Durkheim said that suicide could occur in *both* periods because “people [were] suddenly being thrown out of adjustment with their typical ways of life, sudden economic prosperity being as disastrous as sudden loss” (Clinard 1964: 5). In both cases, there is a sense of uncertainty and chaos, and people become disoriented. Under these conditions, most people no longer felt that they were making progress with reference to what they wanted and desired. This important insight, that the *rate* of social change, and not its direction, was responsible for increases in anomie, set the tone for subsequent research on social change and the effects of anomie.

Following Durkheim, Parsons (1937) pointed out that, sudden prosperity, with a subsequent increase in deviance, resulted in a situation where “a sense of security, of progress toward ends depends not only on adequate command over means, but on a clear definition of the ends themselves” (335). When people “achieve sudden prosperity,



which they had thought impossible to achieve, they tend no longer to believe in the impossibility of anything” (Clinard 1964: 5). Thus, the breakdown or failure of controls over an individual’s desires in a society and of socially accepted norms and standards, especially when change is sudden, gives rise to conditions that may lead to deviant acts such as suicide. It was this type of suicide that Durkheim called “*anomic suicide*,” proposing that the condition was one of anomie. His research showed that there was a high rate of such suicides among those who were affluent. Sudden upward changes in one’s standard of living tends to put norms in flux. Situations as such “become functional equivalents of depressions, in which the regulatory functions of the collective order break down” (Clinard 1964: 5).

For Durkheim ([1897] 1951), a deviant act such as suicide “was not an individual phenomenon but was related to certain characteristics of the social organization” (Clinard 1964: 6). These characteristics “were the degree of control or regulation in a society, the amount of group unity, and the strength of ties binding people together” (Clinard 1964: 6). A unified and well-regulated society or culture can diminish anomic currents. Such *social facts* are typically to be explained with reference to society or its structures and not necessarily with reference to the individual (Clinard 1964). However, “when the theory of anomie is elaborated in the middle of *Suicide*, it is...in most respects a microsociological theory” (Marks 1974:331). For Durkheim ([1897] 1951), disturbed and interrupted group life produces unregulated individuals with “insatiable appetites” and “fevered imaginations” (254).

Deviant acts such as suicides arising from a state of anomie were, therefore, products of the failure of social restraints on what might be called “overweening

ambitions” (Clinard 1964: 7). As Durkheim ([1897] 1951) wrote, “human activity naturally aspires beyond assignable limits and sets itself unattainable goals” (247-248). This idea reflected the view that individuals are “filled with certain innate desires which needed to be fulfilled and that society either restrained or encouraged them” (Clinard 1964: 7). An individual’s natural “needs must be regulated by the moral needs defined and regulated by the collective order” (Clinard 1964: 7).

What Durkheim referred to as anomie can otherwise be termed a state of *deregulation* (Dohrenwend 1959; La Capra 1972; Merton 1957; Parsons 1937), or on the microsociological level, meaninglessness (Srole 1956; Powell 1970). Some have even interpreted it (from the original French) as *dereglement* or *derangement* (Mestrovic & Brown 1985) with which there are connotations of immorality, madness, and sin. This condition arises when a disturbance of the collective order allows people’s aspirations to rise past all prospect of fulfillment (Clinard 1964). People aspire to goals that they cannot attain or find difficult to reach. Appearing more to describe and explain the present than the society and cultures of his day, Durkheim spelled out the characteristics, principally economic, of a society or culture that produces “unlimited aspirations” and hence anomic behaviors (Clinard 1964: 7). As Durkheim ([1897] 1951) described it,

Actually religion has lost most of its power. And government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant...On both sides nations are declared to have the single or chief purpose of achieving...prosperity; such is the implication of the dogma of economic materialism, the basis of both apparently opposed systems. And as these theories merely express the state of opinion, industry instead of being still regarded as a means to an end transcending

itself, has become the supreme end of individuals and societies alike. Thereupon the appetites thus excited have become freed of any limiting authority...Such is the source of the excitement predominating in this part of society, and which has thence extended to other parts. There, the state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find an ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain. Reality seems valueless by comparison with the dreams of fevered imaginations; reality is therefore abandoned, but so to is possibility abandoned when it in turn becomes reality. A thirst arises for novelties: Unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known. Henceforth, one has no strength to endure the least reverse. The whole fever subsides and the sterility of all the tumult is apparent, and it is seen that all these new sensations in their infinite quantity cannot form a solid foundation of happiness to support one during days of trial. The wise man, knowing how to enjoy achieved results without having constantly to replace them with others, finds in them an attachment to life in the hour of difficulty. But the man who has always pinned all his hopes on the future and lived with his eyes fixed upon it, has nothing in the past as a comfort against the present afflictions, for the past was nothing to him but a series of hastily experienced stages. What blinded him to himself was his expectation always to find, further on, the happiness he had so far missed. Now he is stopped in his tracks; from now on nothing remains behind or ahead of him to fix his gaze upon. Weariness alone, moreover, is enough to bring disillusionment, for he cannot in the end escape the

futility of an endless pursuit... We may even wonder if this moral state is not principally what makes economic catastrophes of our day so fertile in suicides (255-256).

Durkheim also pointed out the importance of social ties/bonds, and noted that stable societies or cultures are the ones in which definite and reasonable goals help the individual respect normative bounds. Economic goals are, in many cases, more clearly characterized and typically fall within the aspirations of the individual (Clinard 1964).

This relative limitation and the moderation it involves, make men contented with their lot while stimulating them moderately to improve it; and this average contentment causes the feeling of calm, active happiness, the pleasure in existing and living which characterizes health for societies as well as for individuals. Each person is then at least, generally speaking, in harmony with his condition, and desires only what he may legitimately hope for as the normal reward for his activity. Besides, this does not condemn man to a sort of immobility... For, loving what he has and not fixing his desire solely on what he lacks, his wishes and hopes may fail of what he has happened to aspire to, without his being wholly destitute. He has the essentials. The equilibrium of his happiness is secure because it is defined, and a few mishaps cannot disconcert him (Durkheim [1897] 1951: 250).

*Forms of Anomie:* Durkheim ([1893] 1933; [1897] 1951) discussed two forms of anomie—*chronic* and *acute*. Both were a result of an imbalance between means and

needs (states of disequilibrium), where means were inadequate to fulfill needs. But it is important to differentiate between these two types of anomie.

*Chronic Anomie.* Durkheim's analysis of chronic anomie focuses not on sudden social or economic change, but rather on the consequences of the gradual decrease of social regulation. The premise of chronic anomie, "is conceived as a permanent disease of industrial societies" (Besnard 1988: 92). According to Durkheim ([1897] 1951), industry has come to be viewed as an end in itself since the restraint over economic (industrial) relations that was typically exercised by religion, civil authority, and occupational groups has eroded over time (Thompson 1982). Consequently, in the industrial context, the individual is freed from social restraint, while integrative mechanisms are weakened (Pope 1976; Thompson 1982). Thus, chronic anomie "expresses the fact that the social world is change in itself and is a permanent lack of stable references" (Besnard 1988: 92).

The degree of restraint, in the midst of unsteady references and social ties, that the individual can endure is proportional to the amount that the individual experiences. Therefore, the weakening of restraint and integration makes remaining restraint appear intolerable. This is even more true for the fortunate and affluent than it is for the poor. Durkheim ([1897] 1951) noted that in modern societies and cultures, the deregulated state is elevated to a virtue: "The longing for infinity is daily represented as a mark of moral distinction, whereas it can only appear within unregulated consciences which elevate to a rule the lack of rule from which they suffer" (257). In essence, chronic anomie is not a product of temporary or the sudden absence of rules and norms. It results from "the

presence, in modern culture, of the doctrine of constant progress, the longing for infinity, the necessity for a person to advance constantly toward an indefinite goal” (Besnard 1988: 92).

*Chronic Anomic Currents in the National Football League (NFL).* Chronic anomic conditions arise when industry or occupational groups such as the NFL (within modern culture) are in a state of constant social change and there is a disappearance of many regulatory norms. According to Durkheim ([1897] 1951), “the sphere of trade and industry...is actually in a chronic state” (255). This is the state of modern professional sport in America, which during the last 50 years has undergone substantial change (Eitzen 1999, 2005; Frey & Eitzen 1991; Sage 1998).

The industry of professional football has been one of the most successful growth industries in recent decades (Lowry 2003; MacCambridge 2004; Sage 1998). To understand the roots of change in the NFL, we must turn back to 1960 when the newly-appointed commissioner Pete Rozelle persuaded the government to pass the Sports Broadcasting Act. This allowed sports leagues to sell broadcast rights as a package and ultimately allowed them to negotiate more favorable contracts. Shortly thereafter, the NFL reached its first deal with CBS. CBS agreed to pay the NFL \$4.6 million, which would be split among the teams. With this accomplishment, Rozelle was credited “with transforming modern sports by marrying games with TV” (Lowry 2003: 239). This transformation arguably brought about the emergence of chronic anomic conditions within the industry because “government, instead of regulating economic life, [had] become its tool and servant” (Durkheim [1897] 1951: 255).

Today the NFL secures: (a) \$2.5 billion from network and cable TV contracts, which is split between the 32 teams, giving each \$78 million; (b) \$200 million from Direct TV's Sunday Ticket, which gives each team another \$6.2 million; (c) \$1 billion from direct sponsorships, luxury suites, broadcasting, parking, and concessions, which is retained by the individual clubs; and (d) \$1.1 billion from ticket revenues, of which \$300 million is put into a visitors pool and split evenly, giving each team another \$10.9 million (Lowry 2003).

The economic change associated with the emergence of the Sports Broadcasting Act, and then through free agency in the 1990s, has set up the NFL to have one of the most favorable player deals in professional sports. On average, athletes receive \$1.2 million in salary, which does not include large signing bonuses. For example, Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb made \$21.7 million last year, the majority of which came from his signing bonus. With these chronic changes in the industry of the NFL, come the "pluses and minuses associated with players who are larger than life" (Lowry 2003: 235). As Durkheim ([1897] 1951) said, "industry, instead of being still regarded as a means to an end transcending itself, has become the supreme end of individuals...Thereupon the appetites thus excited have become freed of any limiting authority" (255).

*Acute Anomie.* For Durkheim ([1897] 1951), the anomie of affluence is a result of rapid and extreme changes in wealth. This type of anomie is what Durkheim termed acute anomie. Acute anomie is central to this study and helps explain why economic crises (sudden fortune) help increase social deviance.

According to Pope (1976), “central to the explanation [of acute anomie] is the means-needs balance” (25). The key consideration is whether an individual’s means are adequate for the fulfillment of his or her needs. Where means are proportional to needs, Durkheim ([1897] 1951) noted, they exist in a state of equilibrium. And, on the other hand, where the means are inadequate to fulfill the needs, they exist in a state of disequilibrium. These needs are not given by an individual’s biological, psychological, or individual nature, but are social products that differ from one social context to the next (Thompson 1982). In many cases, “particular goals, desires, passions, or appetites for comfort, well-being, and luxury may become translated into needs” (Pope 1976: 25). Durkheim used needs in a general sense to include all of these things. Moreover, he spoke of needs, ends, and goals, or the passions, appetites, and desires that can turn a want into a need.

Durkheim ([1897] 1951) believed that human wants are boundless and insatiable, and, “unless restrained they represent a constant threat to individual happiness” (Pope 1976: 25). Far from serving to fulfill and satisfy the individual the satisfaction of needs only serves to stimulate additional needs. Thus, the essential element for equilibrium between means and needs is some external force or social control mechanism that limits individual desires. Because most people cannot do this themselves, an external restraint is necessary. For Durkheim ([1897] 1951), the needs in question are moral in nature. Because structures are the only superior moral power whose authority and regulation individuals accept, only societies, cultures, or other social structures can provide the required restraint and control. Restrained by this societal pressure, each individual “in



his sphere” accepts the “limit set to his ambitions and aspires to nothing beyond” (Durkheim [1897] 1951: 250).

For Durkheim ([1897] 1951), this is the way equilibrium is sustained under normal conditions. But, during periods of crisis characterized by abrupt changes, society and its institutions become unable to exercise their usual regulatory and moral authority. In the case of economic depression, people are cast into a new and lower state. This forces them to scale down their goals. And, “although the old rules are no longer applicable to an individual’s new situation, new ones appropriate to that situation cannot be instantly established” (Pope 1976: 26). As a result, individuals find it difficult to adjust to their new situation, and their subsequent suffering “detaches them from a reduced existence even before they have made trial of it” (Durkheim [1897] 1951: 252). For similar reasons, sudden wealth and prosperity also creates a disjunction between means and needs. This disjunction is particularly severe because “the richer prize offered” stimulates them, making them even less agreeable to restraint (Durkheim [1897] 1951: 253).

Durkheim ([1897] 1951) observed that there were remarkably low rates of deviant behavior, such as suicide, among the poor. He stated that, “actual possessions are partly the criterion of those aspired to,” so that the more an individual has, the more that individual wants (254). Pope (1976) elaborated, “having little, the poor aspire to little; thus their means tend to be adequate for their needs” (26). By contrast, wealth “by the power it bestows, deceives us into believing that we depend on ourselves only,” thereby encouraging opposition to collective social rules and regulation and suggesting the possibility of unlimited success against the opposition “we encounter from objects”

(Durkheim [1897] 1951: 254). Ironically, by virtue of having more, the affluent experience a greater means-needs imbalance than do the poor.

In essence, Durkheim ([1897] 1951) related sudden change to society's ability to moderate aspirations. During times of abrupt change, society's regulatory impact is weakened. Individuals find themselves in new and different situations to which the old rules do not seem to apply. As a result, they are freed from social restraint, their needs increasingly outstrip their means, and the consequent disequilibrium creates more unhappiness and a state of meaninglessness, which manifests itself in deviant behavior.

*Acute Anomic Currents in the NFL.* The media's marketing of sports (NFL) celebrities as cult figures and their subsequent commodification has promoted the huge salaries and over-hyped celebrity status of professional athletes. These multi-million dollar salaries and the status, power, and influence that comes with them changes athletes' lives instantly. Moreover, sports stars today set the benchmark for aspiration and material wealth in contemporary popular culture (Whannel 2002). In essence, the chronic anomic currents in the industry have contributed to the acute anomic crises for individual NFL players. Moreover, it appears that chronic and acute change in the industry, multi-million dollar salaries and signing bonuses, have a dramatic impact on player behavior and lifestyles. In other words, acute changes in wealth among the individual NFL players may be associated with *personal anomie* and deviance.

Furthermore, the sudden life change that accompanies the instant wealth and power of professional football players can be conceptualized as the basis of acute anomie. For Durkheim ([1897] 1951), acute anomie is conceived as a "disease of the infinite,"

(Besnard 1988: 93) a “sickness” (Cohen 1972: 329). He pointed out the implications of abrupt changes and accentuated how anomie could result from improvements in economic and material conditions. He cautioned for example, “of the moral danger involved in every growth of prosperity...wealth...suggests the possibility of unlimited success” (Durkheim ([1897] 1951: 254). Additionally, it appears in many cases that the wealth acquired by NFL players gives them “a sense of power and supremacy that deceives them into believing that they are answerable only to themselves” (Abrahamson 1980: 50).

Interpreting Durkheim’s ([1897] 1951) prescient descriptions of “unfamiliar pleasures” and “nameless sensations,” that describe the lifestyle many professional football players, Harry Cohen (1972) states,

In the anomic drive for power, prestige, money and the materialistic things that these can buy...there is no end, no ultimate satisfaction...There is never enough because the accumulation of wealth is external, and the rewards are not internal in terms of deeper personal and personality gratification and such. In addition, wealth is always relative; there is always more to be had...he sees only more ahead, and keeps running, never reaching his goal. Anomic people do not know why they strive so, why they still miss something when they are richer and richer, their houses bigger and their earnings better...life remains truly meaningless (330-331).

*Durkheim to Srole: The Social Psychological Level of Anomie*

Durkheim ([1897] 1951) typically discussed anomie as a macro-sociological problem. As he used the concept, anomie referred to the traits of a social institution/group or the social structure, and not necessarily to the traits of individuals (Clinard 1964). Although Durkheim's conception of anomie is conceived as a societal level phenomenon, his incredible insight into human behavior can be used to assess social psychological evaluations (different levels of abstraction) as well. Passas (2000) maintains that "the object of analysis may be a given society . . . as it may be a particular section of society . . . or [a] social institution" (106). In essence, an individual's social psychological or personal anomie is typically a manifestation of an anomic social group or institution (Pope 1976). As Parsons ([1937] 1968) argued, "the social and psychopathological explanations of [deviance] are not antithetical but complementary" (326).

Many scholars realized that anomie was a powerful social phenomenon that was prevalent in certain social situations. With Durkheim's, seemingly only macro-level, conception locked in the sociological "iron cage" and with the pressing need to look at the social psychological aspects of anomie, the concept of *anomia* was developed (MacIver 1950; Riesman, Glazer, and Denney 1956; Srole 1956). Robert MacIver (1950) conceptualized anomia as "a state of mind in which the individual's sense of social cohesion—the mainspring of his morale—is broken or fatally weakened" (85), while David Riesman (1956) described the anomic individual as "maladjusted." As individuals feel more and more detached, "they lose their motivation to behave morally in the context of that [social] system" (Cohen 2000:189).

Leo Srole (1956) developed a social psychological measure of anomia that “refers to the degree of felt social connectedness of actors” (Lovell-Troy 1983:303). Orru (1987) argues that,

the background assumption of Srole’s scale is that the desirable condition of social systems is characterized at the macrosocial (molar) level by the ‘integratedness’ of different social systems or subsystems, and at the microsocial (molecular) level by the functional integration of individuals in relation to the social normative situation. Anomia expresses the malintegration or dysfunctional relation of individuals to their social worlds (126).

In other words, the individual with anomic characteristics will seem to be disconnected from: (a) the larger political norms of society; (b) the larger cultural norms of society; (c) the larger economic norms of society; (d) “internalized social norms and values”; and (e) the main socialization group (Srole 1956: 711). Moreover, many scholars (MacIver 1950; McClosky and Shaar 1965; Srole 1956) have said that anomia has two key aspects: (a) disconnectedness and malintegration from the normative structures of society, and (b) deregulation or disrupted/inadequate socialization. Both of these key aspects are important components in this analysis of the negative consequences of sudden change in the lives of professional football players.

At the individual level, disruptions such as sudden wealth and power can weaken their sense of belonging, leading to anormative behaviors of many NFL players. This, in turn, produces anomia at the individual or social psychological level (Durkheim [1897] 1951; Srole 1956). Anomia occurs because of “deficiencies at the level of specific groups” (Marks 1974:334). For this study, these deficiencies occur at the institutional

level and at the individual level of NFL players. Regardless of the level of measurement and the different causes of anomie/anomia, “the concept itself refers to the same idea/phenomenon: a weakening of the guiding power of social norms, a loosened social control” (Passas 2000:106-107).

### *Summary of Theoretical Understandings*

In summary, social disorganization theory suggests that identifiable characteristics should be found that contribute to two distinct groups within the NFL: players who live within the bounds of normative behavior and players who display deviant characteristics. Subcultural and learning theories were initially thought to be useful in identifying some of these characteristics. But, their differences with Durkheimian literature and qualitative data make them less compatible.

However, some elements of subcultural and learning theories could be used at several points during this study. One could make the case that the group is bounded via a subculture. It could be argued that learning takes place through various circumstances and is thus a useful paradigm. Nonetheless, there appeared to be much more evidence that NFL players were part of a *weak* culture, not a subculture. If players were indeed enmeshed in a subculture then they would likely have some level of social support, as even deviant subcultures provide social bonds. And if deviant subcultures provide social ties and support, it could be argued that players would be integrated and would likely be less anomic. However, qualitative data suggested that these players’ culture was weak, with few ties and support mechanisms. This appeared to be a key factor in why players in the study group exhibited anomic characteristics and elements of deviance. In essence,

this indicated that many of the players typically did not learn deviance from their subculture (for more discussion see Endnote 1).

Thus, Durkheim's theory of anomie, and related themes of social control and social support, provides the theoretical framework for this study of deviant behaviors in the NFL. In addressing possible factors associated with those NFL players who are law breakers (or engage in deviant behaviors), Durkheim's theory suggests that rapid change in wealth could be a plausible explanation. According to Powell (1970), "crime [or deviance] flourishes under conditions...of anomie" (107). Moreover, for those who appear to be anomic, weak social ties (social control and social support factors) may perpetuate this condition. So with Durkheim in mind, is deviance in the NFL a product of anomie?

## Chapter Three

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This study was conceptualized and designed after many personal conversations and in-depth interviews with two former NFL players. The study has evolved over a five-year period. Initially, elite and specialized interviews (Dexter 1970) provided insight and opportunity to conceptualize a qualitative approach based on inductive techniques, which has been termed “field research or naturalistic research” by Schatzman and Strauss (1973) in their text, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*. Later the researcher determined that more data and comparable data could be obtained by developing a structured interview guide that could be administered or self-administered by respondents. The second phase of research allowed for a more deductive approach based on the findings of the qualitative/naturalistic field data and on social disorganization theory.

The blended form of research (Campbell & Fiske 1959; Sieber 1973; Bauman & Adair 1992; Creswell 1994, 2005; Jick 1979; Dexter 1970), which first began as an open-ended inquiry and qualitative field research, then formed into a more quantitative format that allowed for a more comprehensive look into the lives of NFL players. The qualitative data lends itself to the “qualities” of behavior that could be missed from just a quantitative approach (Strauss 2003). The structured interview guide composed of sixty variables designed from theory and the inductive data gives comparative and additional data. The closed nature of a professional sports league such as the NFL avails itself to using this blended method to maximize data on the NFL’s players. By using a blended approach, every effort was made to reduce error/bias that must be considered when doing



field research and quantitative methods. Moreover, by using both qualitative and quantitative methods, reliability and validity should be increased (Sieber 1973; Creswell 2005). It is through the combination of both that findings can be verified and assessed in relation to the research questions.

### *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*

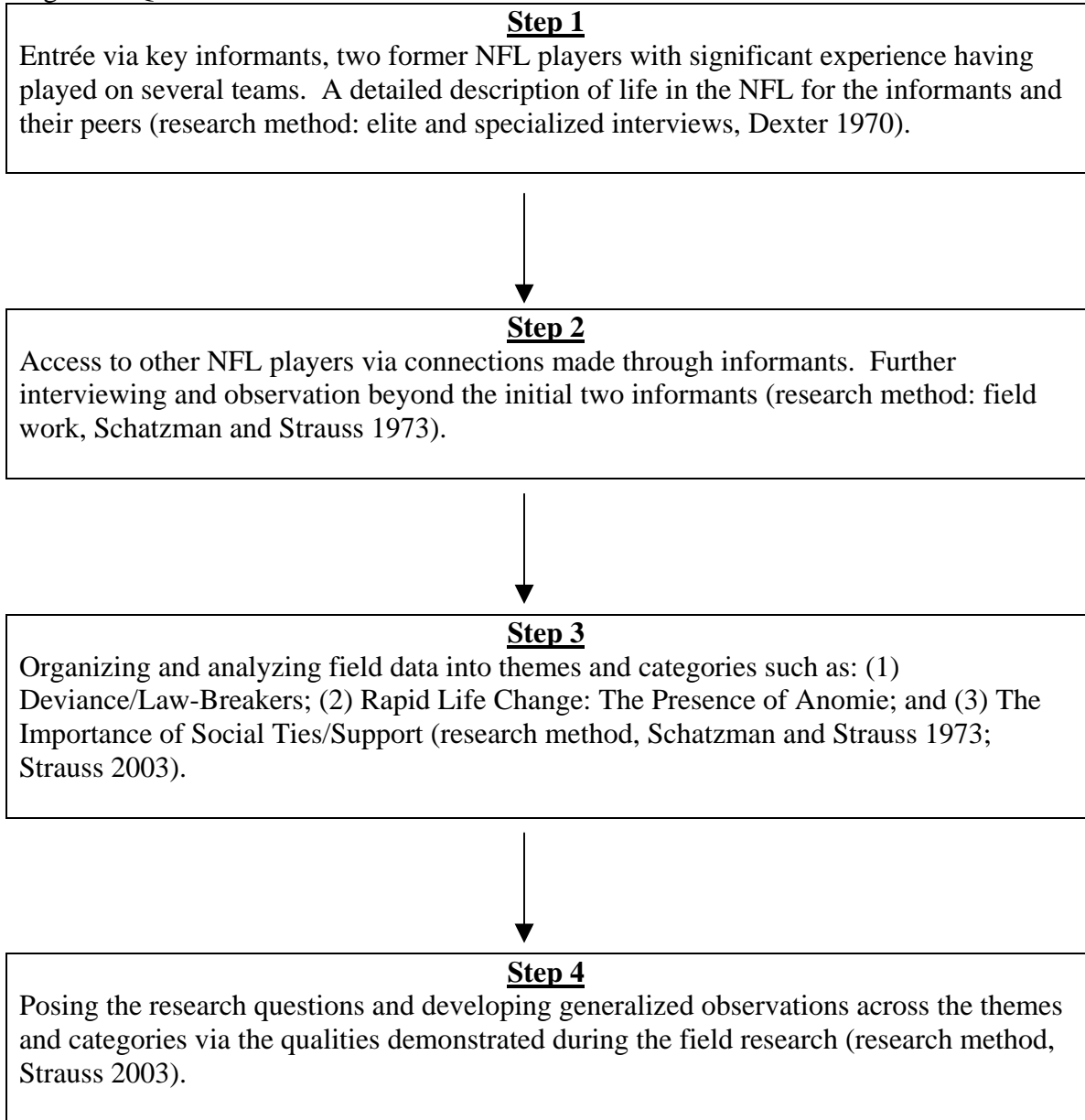
The first step in the qualitative research process was gaining access to NFL players. Elite and specialized interviewing (Dexter 1970) was employed as a way to gain access to two former NFL players. These two players became “key informants,” and the point of entry for gaining access to other players. Dexter (1970) suggests the applicability and use of this approach for closed, influential, and prominent populations. In essence, elite interviewing, as defined by Dexter (1970), means that the investigator “is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him what the problem, the question, the situation, is—to the limits, of course, of the interviewer’s ability to perceive relationships to his basic problems, whatever these may be” (6).

Dexter’s (1970) thorough description of elite and specialized interviewing makes the point that in many cases the use of “well informed” persons or informants is the only way to gain entrance into select groups. According to Paul (1953), key informants are, ideally...individuals who have not only proved themselves well informed and well connected, but have demonstrated a capacity to adopt the standpoint of the investigator. Informing him of rumors and coming events, suggesting secondary informants, preparing the way, advising on tactics and tact, securing additional data on their own, and assisting the anthropologist in numerous other ways (430).

Concentration on several informants can help the researcher acquire a better picture of the norms, attitudes, expectations, and values of the particular group under study than typically could be obtained solely from larger numbers of less intensive interviews. However, Dexter (1970) notes, “it will often be preferable to combine the use of informants with other interviewing and with other methods of data collection” (8-9).

A second major step in the qualitative research process was the movement beyond the two initial informants to the larger “field” of NFL players. In order to accomplish this methodological step, the researcher relied upon Schatzman and Strauss’s (1973) classic work on field research and Strauss’s (2003) work on qualitative analysis. Central to the Schatzman and Strauss (1973) paradigm are several important processes. These include: (1) entering; (2) organizing; (3) watching; (4) recording; and (5) analyzing. Each of these can be simultaneous data collection activities and are essential in understanding the qualities of the behavior under investigation. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) emphasized the emergent nature of human behavior and that qualitative research must remain open to new and continuing questions in order to capture the truly natural essence of human behavior. Strauss (2003) illustrates the various methods available to discover points of commonality and difference within qualitative data. Much of his emphasis on analysis is based on organization and thematic commonalities. Figure 1 illustrates the phases of qualitative data collection as based on the work of Dexter (1970), Schatzman and Strauss (1973), and Strauss (2003).

Figure 1: Qualitative Research Process—Phases of Data Collection



### *Qualitative Analyses and Findings*

The qualitative findings will be reported in first person so as to communicate from the field in a “natural” manner. A major objective within the qualitative field approach is to reduce communication bias and maintain the rich quality of the field data as reported (Schatzman & Strauss 1973; Strauss 2003). First person reporting is preferred in mixed-method studies and most qualitative analyses (Creswell 2005).

### *Step One: Early Conceptualization of the Study and Entrée*

From 2001 to 2005, I engaged in fieldwork in several locations, which were rich with “NFL communities.” The motivation for this fieldwork came almost simultaneously with conceptualizing a research project on professional sport and conversations with a friend who happened to be a former NFL player. I then began to reflect on earlier conversations with another friend, also a former NFL player. I began to read and explore the available literature on sport and society (Frey & Eitzen 1991; Benedict 1997; Benedict & Yaeger 1998; Sage 1998; Wenner 1998; Eitzen 1999; Blumstein & Benedict 1999; Starr & Samuels 2000; Coakley 2001). In particular, I began reviewing the literature on professional sport and its athletes. The literature is rich with examples of athletes who find themselves in trouble with the law. However, most of the literature is journalistic in nature. I found very few explanations for deviant behavior. With the literature and these formerly mentioned intimate conversations fresh in memory, I began to think about and conceptualize a study on the NFL and its players. It was apparent that explanations other than journalistic were needed. At times, even the questions in the contemporary literature were not very clear.

My first real glimpse into the NFL came as a result of numerous intimate personal conversations with a former NFL player back in 1997. This was several years before I would even be considering any form of research; yet those in-depth conversations held the key to the evolving study. This former player, whom I will refer to as N1 (number 1), had just retired from the NFL at the time of our initial conversations.

At that time, he appeared to still be in impeccable physical condition not to mention relatively young. This observation led me to ask him why he had retired when it appeared he had several more productive years left to play, particularly since his production the last year he played was above average for players at his position. This question prompted N1 to disclose many stories about the deviant behaviors of players he knew. He described a series of destructive lifestyles he and others had indulged in and the deviant life-choices that came as a result—the promiscuous sex, daily drug use, alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, rapes, attempted suicides, and so on. He referred to many of these behaviors as reasons why he had ended of his professional career. His frequent run-ins with the law and a court ordered rehabilitation essentially forced him into retirement. His stories left an impression and prompted more questions and then even more questions about how this happens to a gifted and talented young professional.

This real life case did not seem rational to me. Here was a great athlete, who had made millions of dollars, who had everything most Americans can only dream of, who had his career cut short because he could not stay out of jail. This seemed to be a cruel paradox. As we visited for several weeks, N1 told me many incredible stories. At the end of our last conversation in 1997, I finally asked if there was a reason why he was

unable to curb his unlawful behavior. I remember exactly what he told me: “I was instantly rich, and I couldn’t...handle it.”

A few years later, I was re-introduced to N2 (another former NFL player, a friend that I had not seen since childhood). As a young boy, I had the privilege of knowing N2 when he played football at the college where my father was employed. As a football fan, I looked up to N2 for his athletic prowess and status as an all-American collegiate football player. For a short time, N2 took me under his wing and explained the intricacies of the game of football, escorted me around the locker room, took me to other various social events, and explained the process of “making it to the NFL,” at a time when he was being scouted by numerous NFL teams.

In 2000, I met N2 at a hotel in the midwest to catch up and hear about his career in the NFL. When the topic turned from family and friends to the NFL, he started describing the wild, deviant, and unlawful behaviors/activities that he had witnessed—descriptions of behaviors that reminded me of earlier conversations with N1. After N2 told me about a good friend in the league who had just tried to kill himself, I asked myself how athletes who had “everything” could end up in this condition? This question would become the topic and problem of this research.

### *Step Two: Access to Additional NFL Players*

Several months later, while visiting N1 in Texas, I began to develop ideas for a more extensive project. N1 took me to many of the “seedy” local establishments where professional athletes “hung out.” Later, N1, who still had numerous friends in the league, took me to a Sunday night game. We had front row seats for the game and were

subsequently escorted to the field where he introduced me to several players. The following day, N1 took me to meet many of the players I had met after the game. At this point, I realized that I had gained access to an affluent, elite, yet seemingly delinquent and closed social group.

This point cannot be overstated. My observation of these athletes revealed that many of them were very cynical and wary of outsiders. Most have been “burned” (mistreated or lied to) on numerous occasions by journalists, reporters, agents, and even friends. They were very aware of these “outsiders” and their, in many cases, exploitive intentions. It was only through my informants that initial, but skeptical, access was gained. Once I had gained initial access and my informants had told their peers (at least several times) that I was “okay” and could be considered one of the “boys,” the other players began to feel more at ease and started to open up to me. I told them that I was doing research on NFL players’ activities off the field and wanted to get the inside view of what goes on in their lives and the NFL. I also kept reiterating that everything they did in my presence and told me would be confidential and not used to harm them in any way. I emphasized that I was interested in the group characteristics and not one player per se.

They began to view me in a unique way. Some called me “professor,” yet at the same time I was becoming one of the “boys,” which was ultimately the most important distinction I could acquire from the players. Without being labeled as such, I undoubtedly, would have been categorized with the media and other reporters, and viewed as someone “just out to get the most recent and juiciest gossip.” I think, in many ways, after some initial conversation, they felt we had some “things in common”—especially a love for athletics, in particular football. They were impressed that I’d “done

my homework” and knew about their professional careers, statistics, and the game of football in general. Also, on several occasions, I played golf and basketball with some of the players, which ultimately expanded my access and legitimized me. I felt like being able to “shoot the bull” with these athletes really helped them begin to feel comfortable with me and opened a lot of doors for further access. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) emphasize that in the naturalistic field approach “comfort” and “natural” presence is what the researcher is seeking so as to acquire as much data as possible.

Most seemed as if they enjoyed talking to me and viewed me as knowledgeable and someone they could confide in, as most did not feel they could do so with their agents, reporters, or even other peers. They appeared to appreciate my role as the “professor” and even at times told me that what I was doing was important in that they could talk about the many problems they faced as celebrities and professional athletes. Ultimately, I had identified a problem, which the players themselves regarded as an important issue. Thus, I was developing relations with these players in the context of reciprocity (Schatzman & Strauss 1973).

As I continued my conversations with N1 and N2, interviews with other players began to snowball. The initial relationships I had built were now paying off. The players that I interviewed in Texas, as well as my two informants, began to tell their peers that I was “okay” and that they should “help me out” with my research. Some even told other players that I was someone they could talk to about personal issues they were dealing with and that maybe I could help. As these interviews unfolded and I tried to understand their situations, I could feel their respect and desire to assist me in understanding the real life situations they find themselves in as NFL players.



The following summer in 2001, I was permitted to attend (with an all-access pass) an NFL training camp. This access came with the help of an individual who had ties to this NFL team. I was able to talk with the head coach and a couple of front office officials about my research. Subsequently, I was introduced to numerous players during their breaks, many of which granted me interviews. These conversations also led to interviews with other players later that year. Many of these further interviews were also facilitated by my two informants. This, alongside my fieldwork in Texas earlier in the year, was the beginning of my interviewing, which continued through Super Bowl week in 2005.

Super Bowl week was the last of my significant data collection periods for this study. It was during this experience, when N2 and I walked unabated through the intense security, police, police dogs, and huge numbers of hotel staff into one of the team hotels and into a secure location where only the players, coaches, intimate others, and select media were allowed, that I knew there was something special and rare about the kind of access I had gained. N2 almost immediately started introducing me to players and coaches. These conversations turned into more in-depth interviews later in the week.

The various in-depth interviews were largely unstructured, open-ended, and based on prior elite and specialized interviewing with N1 and N2. The strength of this type of interview is that it collects descriptive data in a very natural method (Schatzman & Strauss 1973; Bauman & Adair 1992). Later, I began to ask more difficult questions as my level of comfort grew. In this study, I asked about the athlete's world in order to draw out a description of their activities, routines, and relationships. These kinds of questions draw out descriptive data or the *life experiences* of the respondents.

I typically opened the in-depth interviews with several general questions or statements such as: “Tell me about yourself”; “where did you go to school?”; “where’s home?” In other words, I asked them to tell me about the various stages of their life (childhood through college) leading up to the NFL. I also asked them about changes they had experienced en route to becoming a professional football player. And, I asked them to tell me about life in the NFL. I frequently found myself engaged in conversations about family, wealth, being a celebrity, their happiness or unhappiness, drug and alcohol abuse, promiscuous sexual conduct, and criminal or unlawful behavior. As my acceptance level grew and as I was more comfortable, I began to use the questionnaire during this phase. The data collection from the questionnaire will be discussed in the quantitative methods.

Of the 104 NFL players interviewed during this five-year period, most mentioned the presence of deviant lifestyles and the range of concerns that results from being suddenly wealthy. Many said they were unable to cope with the freedom that came with sudden wealth and fame. At times, I was almost overwhelmed by the litany of chronic personal and social problems these players had experienced. They described the role that prior socialization and social support—or lack of it—played in their lives.

### *Step Three: Organizing and Analyzing Data*

The discussion is based on three *core* themes that emerged from the qualitative data: (a) deviant behaviors, activities, and lifestyles; (b) anomie (sudden life, status, and economic change—wealth); and (c) the importance of social ties and support. Using an inductive approach, I was “interested...not in the viewpoints of specific individuals but in

the general patterns [or themes] evinced by classes of individuals” (Strauss 1987: 268) or, in terms of this study, evinced by a group of athletes (with commonalities) caught up in “the NFL lifestyle.” Many players suggested that they, and their peers, were subject to varied sets of social dynamics, socialization experiences, and family structures and that certain social ties and support factors had profound effects on their lives, their behavioral patterns, and their ability to cope with life, status, and economic change (most importantly sudden and extreme wealth). Figure 2 illustrates the major themes evidenced from the qualitative data.

Figure 2: A Working Behavioral and Attitudinal Model for NFL Players Derived From Field Study

<i>Major Themes which Emerged Across the Sample of NFL Players</i>		
<i>(1) Evidence of Deviance</i>	<i>(2) Indications of Anomie</i>	<i>(3) Social Ties</i>
<i>Factors Influencing Themes</i>		
<p>Deviance as Demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law Breaking Behavior</li> <li>• Evading Arrests because of Police Deference</li> <li>• Deviance without Arrests</li> <li>• Receiving Rehabilitation or Counseling</li> </ul>	<p>Anomie as Demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reactions to Sudden Wealth and Status Change</li> <li>• Unhappiness and the Search for Meaning and Life Satisfaction</li> </ul>	<p>Institutions and Social Networks that Provide Social Support/Control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of Marriage</li> <li>• Extent of Family Structure</li> <li>• Level of Educational Background</li> <li>• Presence of Practicing Religion</li> <li>• Peer Network</li> </ul> <p>Early Socialization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood Family Dynamics</li> <li>• Socioeconomic Status</li> <li>• Urban/Rural Location</li> <li>• Childhood Friends</li> </ul>

*Deviance Theme.* Typically, the interviews revealed that deviance, which consisted of unlawful behavior or other anormative behaviors, occurred in relation to the life change that occurred when players entered the NFL from college. More importantly, the suddenly acquired wealth that came with this life change, appeared to be a key factor in the NFL players’ (in the sample) propensity for deviance. Put simply, the money that players were exposed to allowed them to pursue behavior and activities that, under previous circumstances, many could not afford. The money allowed for excess levels of almost anything a player wanted. Many times, these excesses led to deviant and illegal activities. Figure 3 shows the categories of deviant behavior within the overarching theme.

Figure 3: Deviance Theme

<u>Deviance, Commonalities in NFL Players’ Language:</u> “ <i>my wrongdoings, delinquent, terrible, bad, corrupt, shame, flawed, defective, immoral, consumed, consequences, addicted, abuse, sin</i> ”
<u>Categories:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law Breaking Behavior</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evading Arrests because of Police Deference</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deviance without Arrests</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehabilitation/Counseling</li> </ul>

In many cases, deviant behaviors turned into unlawful or illegal actions. A number of players reported having been arrested after entering the NFL for illegal drug possession, to soliciting prostitutes, to drinking and driving, to rape, and assault. A key pattern for law breakers appeared to revolve around money and power issues. Many of

the players that had been arrested told me that their wealth and power had been a stimulus and a driving force for their unlawful activities. I would argue that their wealth provided them a platform from which to deviate. In essence, many had difficulty coping with sudden affluence and the situations that wealth created. The sense of entitlement that came with wealth gave many of the athletes the idea that they only answered to themselves and that there were few consequences for their behavior.

Moreover, I found that a large portion of the players' sense of entitlement was a result of being seen as famous and to some extent perpetuated by team owners and management. Much deviance and even illegal behaviors were, or appeared to be, condoned by team owners and management. While owners are very concerned about team image, they are dealing daily with players and problems. From their perspective, players come and go. Football is a business. Winning is good for business. Hence, better players with questionable behavior are tolerated up to a point, especially if public relation damage control stays within an acceptable level determined by the team management.

For example, I was told of one instance in which 14 NFL players were accused of sexual misconduct. The players involved offered the accuser a large sum of money in order for her not to go to the police. The owner of the team was notified of these allegations and immediately called for a private meeting with two of his star players who were involved in the incident. According to one of these players, the owner said, "I don't know if you all did it or didn't do it, and I don't want to." He went on to give the players the phone number of a lawyer who "could take care of it" for them.

In essence, these players' destructive behaviors appeared to be ignored by team management. The owner commented later, according to one of the players involved, "If this was simply a consensual orgy, I'm not all that concerned... There is no reason to consider suspension." Eventually, the players involved, facilitated by the organization, paid off the accuser, as reported by the player. There were no consequences for the players involved—even after several had admitted that they had indeed been involved in the "nonconsensual" sexual orgy. Even though this incident did not result in official charges being filed, 12 of these 14 players involved in the sexual misconduct were eventually arrested and charged with various other illegal activities. I would argue that the appearance of "no consequences" in this case gave these athletes a sense that there were no boundaries or limits for their behavior. If there were clearer boundaries and consequences, perhaps some of the players would have curbed their future behaviors.

In essence, the message from many of the players interviewed seemed to be that if you are a professional football player you are entitled to do as you wish without the threat of harsh consequences. This sense of entitlement empowered by wealth and status, appeared to be a key factor in players' illegal behaviors. Figure 4 illustrates some of the players' perceptual accounts of unlawful acts. These phrases are quotes from the players. They are typical comments that I heard across interview settings.

Figure 4: Law Breaking Behavior Category

CATEGORY CODE: LB

Definition: NFL players that have been arrested after entering the NFL.

Law Breaking Behavior Examples:

*I never seemed to have enough, enough women, enough dope... [eventually] I got busted.*

*I've been arrested several times...you see, I thought I was above the law...and consequences, I never thought about consequences.*

*I been arrested...got into a bar fight and was busted for possession...*

*I got into some rough shit, man...too much money and free time...Usually, I could find a way out...but last year I got taken in [arrested].*

*Things changed so damn fast...I started to use alcohol to take the edge off...I've had three DUIs...*

*If you play in this league...it's a fast-paced world... and a lot of these young men use alcohol and drugs to cope with their new lifestyle.*

*I didn't know how to turn all this stuff down...I never had any of it growing up...the money, man, the money, I couldn't handle it...I started blowing it on all sorts of shit...next thing I know I'm in jail for solicitation [of a prostitute]...*

*I've been arrested twice on drug charges...*

*You get involved in the nightlife...you gonna get in trouble...I consider myself lucky, only being cuffed [arrested] once...I had to get out...it would've killed me...*

Even if some of the players in the sample were not physically arrested and charged with an illegal offense (just as the 14 players mentioned above), many still engaged in unlawful acts. But, their status as professional football players afforded them, as one NFL player told me, “a free pass.” In other words, the police and other authorities “permitted” athletes to participate in illegal activities without subjecting them to arrest.



Police refused to arrest and others refused to press charges against many of the athletes because they deferred to their status as NFL players. This led me to conclude that by simply looking at the law breakers we may be underestimating the number of NFL players involved in deviant or unlawful behavior. As one player told me, “If you have enough money and people know who you are, you can get out of just about anything.” Figure 5 describes situations in which players were not arrested after they had been stopped or confronted by police.

Figure 5: Evading Arrests because of Police Deference Category

<p><u>CATEGORY CODE: EAPD</u></p> <p>Definition: NFL players that have reported being involved in activities typically resultant in arrests, but have been released due to their status as an NFL player.</p>
<p><u>Evading Arrests because of Police Deference Examples:</u></p> <p><i>I should've ended up in jail...but, I was simply slapped on the wrist and told not to do it again.</i></p> <p><i>I don't even know how many times I've had run-ins with the law...its more than a couple...but every time I somehow seemed to escape the consequences of my actions.</i></p> <p><i>If you're a pro athlete, a lot of times you can get away with murder, just look at [a notable NFL player]...in some ways, its like there are no rules as long as we can perform on Sunday.</i></p> <p><i>I been stopped by the cops several times...thought I was done...I had been drinking and had a bag in the car...but once the cop found out I was [a notable NFL player] he told me to go on...I signed a couple of autographs for him and he forgot it.</i></p> <p><i>I knew the law wouldn't touch me...and they didn't...</i></p> <p><i>In the...NFL, everyone's vulnerable, they just don't all get caught or are held accountable.</i></p> <p><i>When these guys get off so easily...all of the time...you see, this is what promotes and even perpetuates even more of these kinds of actions...the drinking and driving, buying hookers, beating wives and girlfriends, and all that kind of shit...</i></p> <p><i>And people wonder why these young men got the god-complex...because, hell, they can usually get away with whatever the...they want...and this ain't good.</i></p>

The NFL players in the sample also reported participating in many other forms of deviant or anormative behaviors—that were not all strictly illegal (some of these behaviors may be illegal in some places, but are not always regularly investigated or prosecuted). These behaviors included spending large sums of money on sex (strip clubs)

and substance (alcohol and drugs), promiscuous and unusual sex with multiple partners, alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, drug abuse, and suicide attempts. According to many of the players who fell into this category, their wealth and status set the stage for their deviant behavioral outcomes. As one player told me, “we make a lot of money...that’s our lifestyle...it sets us up for crazy and kinky stuff.” Another player told me, “you go to a club, they treat you like a king...you get escorted to the VIP suite, they bring you Don Perignon and strawberries...everything is on the house, even the women.” In essence, this type of “VIP” treatment appeared to be associated with player deviance. Figure 6 outlines several of these deviant behaviors and activities.

Figure 6: Deviance without Arrests Category

CATEGORY CODE: DWA

Definition: Deviant behavior or activities that were not illegal or did not result in arrests.

Deviance without Arrests Examples:

*You see, fame works two ways, I'll pay you and then you pay me...*

*This life was starting to slowly kill me...I've blown thousands of dollars in bars, strip clubs...and...the crazy sex with many, many women...you'd think with this kind of freedom I would be happy, I wasn't.*

*My thing was sex, sex with tons of women...I didn't discriminate...*

*I could talk about the gang bangs, the drug abuse, and on and on...*

*We think the more we have the better we gonna feel, the more steroids we pump the better we gonna feel, the more women we [have sex with] the cooler we gonna be...there just ain't no end, and its...tiring...so what do we do, more drugs, more sex, more liquor...*

*Damn, we been involved in some kinky [sex]...*

*I don't know how many guys I know that beat their wives or their girlfriends, or for that matter, both...it seems to be a common thing...*

*It seems like, every week, one of my teammates is involved in a bar room brawl...They get drunk and do stupid shit...I've even been involved in a few of them...*

*One of my boys, man, he got so depressed and [messed] up on drugs, he tried to kill himself...*

*You wouldn't think it...and its covered up a lot...guys trying to kill themselves...suicide attempts are more frequent than anyone would think.*

Although some may not label rehabilitation or counseling a deviant behavior, it was included within this theme because rehabilitation, in many cases, was an outcome of the deviant actions of NFL players in the study group. In the interviews, many players said they needed to get help or some sort of counseling for various addictions and personal troubles. I concluded from the qualitative data that those individuals who had received counseling or rehabilitation were, in most cases, involved in unlawful or illegal activities. Figure 7 highlights some of the situations in which NFL players found themselves and in which rehabilitation or counseling was necessary.

Figure 7: Rehabilitation/Counseling Category

<p><u>CATEGORY CODE: RC</u></p> <p>Definition: NFL players that have received rehabilitation or counseling for various deviant behaviors and activities.</p>
<p><i>I got injured back in [a date]...started taking pain killers...I got hooked and was forced to go to a rehabilitation facility.</i></p> <p><i>After my third DUI, they made me check into rehab.*</i></p> <p><i>I was into so much shit, coke, dope, a bunch of shit, I didn't know if I was comin' or goin' ...I been to different rehabs five times now...*</i></p> <p><i>In order to keep my license I had to get some substance abuse counseling...*</i></p>
<p>* indicates that the respondent from which the quote came was arrested after entering the NFL</p>

The study participants' comments revealed that deviance (illegal or legal) was connected to wealth and the athletes' newfound status as a professional football player. A sense of entitlement appeared to influence the ability of many players to make, what I would describe as mature, adult life-choice decisions. Time and time again, abrupt life

and economic change seemed to be an important factor in terms of their participation in deviant behaviors and activities. There also appeared to be a relationship between those who had received counseling/rehabilitation and those who were involved in illegal activities. Nearly every player that had received counseling/rehabilitation had also been arrested.

In essence, each player that reported their involvement in deviant behavior also made reference to their wealth and status. This was a finding that cannot be highlighted enough. In many cases they told me that a majority of their deviance was only possible because they had the appropriate resources (money and status). And, interestingly, many of the players felt that they had the “right” to do as they pleased simply because of their fame and recognition as a professional athlete. Also, many stated that the lack of consequences for their actions perpetuated further deviance. Thus, I would conclude that their perceived empowerment from wealth and fame, as well as, weak social control mechanisms (team organizations and law enforcement) were important factors in regard to furthering their behavior into more social deviance.

*Ideal-Typical Deviance.* During a conversation at a sports bar in Texas with several players, N3, as I will call him, told me an unfortunate story of deviant and unlawful behavior in which he was involved. After I reviewed the qualitative data, this story appeared to represent a common pattern of deviance among the players in the sample. To me, this appeared to be an “ideal type” since it was a situation that could be revisited in the lives of many NFL players.

N3 explained to me that he and another star millionaire NFL player had decided to blow off some steam after the season back in the late 1990s. They rented a suite at a local hotel. Through some connections the players had with a local gentleman's club, they invited three topless dancers to their suite. After spending some time "getting to know one another," or in other words, smoking several cocaine laced joints and having a few cocktails, the two players encouraged the women to have sex with each other. The two players gave the women several objects typically used for sexual stimulation. "We sat back and told the bitches what we wanted them to do...they did it," N3 told me. He also said that this was not out of the ordinary, that they and "everyone I know" takes part in similar deviant activities. They continued the evening by engaging in group sex, doing cocaine, smoking marijuana, and drinking heavily.

This scenario continued for three consecutive days, until finally the hotel manager became suspicious of prostitution. The manager informed the local authorities of his suspicion and the five individuals were arrested and charged, not with prostitution or solicitation, but with illegal drug possession. Eventually, the charges were dropped.

This story, along with the many other similar accounts I heard, about drug abuse and wild promiscuous sexual behavior was a prevalent and reoccurring theme from the qualitative data. To me, these stories revealed that as these NFL players' gained wealth and status, their behavioral license expanded, which created increased opportunities for deviance to occur. These accounts indicated that, in many cases, women became sexual prey for these athletes in which their self-gratifying deviance turned into illegal behaviors. This deviance was then dismissed by the athletes, as well as law enforcement

and the NFL, as minor, out of the norm, incidents. As one player told me, “boys will be boys.”

*Anomie Theme (Rapid Change).* Another common theme that emerged from the interviews was that most of the study participants reported difficulty with life change, in particular, sudden wealth. One finding that surprised me was that many players in the study group reported being unhappy with life. Several went as far to say that they felt their life was meaningless. Figure 8 shows the categories of anomic behavior.

Figure 8: Anomie Theme

<u>Anomie, Commonalities in NFL Players’ Language:</u> <i>“life changes, world changed, change, suddenly transformed, sudden, gratification, intensified, loss of self-control, transformation, entitlement, meaningless, chaotic, fast-paced, hard times, unhappy, unhappiness, out of control, cope, trying to cope”</i>
<u>Categories:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudden Wealth and Status Change</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy verses Unhappy with Life</li> </ul>

Many of the NFL players in the sample talked about their inability to cope with sudden life, status, and economic change. Numerous players referred to life in the NFL as “fast-paced” or the “NFL lifestyle.” A common pattern among players was that without support, “life in the fast lane” will eventually “kill ya’.”

For this study, this point cannot be overstated. The data revealed that with many of the players’ transition from college to the NFL, there was a “sudden” character of change, especially regarding wealth. In college, the majority of these players were



scholarship athletes that had some level of support and structure. But, they were not permitted by the NCAA to work or accept any outside funds. With many of the athletes from this sample coming from families or households with low socio-economic backgrounds, there was little financial support for the athletes via their parents or guardians (families). Therefore most were forced to remain in relative “poverty” until they were drafted or signed by an NFL team (or signed with an agent). Thus, going from unpaid student-athletes to, in many cases, millionaires, was a sudden and violent life change. Figure 9 illustrates some of the anomic conditions and characteristics of the study group.

Figure 9: Sudden Wealth and Status Change Category

<p><u>CATEGORY CODE: SW</u></p> <p>Definition: Sudden change in wealth, status, power, and other dimensions of life (earning a large salary) after entering the NFL.</p>
<p><i>A lot of these athletes think they are bigger than life now...</i></p> <p><i>You begin to think you're some type of god...*</i></p> <p><i>We were given everything...and now you think you can do anything and get away with it.</i></p> <p><i>Guys were given everything...</i></p> <p><i>They think they are bigger than life itself...</i></p> <p><i>Money, they say money is power and with money comes prestige...this is a change that I didn't handle very well...and most that I know didn't handle well...</i></p> <p><i>I realize now...before I went into the NFL, well, I never knew how to treat women and all that stuff...once I was drafted by the [NFL team] everything intensified...now I had money...it didn't take long...I was out of control...*</i></p>
<p>* indicates that the respondent from which the quote came was arrested after entering the NFL</p>

Contrary to common belief, an overwhelming number of the NFL players in the study told me they were unhappy with some aspect of life. Most fans would think that athletes would have an extremely high rate of self-reported happiness. They are, after all, wealthy and famous. Yet, many were unhappy and felt that life (off the football field) was meaningless. A common pattern within this theme revealed that the extreme changes that occurred in their lives had a substantial effect on their level of happiness. Numerous players told me that sudden wealth did not bring stability and happiness, but an unexplainable dissatisfaction with their lives. I would argue that this “unexplainable” dissatisfaction may be what Durkheim described as anomie. Figure 10 highlights this finding.

Figure 10: Happy verses Unhappy with Life Category

CATEGORY CODE: LH

Definition: NFL players perceived happiness and satisfaction with their life after entering the NFL.

Happy Verses Unhappy with Life Examples:

*My life off the field, honestly, its pretty...meaningless.\**

*Everything changed around me...and everything seems chaotic...a lot of us, man, we ain't even happy, I ain't.*

*Really, we're a bunch of deranged [individuals]...\**

*I thought with more championships and more honors, more money, more fame, more women, I would be able to find happiness...but, I still felt empty.\**

*You got women everywhere, you still ain't happy, you got clothes and jewelry galore, you still ain't happy, you got pretty much everything you ever wanted, but you still ain't happy...How can a man who has everything be unhappy?*

*Right after I was drafted into the league...let me tell you about how miserable I really was inside...\**

*I started to ask myself, where can I find some happiness?*

*This ain't what I thought it was...I'm not even happy.*

*I had pretty much anything anybody could want, but I wasn't all that happy...that's pretty [messed] up.\**

*I was so unhappy...\**

*I had always thought I was a guy who had good judgment, good character...but, I kept finding myself doing crazy things...I thought, usually the next morning, damn, what the hell happened...I'm out of control.\**

*When I think back, there was really a sense of discontent in the locker room...almost like guys were really unhappy...with things outside of playing...*

*Depression, man, it runs rampant through the NFL...*

Figure 10: Happy Verses Unhappy with Life Category

*There's a lot of miserable and unhappy young men playing in this league...funny how being rich, famous, and athletically superior don't fulfill the soul...*

*The biggest change I see is that guys are making more and more money and what is required of them is so much less. They think they are bigger than life and the athletes today think they are above the law...and when all the cars and women lose their flavor, misery sets in and the bigger the money and glory gets, the more miserable a lot of these guys are.*

\* indicates that the respondent from which the quote came was arrested after entering the NFL

In most cases, an individual who is unhappy, who feels that his or her life is meaningless, and exhibits deviant characteristics during economic crises seems easy to explain. But, it is more difficult to conceptualize why an increase in these states and behaviors during times of unusual economic prosperity can materialize. For many of these study participants, sudden prosperity was as disastrous as a sudden loss.

According to one player, "I never had nothin' my whole life, then I got drafted by the [NFL team], and I was, like, damn, now I'm rich...and I was doing something I'd wanted to do my whole...life." The problem was, as this player reflected further, "I had everything, just like that, I mean...everything...and ya'll all think that would be...great...I got bored, and when I was bored, I wasn't satisfied." He later told me that his personal life had become such a mess that he became bored with the one thing (football) that he had wanted to do his entire life. As he told me, "it got to the point where I even lost my love for the game, for...football." He asked, "How could I get bored with money, beautiful women, being famous, and especially football? How could I get bored with that shit? It's every man's dream. How...could that happen?" These

comments revealed to me an array of anomic characteristics. This athlete's anomic state later turned to deviance, as he was arrested on drug charges.

Thus, the field work revealed that, in many cases, the rapid acquisition of wealth by NFL players appeared to manifest itself in states of unhappiness, in some cases meaninglessness, and an array of deviant behaviors and activities. I would conclude that the data showed a pattern of association between the anomic characteristics of players' inability to cope with sudden economic prosperity and their unhappiness with life, as well as, their social deviance.

*Ideal-Typical Anomie.* During a phone interview that was arranged by N2, N4, as I will refer to him, told me some of the intimate details of his, almost, tragic life story. This account appeared to represent a common pattern of anomie among the athletes in the study group. It was, I thought, the ideal-typical story of an anomic individual.

N4 was raised by his grandmother in a public housing project located in a notoriously dangerous urban location. He managed to stay out of trouble (for the most part) while growing up by playing a variety of sports. In the early 1990s, he was chosen in the first round of the NFL draft. He signed a lucrative contract, making him one of the highest paid players at his position in NFL history. He later played for other NFL teams.

As he told me, he was determined to leave the poverty of his past behind. He said, "I wanted to be rich." In the midst of his newfound affluence, he told me he was "transformed into a larger than life figure." He was now more than a professional football player, he was a celebrity. He got everything he wanted with the snap of a finger. He said, "I loved the sex, sex with many women. There weren't too many that I

turned down. And the money. Briefly, my life was unbelievable. It was great.”

However, as he revealed, the more successful he became, the more he felt an unexplainable emptiness.

Along the road to fame, his dreams turned into nightmares. He told me that “the night we won [an important game], I was one of the first ones out of the locker room, probably the first one home and to bed, and I thought, this, this ain’t what I thought it would be. I’m not even very happy.” But still, he thought with more football accolades, more wealth, more fame, more women, he would find what he was looking for, that ultimate happiness. The problem was that this happiness, he said, “wasn’t there.” He felt empty inside. According to one of his close friends, N4’s “ego was beginning to kill him.” N4’s wild behavior and promiscuous sexual pursuits cost him his family, and as he said, “my will to continue [live].” He told me over and over that he had everything, yet he was unhappy with his life. “I couldn’t understand it,” he kept repeating. Despite his wealth, fame, and athletic success, he was contemplating suicide.

N4’s account held many aspects (sudden wealth, fame, unhappiness, and deviance) that were common themes for many of the players in the study group. This was a story that was all too common for many of the players that I interviewed. Moreover, it revealed that many NFL players had difficulty coping with sudden wealth and status and that many resort to deviant means, amidst their confusion and unhappiness, in order to try to deal with the pressures of affluence and celebrity thrown at them via their high profile profession.

*Social Ties/Support Theme.* The importance of common social ties or support structures such as marriage, family, education, religion, geographic location, and peer networks were common patterns in the interviews among the study participants. Many players revealed to me that those athletes integrated into, and regulated by, common social networks were more successful at coping with rapid change and affluence. Also, the qualitative data suggested that a number of the NFL players in the study group were subject to varied sets of social dynamics, socialization experiences, and family structures. In essence, some players had support while other did not. This seemed to contribute to either their happiness or unhappiness, and ultimately, their normative or deviant behavior. Thus, I would contend that these social ties/support factors surrounding “relationships” had a profound effect on the lives of many of these athletes, their behavioral patterns, and their ability to cope with social change; most importantly sudden wealth. Figure 11 illustrates the key categories and subcategories that emerged within this theme.

Figure 11: Social Ties Theme

<u>Social Ties, Commonalities in NFL Players' Language: "link, tie, connection, higher connection, attachment, glue, bind, bond, support system, friendship, relationship"</u>	
<u>Categories:</u>	<u>Sub-Categories:</u>
Social Support/Social Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marriage</li> <li>• Family structure</li> <li>• Educational background</li> <li>• Religion</li> <li>• Peer network</li> </ul>
Early Socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood family dynamics</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Urban/Rural location</li> <li>• Childhood friends</li> </ul>

From the interviews, social support/control factors emerged as important ties for the NFL players in the study. Among these factors were marriage and family, their level of education, religious beliefs, and friends or peer networks. It appeared from the qualitative data that these factors had a buffering effect on life change and stress for many study participants. As one player told me, "This kind of life [being a professional athlete] is hard enough with a very supportive family...if you take that away, it's almost impossible to keep your focus." In other words, without social support, many of these players coped with their newfound success through deviant means. But, when athletes experienced a stressful life event, such as entering the NFL (sudden wealth and status), social support (if available) was mobilized to mitigate the potentially pathological and/or



negative consequences of the stressful/new experience. Moreover, it appeared that, in many cases, social support and control had buffering effects on deviance. Figure 12 provides examples of these buffering qualities and illustrates further aspects of this theme.

Figure 12: Social Support/Social Control Category

<p><u>CATEGORY CODE: SS/SC</u></p> <p>Definition: The perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners (Lin 1986: 18)</p>	<p><u>Social Support Examples:</u></p> <p><i>You've got to have a network...you just don't know, you can't imagine, how important having a family or at least some true friends is...it gives you some limits...or at least makes you think twice...and, believe me, you need that...in this world [NFL] its too damn easy to get caught up in all kinds of shit that's gonna bring you down...</i></p> <p><i>I was raised in one of the roughest places in [a Midwestern city], people don't make it out.</i></p> <p><i>My Dad...he's in prison...I had no one to teach me...*</i></p>
<p><u>SUB-CATEGORIES:</u></p> <p><u>Marriage:</u> Provides regulation; acts as a buffering agent in the lives of NFL players.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Being married...kept me out of a lot of trouble.</i></li> <li>• <i>I owe a lot to my wife...she kept me on the straight and narrow.</i></li> <li>• <i>A lot of times it don't matter [being married] ...there's so many women...but I think it helps...those who are married seem to have more foundation.</i></li> <li>• <i>After we split up [wife]...all hell broke loose.*</i></li> </ul> <p><u>Family:</u> Key agent of socialization; provides regulation and acts as buffering agent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>If I only had a father...*</i></li> <li>• <i>I grew up with my mom and sister, but not having a dad, I had no role model...*</i></li> <li>• <i>My Mom she brought me up...but I didn't know my Dad.*</i></li> <li>• <i>My Dad, I never knew him.*</i></li> <li>• <i>If you're not rooted and grounded and have some sort of structure like a family, the NFL lifestyle will eventually consume you.</i></li> </ul>	

Figure 12: Social Support/Social Control Category

Educational Background: Support system in school comprised of teachers, coaches, counselors, access to curriculum; provides regulation and acts as buffering agent.

- *Didn't give a shit about school...I wanted to be rich... to play at the next level.\**
- *College...what a joke...I didn't care, should have though, could have given me a strong foundation.\**
- *Didn't think about the importance of it [school] at the time, I wish I had.*
- *I wish I'd finished school...the guys that finish, don't take the quick money and go to the draft...it seems like they so much better grounded...I know it would have helped me ...but I [messed] up...if you really look at it, they the ones that seem to stay out of trouble, and be more productive and successful in all aspects of life.\**
- *Man, I needed to stay in school...I wasn't ready for all the shit that gets thrown at you, hell I just wasn't mature enough to make that kind of money yet.\**
- *If I'd entered the draft early, well, let's just say it probably wouldn't have been good.*

Religion: Support and regulation from having a relationship with God or a higher power and a connection with those who hold the same beliefs.

- *The reason I got God...I needed something bigger than myself to grab a hold of...the pressures of playing pro football and being a celebrity and role model, they're great...and if you ain't got no family, no loving wife, or other things like that, its God...He's the only thing that's gonna save you.*
- *Having a relationship with Jesus...has saved my life.*
- *Jesus keeps me in check.\**
- *I got lucky...I was introduced to God.*
- *You need God to get through all the crazy stuff that being a pro football player throws at you.*

Figure 12: Social Support/Social Control Category

Religion (con't.):

- *Having a relationship with God is key in surviving the fast-paced lifestyle we live in.*
- *Jesus talk...makes me sick...He ain't there for me.\**
- *Man, that's garbage [religion]\**
- *I don't need no god...hell, I am one [although this was said jokingly, it seems to represent a common latent belief]\**

Peers: Support or lack of support from teammates and/or others within the NFL team organization; buffering agent.

- *When you know you're going to be playing against a guy next year, its hard to be good friends with him...how can you be so close to someone you're supposed to hate?*
- *We ain't all friends, we're too selfish...just out to get the next big contract.*
- *When you're trying to win [as a team]...and you have a guy like [a notable NFL player] just out for the money, its hard to like him...or even respect him.*
- *We're very hypocritical.*
- *A lot of just don't like each other.\**
- *Back in the day, man, most of us, we all got along...we were in it together...money, man, money is the root of all evil...now you see guys, they all burnt out and angry, for what though?*
- *Seems like everybody hangs in two groups, those who got God, and those who don't [there seem to be two distinct groups of peer-relationships, the] haves [and the] have-nots*

Figure 12: Social Support/Social Control Category

Peers (cont.):

- *Its interesting how some of these young men give thanks to God when they are in the end zone, but then you see them in the clubs with two, three, four women...also, when everything is going great in their careers, they o.k. and they don't want nothing to do with the haves but when something goes bad wrong, who they try to turn to [the haves]...the same ones they always talkin' bad about.*

\* indicates that the respondent from which the quote came was arrested after entering the NFL

According to the qualitative data, early socialization experiences and contexts appeared to be a significant theme in the lives of many of the study participants. Key factors within this category that were frequently mentioned revolved around family dynamics and structure, where they were from, socioeconomic status, and their childhood friends/peers. The data suggested that growing up in a fractured family or a single parent/guardian household, particularly one lacking a father figure, had a variety of detrimental effects on many of the NFL players in the study group. Alarmingly, many players reported having no connection to their biological father and a significant number also told me that their father was in prison. As one player told me, “so many of us never had a father figure, and just like in my case, mom worked 12 hours a day...I guess what I’m trying to say is this, that a lot of guys ain’t got no clear definition of right and wrong...they don’t know how to make good decisions, I mean, I didn’t, and it cost me.” This player later said that he had had drug problems his entire NFL career. “I couldn’t say no,” he revealed.

It was also apparent from the interviews that growing up in a densely populated area with many perceived social problems had a direct impact on many of their lives. According to one player, “when you go to sleep at night to sounds of gun shots right outside your bedroom, that stays with you, it affects you.” Further, peer relationships appeared to be important as well. Another player, elaborating on the impact of insufficient social support (learning the difference between right and wrong), revealed that “some players in the league are great athletes, but they come from backgrounds where their families are absent so they join gangs or they been around a lot of gang activity...[so] when this is your main support, let me say, good [life] choices don’t happen.” A number of players went on to talk about the detrimental role gangs played in their early socialization. The data indicated that most players did not view gangs as a social support network.

Thus, players who were unable to maintain (or did not have) social ties for various reasons appeared to have more difficulty staying out of trouble. Also, many players reported that a close friend or family member had been shot, and some of them had died. Again, for many of the players in this study group, this represented an early socialization that was marred by poverty, a dangerous living environment, and the loss of those intimates that, perhaps, provided social bonds.

On the other hand, players who were raised in a more traditional family setting in a rural location appeared to have fewer problems later in life. The key to this finding, I would argue, is that the support for those players falling in this category largely came from having a father figure and, in essence, two parents/guardians. According to the data, these players had intimate relationships with family and as one player said, “my

parents taught me the difference between right and wrong...I had to abide by certain rules, I had boundaries and if I challenged those, there were consequences.” Moreover, according to the interviews, those players that reported growing up in a more rural location typically mentioned that the town/city had a high level of religiosity. Many of the players told me that this was a key source of support for them. Some even mentioned the continued importance of the support they received from, not just their birth families, but from the churches they attended growing up. Figure 13 illustrates and elaborates on this theme.

Figure 13: Early Socialization Category

<p><u>CATEGORY CODE: ES</u></p> <p>Definition: Childhood process of learning how to act according to the rules, norms, and expectations of a society/culture (Merton 1957). Key agents in this process: family (structure, socioeconomic status, location where raised) and peers</p>	<p><u>Early Socialization Examples:</u></p> <p><i>I grew up in a neighborhood so full of crime it came with its own jail.*</i></p> <p><i>I grew up in [Southern state] with just my Mom in a public housing project.*</i></p> <p><i>We were so poor...when I was a kid...my Mom she did the best she could, but she was never around...I guess I raised myself.*</i></p> <p><i>My Mom and I lived in what I thought at the time was a normal family...hell, it was normal to be poor...but I look back, and think what a terrible existence and my Dad, hell, I never knew him, I always despised him.</i></p>
<p><u>SUB-CATEGORIES:</u></p> <p><u>Childhood Family Dynamics:</u> Household and community relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Let me tell you, I never had no relationship with my old man...all I know is I heard he was in the Pen...what a [mess] up.*</i></li> <li>• <i>I grew up in a place so dangerous you wouldn't believe...and the drugs in our neighborhood, I don't even know if you could even call it a neighborhood.</i></li> <li>• <i>I needed someone to help me through all the changes and problems...when I was growing up...didn't have a dad...*</i></li> <li>• <i>The apartment complex we lived in...just my grandma and me and two of my cousins...it was a rough place...we all had to stick together...</i></li> <li>• <i>Without my ma...you see, she made sure we at least had the necessities...she was our support...she taught us the difference between right and wrong.</i></li> </ul>	



Figure 13: Early Socialization Category

Childhood Family Dynamics (cont.):

- *Man, a lot of people just don't realize...they don't realize what its like...I didn't have no real family...I grew up with my aunt and five cousins...so when I got to the league, man, and I was lucky, I didn't have no family and no idea how to maintain what I got...I never had no discipline...\**
- *My brother was killed right in front of our apartment...shot...\**

Socioeconomic Status: Perceived social class of family and community of origin

- *We were so damn poor...and the apartments we lived in, my Mom, and me and my three sisters...it was so nasty, it was terrible.\**
- *There were times, times we didn't have enough money to buy things like milk...*
- *We lived in the poorest part of town...the south side...*
- *Son, we was dirt...poor*
- *I don't know how the hell we survived looking back, man...it was hard...especially since dad took off on mom just after I was born.\**

Urban/Rural Location: Grew up in an urban or rural geographic area

- *I was raised up in [a major metropolitan location] and let me tell you...all of us boys, well, it wasn't a place I'd want to raise my kids...\**
- *I grew up... [in a major metropolitan location]...we ran the...streets there...\**
- *Man, I lived with one of my aunts...in [a major metropolitan location]...\**
- *Well, I was born in [a major metropolitan location] and lived there most of my life...we left when my uncle sent me to [a prep school]...let me say...leaving that slum that I spent my childhood in probably saved me.*
- *I was raised by my mother and father in [a rural location]...I would say I had a pretty traditional childhood.*
- *I grew up in [a rural location]...I can't complain, I had everything I needed.*

Figure 13: Early Socialization Category

Childhood Friends: Relationships with friends/peers during childhood

- *My hood, man, that place was [messed] up...I saw five good friends get gunned down in broad daylight... and for what...it was just a [messed] up place.\**
- *I had friends...too many to count...they didn't make it [were killed before the completion of high school].*
- *A lot of people I know...almost everybody I know has been shot or stabbed at least once...\**
- *I had some good friends that I hung with...but, now, they weren't real friends...actually, I feel sorry for them now...the ones thats still alive.*
- *I had my posse...we was tight...man we got into some shit though...I probably wouldn't have been as [messed] up, but I was basically was raised in a group home...my mom was all [messed] up on crack and I ain't got no dad...\**
- *We all had good friends in school...it seemed like football gave me a group of guys to hang out with...really football has been a good rock [foundation] for me.*

\* indicates that the respondent from which the quote came was arrested after entering the NFL

*Elements of Social Support.* The qualitative findings from this theme were some the most important. The data revealed that the NFL players included in the study group displayed a range of anomic characteristics and engaged in a variety of deviant behaviors. In other words, the social conditions these athletes found themselves in were amenable to various states of anomie and conducive to deviance. Thus, the two constants for these players were that (1) they all experienced “sudden” newfound affluence and fame, and (2) that most were involved in an assortment of deviant behaviors, some illegal. The question then became, was anomie the only factor that was responsible for their

deviance? Or, did other factors such as social ties and support play a role in their deviance as well?

Based on the qualitative data, my argument is that many experienced anomie and engaged in deviant behavior because, first, they experienced a sudden change in wealth and status, and second, because they did not have adequate social ties and social support. The qualitative data has already revealed that those players who had social support were better able to cope with sudden life change, less likely to exhibit anomie characteristics, and less likely to engage in deviant behavior. And, those players who were anomic and deviant appeared to not have adequate social support.

However, I would contend that the majority of these athletes should have a wide array of social connections and support that are provided by various social groups. These groups “should” keep them grounded (non-anomic). Or, failing that, they should, at least, keep them in line by setting boundaries or regulating their behavior. But, according to the data, many of the networks available to them were either absent or they did not have a noticeable impact. The social networks, although already alluded to through the social ties theme, that I am referring to are families (birth families or guardians, wives or girlfriends), coaches and team management, other players, police, agents, fraternity (NFL), college and high school alma maters, and even other peers (posses).

*Families.* First, why don't families provide social support? Obviously, if they were absent they could not provide support. If parents or guardians were not available (single mother working all the time, or an aged grandmother or aunt), fathers were in prison, dead, or simply not around, if brothers were shot and killed, or if wives and

girlfriends were not an everyday part of these athletes' lives, then the players received little support from that network. But this aside, there were, perhaps, other reasons why families (that are not absent) did not provide the support that these athletes required in order to keep them grounded.

In many cases, these players were drafted or signed by teams and moved to locations that were far removed from their families. As with N1, he grew up in the East, where his wife lived as well, and attended college in the same region, only to be drafted by a team located on the West Coast. He revealed to me on numerous occasions how much stress that put on his family and their relationships. He said, "the change is difficult [going into the NFL], but it makes it that much tougher to be away from your family, I was even away from my wife a lot." He indicated that being away from his core support group made his transition to the NFL very difficult. Thus, moving to a distant location away from his main social support groups made it that much harder to cope with his new life.

Also, now with free agency, these athletes are traded around the country on a frequent and regular basis. Players do not stay with the same teams for their entire careers as they once did. For most of the players in the study group, once their initial contract was up, they signed with another team—whatever team was the highest bidder. Sociological research (Durkheim [1897] 1951; Sztompka 1993) has found that moving is a disruptive phenomena. There was dramatic change involved when these players were uprooted to new locations. And, in some cases, families and significant others did not move with the athletes. One player told me, "When I signed with [his fourth team] my wife told me she wasn't moving again." He later revealed that they eventually divorced.

I would argue that these conditions also contributed to many of the players' anomie and deviance.

Moreover, during the season, NFL players travel much of the time. Training camps are typically located away from the team's home city. Athletes live in hotels for half of the calendar year. Many players revealed to me that when they went on road trips, their partners typically did not travel with them, especially if they have children who cannot miss school or travel every weekend. As a result, many of these players are away from their core family support networks for a large portion of the year. Under these circumstances, it makes it difficult for families to stay in touch and provide proper support for these athletes, the kind of support that many of these players told me was so important for their success and happiness.

Furthermore, as one player divulged, "When the cat's away the mice will play." In other words, without their wives, family, or other intimates around, they were likely to engage in an array of deviant activities, usually promiscuous sex with different women. Another player told me, "I always knew this wasn't right, but when you away from home, on the road, and you have crazy opportunities to [have sex with] all kinds of women, its hard to stop yourself...you start to rationalize that its okay, hell, everybody's doing it, so you do it." He went on to say, "I know guys that are [having sex with] 4 or 5 different women, groupies, every road trip...some of them are single, but a lot of them is married."

On the other hand, another player said that one of his teammates, who rarely had any problems, who was very devoted to his wife and did not cheat, managed to cope well with all the change and the fast-paced life of a professional athlete. He revealed, "I'll tell you, the key to his success, I don't know if it is or not, but I think it is big...his mom and

dad, man, they go to every game, they go everywhere...he always has them around, I think it keeps him in line.” This appeared to be a rare scenario for the players in the study group. Most of the players interviewed talked about the importance of family as a support mechanism, yet indicated that their profession did not allow for their family support networks to help them on a day-to-day basis, despite the fact that they believed that family support acted as a buffer against anomic conditions and deviance.

*Coaches and Management.* Second, why don't coaches and management provide social support and play a role in preventing anomie? For coaches, it appeared that they simply did not have the time to deal with the multiple and diverse off field behaviors of their players. Coaches have enough pressure (leading a team worth well over 100 million dollars), without having to deal with off-field player problems. And, as one coach told me, “I can only keep them around the facility for so long during any given day...they have a lot of free time...I try to be there for them, but there is only so much of me and my staff to go around...and, most of these young men think they are invincible, they're going to do what they want.”

But many players viewed coaches as indifferent to them. As a result of free agency and major injuries, players come and go frequently so that coaches cannot, or choose not to, invest much personal time with them (unless the player is a superstar). In essence, coaches provided little social support for players in the study group.

The qualitative data revealed that while management provided “access” to counseling and various other help programs they did little to provide the necessary

support for many of the players in the study group. So why don't front office managers do more to protect their large investments?

Managers may be indifferent to their players because of the way most contracts are structured. Unlike some other professional sports, NFL contracts are not "guaranteed." In other words, management typically claims the right to void their financial commitments to players in professional contracts. For example, one player signed (approximately) a seven year \$50 million contract. But this player was only guaranteed \$3 million for the first year of that contract. After the first year, the rest of the money was contingent upon his performance and the organization's assessment of his performance. Ultimately, the contract was bottom heavy, meaning that the player was not likely to see the \$10 million bonus he was scheduled to receive in the third year of his contract. As the player told me, "They were going to cut me after my first two years." Essentially, the team planned to get two years out of the star athlete, at a relatively inexpensive salary, then release him. As one player told me, the mentality of the front office appeared to be, "there's always another guy that can be picked up that can play that position." These organizations do not have as much invested in the athletes as people think. As a result, management support networks were not as effective as their public relations staff would have us believe.

Based on my findings I would also argue that team owners and management make decisions based on profits, and sometimes they may not take into account all the factors that also have potential for profit. With proper support, many of these athletes would be happier and non-anomic, which might increase their value to the organization. Teams would have to spend less time dealing with the problems associated with player deviance.

If players were less anomic, they might achieve higher levels of on-field performance, which would enhance the organization's prospects of winning. This in turn could raise team profits, which would benefit the owners. It would also improve their public image, which has value insofar as it contributes to the sale of apparel and tickets.

*Other Players.* Third, why don't other players (teammates) provide the social bonds that prevent anomie? The typical image most fans have is that these athletes are all "high-fiving," "butt-slapping" good friends—that there is old-fashioned camaraderie among the players. I found that there is some camaraderie. But I also found that many of the players did not like each other very much, largely because these players compete ferociously with other team members (veterans, free agents, and new draft picks) and with players on opposing teams. This competitive situation together with the players' own competitive personalities, both nurtured by years of training, makes it difficult for players to help out other players. These athletes were very aware that careers in the NFL are short and that, as one player told me, "we're all replaceable."

Moreover, numerous players argued that "in today's NFL," the concept of "team" is virtually a myth. Players expressed more concern about their individual performances than they did about the team. As one player told me, "If we win, that's just a bonus." Another player commented that, "Nowadays you have to look out for #1 first...if I don't perform, I'll be cut. Now don't get me wrong, I want to win, but that is most guy's *second* goal." Intimate friendships among these highly antagonistic and competitive athletes were fairly rare for many of the players in the study group. As a result, other



players did not provide the kind of social support networks and conditions necessary that might help combat conditions of anomie and deviance.

*Police.* Fourth, why don't the police act as social regulators? A prominent theme of the qualitative data was that police repeatedly gave many players a "free pass." As one player told me, "A lot of cops are fans too, they look up to some of us...they don't want to bust their kid's hero." According to numerous players in the study group, there appeared to be a lot of bribery involved in police/player interactions. Many players said that when they "found [themselves] in a jam" police offered to "look the other way" in return for game tickets, autographed memorabilia, or even appearances at police social functions such as golf tournaments or banquets. One player revealed that, "I got pulled over last year, I was pretty [messed] up [intoxicated], I had a dime bag [marijuana] on me and an open container [alcoholic beverage]...The cop offered to 'assist' me [follow him home] to my townhouse if I would get him tickets to the game on Sunday." In this case, the police officer let this player go in exchange for game tickets. Numerous other players in the study group told similar stories.

I would argue that "free passes" by the police had detrimental effects on many of the players in the study group. As one player told me, "If you keep getting let-off when do stupid shit, when you break the law, you begin to think you're invincible...you think you can do whatever you want and there won't be any repercussions...I've got several teammates that, like I said, think they're invincible." Thus, it appeared from the qualitative data, that when there were no regulations or consequences for the athletes' deviance, those behaviors were likely to occur again. Without social support and a

greater sense of social control, players in the study group appeared to reveal anomic tendencies.

*Agents.* Fifth, why don't agents provide social support and protect their investment in their client? In conversations with many former players and also several agents during Super Bowl week, I found that many players' agents were scam artists. Many players know very little about legal contracts and money management. Agents enticed the athletes to sign with them by advancing the players money up-front, luxury cars, beachfront condominiums, and an array of lavish items, only to take huge portions of their salaries, bonuses, and advertisement earnings off the back end. During my interviews, I heard that some agents were taking as much as 60 percent of players' earnings, whereas the fee for agents in other industries, like publishing, are typically 10-15 percent.

Agents were well aware that many of their clients were ignorant about a vast array of financial affairs and other various situations that players encounter as a result of being wealthy and famous. One agent even told me that some of his clients did not even know how to do "simple things...[like] manage their money or pay bills." Many agents took advantage of their clients in this regard.

According to another agent, "we're not friends, our relationship is strictly business." So, when a players' earning power decreased substantially or the player was cut, injured, or retired, and the agent felt he could not profit enough off the athlete, the agent ended their relationship. In one unfortunate story, an agent told me about a former number one draft pick who was his client. This player initially signed a multi-million

dollar contract, of which the agent made 10 percent of the players' earnings along with an initial lump sum of several hundred thousand dollars that the agent had "loaned" the player before he was drafted. This player was injured in his first season and was then subsequently involved in some illegal activities. Even though the player had earned several million dollars, after paying his agent, he was bankrupt within two years.

The player, I was told, came from a very underprivileged background without any family support. Between the player's injuries and his legal issues, he was forced out of the league. Several months later, nearly penniless and back in his hometown, he was confronted by several men that wanted to collect on a gambling debt the player had incurred while he was still playing. Without anybody to turn to, the agent told me that the player contacted him and asked the agent to lend him money to pay off his gambling debt. According to the agent "[the player] called and said he needed fifty thousand dollars, he told me he was scared, scared about what these thugs would do to him if he couldn't come up with the money." The agent went on to say, "I felt bad for the guy, but I basically told him [too bad]...I wasn't giving him anything. He made his bed, now he's got to lay in it." I asked the agent, who had made nearly a million dollars off this athlete, why he was so unwilling to help. He replied, "This shit happens all the time with these guys, they blow all their money and end up in all kinds of [bad] situations...It wasn't my problem, he wasn't my client anymore."

Curiously, most of the players I interviewed did not express ill feelings toward their agents or financial advisors. But, the athletes did not view them as "friends" or as someone who provided social support. The exception to this was that a few players had family members or other friends acting as their agents. Instead they saw agents as people

who took care of their “day to day affairs.” While several players revealed that they initially had intimates (family or friends) as agents, they had ended their business and intimate relationship with them because their agents (friends) had taken advantage of them. The qualitative data indicated that agents, in most cases, provided little positive social support, and only had interest in “being there” for the players while they were financially productive clients. Moreover, many of these business relationships appeared to be exploitive and harmful to the players’ best interest.

*Fraternity (NFL).* Sixth, many of the players in the study group and others associated with the NFL often referred to the NFL as a fraternity. Typically, fraternities are seen as organizations that provide social bonds. So, why doesn’t the NFL fraternity provide social support for its players? Based on qualitative data, I would argue that the NFL is not a real fraternity. The NFL is a business that deals in athletes who are human capital. Not only is it a business, it is a big business that extends across the United States to NFL Europe. The organization is too large to provide very many “fraternal” relations.

Moreover, it is a “dog eat dog” industry, where individual player interests typically outweigh group interests. According to one player, “In my opinion, the only real camaraderie involves chasing women and getting [intoxicated].” That player later said that even this was a competition situation and that if a player got into trouble “there ain’t too many guys that’s gonna’ stick around to help.” In other words, the NFL was not a very fraternal environment for most of the players in the study group. Self-interest appeared to be the foremost concern for many of the players, and, in most cases, social support from the NFL “fraternity” was rare.

*Alma Mater.* Seventh, for many people, school (college and even high school) provides social ties that give people identity, a sense of purpose, and grounding. Typically, alumni have strong ties to their colleges and even give money back to their alma mater later in life. So, why don't colleges provide that kind of social bond for athletes? According to the qualitative data, many of the players thought that they were mistreated while in college. Some said they were treated like "slaves" in college. Many players noted that their college teams made a tremendous amount of money for their school, yet the schools did not compensate them for their athletic success. One player told me, "Sure, we're given the opportunity to go to school for free, if you're on scholarship, but, what you have to realize is that most of us, we don't care about the academic part...most of us don't ever finish [get their degree] anyway...we just want to make to the league (NFL)."

Many players also commented on the "deviance" of the universities and their athletic programs. One player told me that he and a lot of his teammates in college came from very modest backgrounds. He said, "I came to school with everything I owned in one duffel bag, we was poor." "And, then they gonna' tell us we can't work, we can't take money from no one...all this shit, but we making millions for that school," he said. He went on to tell me, "Then we the ones who gets into trouble when the booster takes us to eat somewhere or gives us [money]." He said that was "unfair" to have to take the blame for things that were set up by someone in the athletic department. He told me that the players were the "scape goats" for the athletic program if there were thought to be any NCAA violations. "I tell you, I truly believe we're used," he concluded.

On the other hand, many players said that they had close relationships with their coaches and teammates while in college. Some remarked that they still did. But the majority of the players told me that once they left college for the NFL, those relationships dissipated. There was, however, an interesting pattern regarding their college football programs and coaches. I noticed that many players mentioned how much structure and regulation there was in college versus when they got to the NFL. Several players mentioned that they were constantly kept “under surveillance” in college and were “kept busy,” which prevented them “from getting into too much trouble.” As one player said, “We were held accountable.” So, coaches in college were seen as providing some support for athletes while they were in college.

But many of the players in the study group told me that they were not in school long enough to acquire a fondness for their college. Most of the athletes said that they rarely went to class, and if they did, they did so only because their coaches checked on them. Some said that this surveillance was not a bad thing. More than half of the study group did not finish their degree. Athletes who stayed in college longer, particularly those who finished their degrees, expressed some sense of ties to their alma mater. But for those players who did not finish, social ties to college were weak.

*Peers (Posses).* Eighth, why don't other peers (posses) provide social support? It is not uncommon in the hip hop culture for young African American men to travel with peers or a “posse,” which have been noted to provide gang-like social bonds. However, according to the qualitative data, it appeared that the players did not view many of their peers as positively “supportive.” The consensus seemed to be that their peers eventually

became “hangers on,” not friends, and were interested only in what the players had to offer them financially. Many players said that their peers tried to take advantage of them by getting them to fund business ventures, some of them illegal (typically drugs and prostitution). This was particularly true of those players who said that they were unhappy with their life or “bored.” One player told me, “I was unhappy, I was bored.” He went on to tell me that while he was in this state of unhappiness, he started listening to peers that he had never listened to before. He said, “That was a big mistake...I was looking for something else, something that would excite me.” He added, “That usually leads to trouble.” This player was eventually arrested and charged with drug trafficking along with several members of what he called his “posse.”

I would argue that peers are key factors in these athletes’ growing sense of entitlement. Peers put players on a pedestal and give them more than they are due. According to one player, “Everyone tells us how great we are, and we start to believe it...We believe we are above it all.” Who are some of the ones singing their praises? The posse, the entourage, the moochers, and the hangers-on are the members of this false choir. Athletes, according to the data, were particularly vulnerable to peer pressure from this quarter. Some players told me that initially they believed that these various groups offered them support. Although, some recognized that these peers did not offer positive support and relationships. Some players said that they got caught up in their “praise.” Moreover, according to numerous players in the study group, the presence of their posse often brought the violence and deviance of the streets back to their lives. It appeared that this type of peer group did not provide the players in the study group with adequate social support. In fact, they often encouraged deviance.

Still, some players told me that their friends were a valuable support system. Typically, this type of peer group was not mentioned in the same way as a posse or hangers-on. Most players mentioned peers that had been friends of their families for long periods of time. These individuals were seen as uninterested in their wealth and fame. Some players described them as “good” people with “good intentions.” For players “lucky enough” to have peers that they could count on as a positive support system, these bonds appeared to act as a buffer against anomie and deviance.

Despite the overwhelming pattern of players who reported that they were not friends with, or did not get along with, their contemporaries, many told me that much of their peer support came from other athletes, usually NFL veterans, retired NFL players, or athletes from other professional sports leagues. I would argue that this was because the veteran players (who were on the verge of retirement), retired players, and other professional athletes did not pose any threat to the study participants livelihood. The players were not *competing* with these other athletes for their positions and jobs. One player told me, “No one can understand a football player like another football player.” One former player revealed that he had “dabbled in all kinds of bad shit.” He went on to tell me that he knew what it was like to go down the wrong road and that he felt like he could help the young players avoid similar circumstances. He also said that he was a true believer in an athlete to athlete approach and that this method could provide a positive support network. There were several current players from the study group who reinforced a similar approach, saying that it had, in fact, helped them “stay clean.”

So while many players who reported little to no support, or negative support relationships (posses and hangers-on), from their peers, some did have a small number of



potentially positive social support and bonds available through various *other* peer relationships. However, the qualitative data indicated that the majority of peer relationships (if present) did not provide adequate social support, which heightened the possibility of anomic states and deviance among the players in the study group.

*Religion as Social Support (Amidst Other Absent Support Groups and Institutions).* The qualitative data indicated that, in most cases, social ties/support, if available to the players, could help players cope with the stressful life change that occurred as a result of being drafted or signed by an NFL team. Support mechanisms helped to minimize anomie and deviance. But what about players who do not have social support for various reasons: no family, an absentee father or mother, no wife or children, no healthy peer relationships, and so on.

As formerly illustrated, the disruptive nature of rapid life change begs for an institution that provides social support. If social bonds are absent, where do these athletes find social support or role models? The one social institution that many players turned to for support was religion. Numerous players in the study group told me that God was their “anchor,” their “support.” With other support networks weak or unavailable, players appeared to be grasping for the one “universal” structure of support that seemed “always” available to them—religion. In the study group, there were many players with diminished social ties, unclear social roles and norms, who were confronted by unnatural wealth and fame that were searching for a social group or institution that could provide support. For players coming from humble backgrounds, who had no available family or other social ties, religion became that social institution. I would argue that there has been

a “Christianization” of the NFL. This movement appears to have produced a social context or environment that has been helpful for many players as they seek to cope with the “NFL lifestyle.”

*Ideal-Typical Social Ties/Support (And Lack There Of).* During a conversation over lunch at an NFL training camp, N5 as I will refer to him, whom I had met earlier that year, told me that he wanted to introduce me to a player that had been involved in a series of deviant and illegal activities. N5 was one of the few “well adjusted” and “grounded” players that was part of this study group. He was, as one of his teammates described him, “just a good guy.” N5 was aware of my research (via N2) and thought that his teammate, N6 as I will call him, would be willing to speak with me. At that time, N5 had been volunteering his services as a mentor to N6, trying to help him get his life and priorities back in order.

After some small talk, N5 assured N6 that I was okay and that what he told me would be kept confidential. I further verified to N6 that our conversation would not end up a headline in the following morning’s newspaper. At that point, N6 began to explain how his lack of social support (especially family) had contributed to his unhappiness with life, and how his unhappiness had contributed to his deviance.

I asked him what his experience had been thus far in the NFL and if playing professional football had been what he had always wanted to do. He responded, “I guess it was something I always wanted to do, but...why do guys want to play in the NFL? The money, the fame, the women, the jewelry, the cars, the houses.” He continued, “The problem is, there’s only so many cars you can buy. There are only so many women you

can [have sex with] a night. There's only so much all your money can buy. I mean really." He went on to tell me that he had acquired everything he had ever wanted, yet as he revealed, "I still wasn't happy."

He commented further, "A lot of players like to tell people and themselves that football isn't their life...and, when I talk about football, I'm not just talking about playing the game, I'm talking about the lifestyle...livin' fast, being reckless." He added, "Well they lying, that's not true...To a lot of guys, it is their life, it's everything. I realized it was my life. It shouldn't be your life but somehow it is." At this point, he started talking about the importance of having a social support network. As he explained, "you got to have some other interest, family, a wife, kids, even a good friend, something to turn to when things ain't working out on the field, and especially, when the temptations come knocking at your door. I didn't have any of that, I didn't have those kinds of interests." He continued, "When you allow yourself to get caught up in the lifestyle, and you ain't got no family, no nothing to go home to, nobody to say, hey, you better check yourself, your in trouble...That was me, I got caught."

Later that afternoon, N5 told me more about N6's background. N6 grew up in an urban ghetto and was raised by his mom. He never knew his father and his two brothers were killed during a drive-by shooting when he was a young boy. Two weeks into college, he was informed that his mom had died from cancer. So when N6 was drafted into the NFL, he did not have any "close" family to turn to for support. And, it appeared to me that his lack of social bonds via family contributed to his personal anomie and deviance.

Unfortunately, this story was representative of many of the players in the study group. Players' lack of social ties/support combined with their sudden wealth and fame appeared to produce anomic characteristics, which, in turn, created an environment conducive to deviance. However, when social support was present, it appeared to act as a buffer against anomie and deviance.

Opposite of N6, N5 was a veteran player in the league. He was the guy that most of the young players turned to for advice. And, from my observations, everybody appeared to genuinely like him (something that was rare). His background was very traditional in nature. He was raised in a small town by both parents. His family was a tight knit group, according to him. They were very religious, and N5 is too. He is married and credits his wife "with keeping [him] in line."

During my first interview with him, he told me what many others had said before, that the transition from college to the NFL was a very difficult one. He commented that, "Being recognized [famous] everywhere you go, dealing with the pressures of playing pro football, and dealing with the many temptations you face daily is very hard." But he went on to say, "When I get myself into a bind, and I'm not perfect, I rely on my family...They are always there for me, they don't judge me, they are very supportive."

N5 was one of the few in the study group who had social support, who was integrated into a social group such as family, and who was regulated by various institutions such as the family and religion. This kind of support made it possible for him to cope with the life change associated with entry into the NFL. Players like N5 appeared to be better able to avoid getting caught up in the "NFL lifestyle." They appeared to be happier, less anomic, and less likely to engage in destructive and deviant behaviors.

*NFL Team Owners and Front Office Interviews.* After the qualitative themes began to emerge, I felt that deeper inquiry into what front office officials thought about many of their players' deviant behaviors was warranted. After all, these were the individuals that ultimately controlled drafting and signing the athletes to play for their teams. They were also the individuals responsible for helping their players "stay on course."

Throughout my field work I often thought, why doesn't management do more to prevent the various negative behaviors, anomie and deviance? These players were, after all, huge investments for their organizations. Why would they invest so heavily in these athletes, yet do so little to control their actions? Why did they condone unlawful behavior and jeopardize their organization's success? I also wanted to know why they thought NFL players were frequently involved in deviant and criminal activities.

In order to investigate these questions, I conducted elite interviews with several team owners and front office officials. Throughout my conversations and interviews with these individuals, a core theme emerged: lack of social capital. According to one team owner, many players simply do not have the social capital necessary to make good decisions or stay out of trouble. Many players, he said, arrive at camp ill prepared to face the changes and challenges they were going to encounter.

Over and over, team managers told me unfortunate stories about their players' humble backgrounds and their deviant activities. "[Current NFL player] blew in excess of \$50 million over the past few years," one team official told me. How could this happen? He went on to explain this player's background to me. He told me that this was

an athlete with “little to no social skills, a kid really, who was handed a multi-million dollar contract.”

In another interview, a team owner told me that a current NFL player and his mother had lived out of a car throughout his years in high school. There were many more similar stories of ill-prepared young men with modest backgrounds and unfortunate early socialization experiences. Many of the players in the study group were these ill-fated young men. According to one front office manager, some players come into the NFL barely literate, while some were even illiterate. The team owners and managers, at times, feel at loss in how to equip players for life when they come into the NFL with very few social skills. While this is not true in every case, it is in many cases. I thought that many owners and management cared about their players, but did not have the time or expertise to spend on “re-socializing” these young men. The owners, when pushed on the issue, say it’s a business deal.

#### *Step Four: Qualitative Research Questions and Generalized Observations*

The elite interviews conducted with the two key informants, and the in-depth interviews with other players raised the following questions: First, why are so many NFL players involved in deviant and/or illegal activities? Second, given the consistent qualitative findings about being unhappy and inability to cope with wealth and change, does anomie (an attitudinal attribute) contribute to the deviant behavior? Third, does the presence of social ties such as family structure, early socialization experiences, level of education, presence of religious belief, and a network of friends act as a buffer against anomie and deviant behavior? These questions were central to the objectives of this

study. The questions express the “core” themes from the study group interviewed and observed.

As a result of the field work, which has included hours of interviews with the two key informants over a five-year period and 104 interviews with current and former NFL players, the following generalized observations can be made. Within the study group, a substantial number of players had prior experience with deviant and illegal behaviors and activities. Many reported problems with coping upon entering the NFL and sought to find personal fulfillment and happiness despite wealth and popular recognition. I think this indicates that some level of anomie is present in a number of these players’ lives. Yet many other players reported being satisfied and appear to have adjusted to the pressures of the NFL. Social ties appeared to play a key role in the level of happiness and overall life satisfaction for these players. In many of the interviews, players spoke about relationships that gave meaning to life. For many players who are dissatisfied with life in the NFL, social support structures appeared to be absent.

#### *Quantitative Variables and Hypotheses Derived from Theory and Qualitative Findings*

After a review of (1) the current literature (Benedict 1997; Benedict & Yaeger 1998; Blumstein & Benedict 1999), which documents the growing concern over the deviant and illegal acts among many NFL players, (2) the rich history of social disorganization theory (Park & Burgess 1921; Coser 1977; Turner 1974), the classic work of Durkheim’s ([1893] 1933; [1897] 1951) concept of anomie as a social reality, and (3) the qualitative findings from the field research, several social psychological attitudinal themes emerged.

*Law Abiding versus Law Breaking Players:* A number of players in the study group described themselves as having been arrested and broken the law since joining the NFL. But others did not. Given the exploratory nature of this study, what are the correlates for players, in the study group, who abide by the law versus those who do not? Because some players have been involved in law breaking behavior, it seems plausible to hypothesize that these players possess higher levels of anomie.

*Anomie:* Durkheim ([1897] 1951) and others have suggested that anomie is a social psychological attribute (Srole 1956). If anomie can be found to be higher in some NFL players, it is reasonable to hypothesize that players who possess higher levels of anomie have identifiable correlates that are different from the correlates of NFL players who possess lower to non-measurable levels of anomie.

*Happy with Life versus Unhappy with Life:* A number of players described themselves as being unhappy. During the interviews, several said they were searching for ways to become happy. If anomie is defined as a state of meaninglessness and life without a sense of regulation or control (Durkheim [1897] 1951; Srole 1956; Powell 1970; Marks 1974; Kornhauser 1978), it is plausible to hypothesize that the level of happiness is associated with anomie and select other correlates that relate to the players' level of happiness. I would hypothesize that higher levels of anomie are correlated with higher levels of unhappiness. Moreover, higher levels of unhappiness should be



associated more strongly with law breaking players as compared to players who have not broken the law in the study group.

*Wealth and Aspiration:* One clearly articulated theme during the field work was the sense of personal aspiration and the desire to be wealthy by the players in the study group. This desire for money and success indicates a tremendous change in lifestyle for most players. Given the sense of desire for wealth and desire to aspire, I would hypothesize that if stronger levels of wealth and aspiration are present then the higher the possibility of anomie to be present in these players in the study group.

*Social Ties/Support:* In the qualitative data, players spoke of their need for relationships that provide stability and meaning. These relationships ranged from discussion about relationships with God, to marriage, and to life in school. It would appear these relationships provide a sense of social ties and social support. Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that players, in the study group, who feel less supported through relationships possess higher levels of anomie. These players seem more likely to be unhappy and to be law breakers.

*Early Socialization:* Players often spoke about where they came from and the impact of family on their lives. I would hypothesize that players who possess a stronger sense of family support, and come from low-crime cities and neighborhoods, should possess lower levels of anomie, be happier, not be involved in law breaking activities, and possess a more moderate view about what it takes to be successful in life.

### *Hypotheses Synthesized*

Life in the NFL, as experienced by the study group, changed athletes' personal and professional lives. Many players described themselves as participating in deviant behaviors. A number of players admitted they had been arrested and broken the law. The study group spoke often of being happy or unhappy with their new life in the NFL. Players spoke often of the desire for wealth and fame, yet many admitted it came at a cost to their personal lives. A sense of meaningful social ties/support played a role for many players. The references to childhood memories lingered for many players. Hence, relationships and early socialization experiences likely played some role in players' ability to adapt to the fast-paced life of the NFL. Each of these factors may well have contributed in some manner to whether a player possesses some identifiable level of anomie. The presence and level of anomie may be an important factor in describing whether a player is living within the law, whether the player is happy or unhappy with life, whether the player feels he has an adequate social support system, how they related to others due, in part, to the influence of early socialization factors, and their sheer desire to aspire to and achieve wealth and success.

### *Quantitative Methodology*

The use of quantitative methods evolved as a result of the elite and specialized interviews with the two key informants. During the course of those interviews it became apparent that a systematic gathering of data could be achieved through a structured interview guide/questionnaire. The qualitative data gathered during the field work allowed for open-ended interviews that provided a breadth and, at times, a depth to the

data. One criticism (Babbie 1986; Sieber 1973) of this method of data collection can be the lack of comparability within the study group respondents. Therefore, the structured interview guide/questionnaire allowed for response to common questions and statements. Several different statistics were used to analyze these data. In each case, inference to the larger NFL population is not being made. Even with the use of several more powerful statistics, they are being used for descriptive purposes not inferential purposes. The study is exploratory and is intended to find “generalized trends” in the study group. The use of various statistics allows for more insight into these trends (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975).

*The Study Situation:* Quantitative data to assess anomie and deviance among 104 current and former NFL players were collected from 2001-2005. The study participants were located in Ohio, Kentucky, Kansas, Missouri, Texas, and Florida. This exploratory study is the result of elite and specialized interviews with two key informants, both former NFL players. The two key informants frequently expressed a desire to assess the outbreak of deviant acts committed by NFL players.

*Sample Selection:* In 2001, data collection was initiated using a non-probability sampling technique—a snowball sample (Babbie 1986; Berg 2001). Snowball samples are particularly useful in studying deviance, exploring sensitive topics, and access to hard to reach populations. According to Berg (2001), “The basic strategy of snowballing involves first identifying several people with relevant characteristics and interviewing [or surveying] them...These subjects are then asked for the names of other people who

possess the same attributes they do” (33). For this study, the key informants helped secure entrée to many of the participants as well as provide a segway to the participants.

Pre-determined random or other probability sampling formats were not possible due to the difficult nature of entrance into this group. Contacts were made through an intricate network of friendships of the two informants. Once a respondent agreed to participate in the study, a questionnaire was either self-administered or administered by the researcher. Data were collected via 73 self-administered questionnaires and 31 phone interviews in which the questionnaires were administered by the researcher. The respondents were provided ample opportunity to ask questions and make additional comments about the questionnaires, and their verbal responses were recorded. It should be noted that data were treated as one group for quantitative analyses (see detailed discussion in Endnote 2). Qualitative data suggested that there was little difference in types of responses (telephone versus in-person). This justified the bundling of data together.

*Instrument Construction:* A structured questionnaire (Appendix A) was used for data collection and was designed to be either self-administered or administered by the researcher. The questionnaire was explained to the respondent in detail and was then administered. If the respondent seemed hesitant or did not quite understand how to complete the questionnaire, the researcher carefully explained the answering procedures. The research techniques used to gather data included socio-demographic, attitudinal, and deviance-oriented data about the respondent and Likert-type scales and indices (Edwards

1957) designed to measure anomie, wealth/aspiration, social ties/support, and early socialization.

Confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent were a major priority of this research. Explanation was given that the research was focused on group attributes not just one person's responses to the questionnaire. This explanation helped the respondents feel more at ease during the data collection process. The research procedures were guided by the code of ethics of the ASA (American Sociological Association). Each player was notified of his right as a subject both verbally and on the questionnaire/interview guide. No names were used at any point during the study. All completed questionnaires/interview guides and interviews are coded by numbers to ensure anonymity. The research methods conformed to the IRB (Human Subjects Review) guidelines of Kansas State University and were approved by the IRB (Appendix B).

*Characteristics of the Sample:* The sample was composed of 45 (43%) current NFL players and 59 (57%) former or retired players. The mean age of the respondents was 30.10 and ranges from 22-39. There were 40 (38.5%) Caucasian respondents and 64 (61.5%) African-American respondents. The range for years played in the NFL was one to eleven, with 4.52 being the average number of years played. There were 50 (48.1%) players that reported being married and 54 (51.9%) not married, 37 (35.6%) reported having graduated from college while 67 (64.4%) did not graduate from college, 69 (66.3%) reported having a relationship with God/higher power while 35 (33.7%) did not

have a relationship with God/higher power, and 41 (39.4%) reported earning up to \$500,000 per year and 63 (60.6%) earning over \$500,001 per year.

In reviewing early socialization variables, 38 (36.5%) reported being raised in a two parent/guardian household and 66 (63.5%) said they were raised in a single parent/guardian household, 39 (37.5%) reported growing up in a rural location while 65 (62.5%) grew up in an urban location, and 42 (40.4%) reported being raised in a middle class or above family or household, while 62 (59.6%) said they were raised in a lower class or poor family or household.

When asked about their current life situation, 58 (55.8%) reported being happy and 46 (44.2%) unhappy, 26 (25%) reported having received some sort of counseling or rehabilitation, while 78 (75%) said they had not received counseling/rehabilitation, and 71 (68.3%) reported being law abiders (after entrance into the NFL), while 33 (31.7%) reported breaking the law. (The summary of the sample data is presented in Table 1).

Limitations to the sample (Babbie 1986; Berg 2001) need to be considered. Only those players who knew the two principle informants and agreed to participate in the study were contained in the analysis. This limitation must be considered in reviewing the analysis and findings. This is an exploratory analysis. Qualitative data was used to inform and guide aspects of the quantitative approach. Limitations do exist with the variables, but were supplemented and enhanced through the qualitative findings. It must be noted that generalizations should not be made about the entire population of the NFL. The findings only represent this non-random snowball sample.

Table 1: Summary Descriptive Statistics for the Study Group (N = 104)

Characteristic	Sample Data	Frequency
Age:	Mean Standard Deviation Range	30.10 4.028 22 to 39
Race:	Percent White Percent Black	40 64
Player Status:	Percent Current Percent Former/Retired	45 59
Years played in the NFL:	Mean Standard Deviation Range	4.52 2.014 1 to 11
Marital Status:	Percent Married Percent Not Married	50 54
Education:	Percent Graduated College Percent Not Graduated College	37 67
Income (After entering the NFL):	Percent Earning \$0-\$500,00 Percent Earning \$500,001 and above	41 63

Table 1 Continued: Summary Descriptive Statistics for the Study Group (N = 104)

Characteristic	Sample Data	Frequency
Family Structure:	Percent Raised in Two Parent/Guardian Home	36.5%
	Percent Raised in Single Parent/Guardian Home	63.5%
Location (First ten years of life):	Percent Raised in Rural Location	37.5%
	Percent Raised in Urban Location	62.5%
Social Class (Self reported):	Percent Raised Middle Class and Above	40.4%
	Percent Raised Lower Class/Poor	59.6%
Religion:	Percent that has Relationship with God/higher Power	66.3%
	Percent that does not have Relationship with God/higher Power	33.7%
Level of Happiness:	Percent Happy	55.8%
	Percent Unhappy	44.2%
Counseling/Rehabilitation:	Percent Receiving Counseling/Rehabilitation	25.0%
	Percent Not Receiving Counseling/Rehabilitation	75.0%
Criminal Activity:	Percent Law Abiders	68.3%
	Percent Law Breakers	31.7%



*Operationalization of Dependent Variables:* After identifying the themes in the qualitative findings and the application of anomie theory, three dependent variables were operationalized. First, in order to operationalize deviance, players were asked whether they have been involved in law breaking or law abiding behavior. Second, the theoretical construct of anomie was treated as a social psychological attribute and operationalized as a ten item scale. And, third, players reported either being happy or unhappy with life. This third variable was frequently mentioned during the qualitative interviews. It was included as a dependent variable because it represents behavioral characteristics that helped to describe how these players felt about their life situation and was theoretically related to the presence or absence of anomie.

*Law Abiders versus Law Breakers.* In Table 1, law abiders versus law breakers was operationalized as a dichotomous variable. It should be noted that “law abiders” referred to those who had not been arrested after joining the NFL and that “law breakers” referred to those who had been arrested after entering the NFL. The responses were weighted 0 for “law abiders” and 1 for “law breakers.” Approximately, one-third of the study group was self-reported law breakers with 33 players or 31.7 percent being law breakers and 71 players or 68.3 percent being law abiders. The literature on NFL players (Benedict 1997; Benedict & Yaeger 1998; Blumstein & Benedict 1999) suggested that approximately 20 percent were law breakers. This study group had a rate of law breakers higher than other sampled groups.

*Anomie.* The theoretical construct of anomie was operationalized as a ten item Likert-type scale (Edwards 1957). See Table 2 for the anomie scale. Items were coded 3 to 0, with a weight of 3 representing “strongly agree,” 2 representing “agree,” 1 “disagree,” and 0 “strongly disagree.” The scores of the ten items were summed and divided by ten to create a scale ranging from a low of 0, meaning low anomie, to a high of 3, meaning high anomie.

The first five items were from Srole’s (1956) anomia scale. The anomia scale has been widely used over the past fifty years and has been regarded by many as a reliable measure for assessing rapid change, malintegration, and meaninglessness in the lives of individuals (Abrahamson 1980; Clinard 1964; MacIver 1950; McClosky and Shaar 1965; Riesman, Glazer, and Denney 1956; Srole 1956; Bonjean, Hill & McLemore 1967; Powell 1970). The Srole scale was intended to measure the concepts of meaninglessness, unhappiness, and the degree the individual is integrated into a social group (Lee 1974).

Orru (1987) believed that “anomia expresses the malintegration or dysfunctional relation of individuals to their social worlds” (126). In other words, the individual with anomic characteristics will tend to be disconnected from: (1) the larger political norms of society; (2) the larger cultural norms of society; (3) the larger economic norms of society; (4) “internalized social norms and values;” and (5) the main socialization group (Srole 1956: 711).

The sixth item in the anomie scale is from the Neal and Seeman (1964) powerlessness scale. This item was included because it measures a sense of helplessness that is theoretically similar to aspects of Srole’s (1956) conceptualization of anomia.

Table 2: Ten-Item Attitude Anomie Scale and Weighting Values for Each Item (N=104)

Statement	Weighting Value	Possible Responses			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. In Spite of What people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse.	3	2	1	0	0
2. It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.	3	2	1	0	0
3. Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.	3	2	1	0	0
4. These days a person doesn't know who he can count on.	3	2	1	0	0
5. There's little use writing to public officials because they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man.	3	2	1	0	0
6. More and more I feel helpless in the face of what's happening in the world today.	3	2	1	0	0
7. There is too much drinking of alcoholic beverages today.	3	2	1	0	0
8. People should never smoke marijuana because it leads to a life of drugs.	3	2	1	0	0
9. Almost everyone finds leisure time more satisfying than work.	3	2	1	0	0
10. Today's sexual morality seems to be, "anything goes."	3	2	1	0	0
Items 1-5: Srole (1956)					
Item 6: Neal and Seeman (1964)					
Items 7-10: Abrahamson (1980)					

Other Neal and Seeman items were originally included, but were dropped due to theoretical and statistical incompatibility with anomia items.

The remaining four items were from the Abrahamson (1980) gratification scale. These items focus on approval or disapproval of contemporary patterns of indulgence and pleasure such as consumption of alcohol, drug use, leisure time, and sexual standards/values. These items center on the degree to which people accept or condemn “what they perceive as the styles that are in vogue” (Abrahamson 1980: 52). Theoretically, these items should be closely associated with behaviors that accompany malintegration, meaninglessness, and powerlessness (Powell 1970).

*Happy versus Unhappy with Life.* In Table 1, the degree of player happiness was reported and operationalized as a dichotomous variable. The responses were weighted 0 for “unhappy” players and 1 for “happy” players. Forty-six (44.2%) players or nearly one-half of the study group self-reported being unhappy with life. Fifty-eight players or 55.8% percent report being happy. A recent Gallup poll (Saad 2004) found that 4% of Americans were unhappy with their current life situation. Approximately 95% reported being happy. This contrasts sharply with the NFL players who composed the study group.

*Operationalization of Independent Variables:* The variables selected as independent variables in the study were: (1) wealth/aspiration, (2) social ties/support, (3) early socialization, (4) rehabilitation/counseling, (5) income after entering the NFL, (6) age, (7) race, and (8) years played in the NFL. These variables were selected because of

their representation of theoretical concepts often associated with anomie and deviance. These variables were derived from behavioral attributes frequently cited in many of the qualitative interviews. It should be noted that the constructs/indices emerged out of these qualitative data, possessed theoretical coherence, and adequate levels of statistical association (see detailed discussion in Endnote 3).

*Wealth/Aspiration.* Wealth/Aspiration was operationalized as a three item Likert-type index (Edwards 1957). See Table 3 for the wealth/attainment index. The index was constructed by assigning scores of 0, 1, 2, and 3 to the answers “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly disagree,” respectively, to each question. The scores of the three items were then summed and divided by three to create an index ranging from 0 to 3.

These three items were originally constructed and included in the Abrahamson (1980) attainment scale. This index focused on an individual’s desire to aspire and become wealthy. Moreover, these items centered on people’s commitment to strive for wealth and attainments and their perceptions of enjoying wealth and prosperity. In essence, this index emphasized wealth and attainment orientations.

*Social Ties/Support.* Social ties/support was operationalized as a three item index. See Table 4 for the social ties/support index. The index was constructed by assigning scores of 0 and 1 to the answers “no” and “yes,” respectively, to each question. The scores of the three items were then summed and divided by three to create an index ranging from 0 to 1.

This index focused on social ties and support systems of marriage, education, and religiosity; all of which were noted to have buffering qualities against anomie and deviance (Vaux 1988; Cullen 1994; Cullen & Wright 1997). From the qualitative data,

Table 3: Three-Item Attitude Index for Wealth-Aspiration and Weighting for Each Item (N=104)

Statement	Possible Responses			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	3	2	1	0
Weighting Value				
1. It is not natural for people to try hard to become wealthy.	3	2	1	0
2. It is natural for people to enjoy being wealthy.	3	2	1	0
3. I admire people who try to be the best at whatever they do.	3	2	1	0

Items 1-3: Abrahamson (1980)

Table 4: Three-Item Attitude Index for Social Ties/Support and Weighting for Each Item (N=104)

Statement	Possible Responses	
	Yes	No
	Weighting Value	
1. I have a personal relationship with God/Higher Power.	1	0
2. I am married.	1	0
3. I have graduated from college.	1	0



the relationships gained and maintained through marriage, education, and religiosity appeared to indicate the importance of social ties and support.

*Early Socialization.* Early socialization was operationalized as a two item index. See Table 5 for the early socialization index. The index was constructed by assigning scores of 0 and 1 to, first, “two parent/guardian household” and “single parent/guardian household,” respectively, and second, 0 and 1 to “rural” and “urban,” respectively, to each question. The scores of the two items were then summed and divided by two to create an index ranging from 0 to 1. Much of the literature (Bernburg 2002; Fischer 1973; Kanagy & Willits 1990; Killian & Grigg 1962; Lovell-Troy 1983; McClosky & Schaar 1965; Mestrovic 1985; Powell 1970; Simon & Gagnon 1976; Wirth 1938) and qualitative data indicated that family structure and geographic location were both important factors in one’s early socialization process.

*Counseling/Rehabilitation.* Counseling/rehabilitation was operationalized as a dichotomous variable. The responses were weighted 0 for “no” and 1 for “yes.” (see Table 1).

*Income (after entering the NFL).* Income was operationalized as a dichotomous variable. The responses were weighted 0 for “\$0-\$500,000” and 1 for “\$500,001 and above.” (see Table 1).

Table 5: Two-Item Attitude Index for Early Socialization and Weighting for Each Item (N=104)

Statement	Weighting Value	Possible Responses
1. I was raised by one or two parents.	1	Single Parent Two Parents
2. How would you describe where you lived for the first ten years of your life?	1	Urban Rural
	1	0

Table 6: Correlation Matrix\*, Standardized Item Alpha Reliability Coefficient\*\*, and Factor Analysis for Anomie Scale (N=104)

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10	Factor Loading
Item 1	1.00										0.626
Item 2	0.707	1.00									0.541
Item 3	0.693	0.611	1.00								0.732
Item 4	0.687	0.540	0.572	1.00							0.591
Item 5	0.612	0.580	0.423	0.539	1.00						0.520
Item 6	0.604	0.548	0.485	0.486	0.455	1.00					0.420
Item 7	0.688	0.619	0.656	0.690	0.548	0.543	1.00				0.702
Item 8	0.729	0.673	0.671	0.696	0.589	0.594	0.901	1.00			0.731
Item 9	0.625	0.536	0.661	0.512	0.523	0.480	0.616	0.625	1.00		0.738
Item 10	0.485	0.484	0.591	0.543	0.354	0.404	0.546	0.577	0.519	1.00	0.709
Standardized Item Alpha Reliability Coefficient = 0.933											
Eigenvalue = 11.16 Percent of Variance = 41.7											

\*All Correlations are significant at the 0.001 level.

\*\*Standardized Item Alpha is computed as:  $\alpha = k\bar{r} / 1 + (k - 1)\bar{r}$  where k equals the number of items in the scale and  $\bar{r}$  equals the average correlation between items.

Table 7: Correlation Matrix\*, Standardized Item Reliability Coefficient\*\*, and Factor Analysis for Wealth/Aspiration Index (N=104)

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Factor Loading
Item 1	1.00			0.597
Item 2	0.511	1.00		0.719
Item 3	0.323	0.590	1.00	0.750
Standardized Item Alpha Reliability Coefficient = 0.731				Eigenvalue = 1.78 Percent of Variance = 50.6

\*All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

\*\*Standardized Item Alpha is computed as:  $\alpha = k\bar{r} / 1 + (k - 1)\bar{r}$  ; where k equals the number of items in the index and  $\bar{r}$  equals the average correlation between items.

Table 8: Correlation Matrix\*, Standardized Item Reliability Coefficient\*\*, and Factor Analysis for Social Ties/Support Index (N=104)

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Factor Loading
Item 1	1.00			0.609
Item 2	0.531	1.00		0.392
Item 3	0.400	0.444	1.00	0.341
Standardized Item Alpha Reliability Coefficient = 0.718				Eigenvalue = 1.15 Percent of Variance = 60.1

\*All correlations are significant at the 0.001 level.

\*\*Standardized Item Alpha is computed as:  $\alpha = k\bar{r} / 1 + (k - 1)\bar{r}$  ; where k equals the number of items in the index and  $\bar{r}$  equals the average correlation between items.

Table 9: Correlation Matrix\*, Standardized Item Reliability Coefficient\*\*, and Factor Analysis for Early Socialization Index (N=104)

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Factor Loading
Item 1	1.00			0.609
Item 2	0.567	1.00		0.392
Standardized Item Alpha Reliability Coefficient = 0.724				Eigenvalue = 1.75
				Percent of Variance = 47.8

\*All correlations are significant at the 0.001 level.

\*\*Standardized Item Alpha is computed as:  $\alpha = k\bar{r} / 1 + (k - 1)\bar{r}$  ; where k equals the number of items in the index and  $\bar{r}$  equals the average correlation between items.

*Age.* Age was operationalized as age of the respondent at last birthdate. (see Table 1).

*Race.* Race was operationalized as a dichotomous variable. The responses were weighted 0 for “White” and 1 for “Black.” (see Table 1).

*Years Played in the NFL.* Years played in the NFL was operationalized by asking the respondent how many years he had played in the NFL. (see Table 1).

*Reliability Analysis of the Scales/Indices:* In order to construct composite measures of anomie, wealth/attainment, social ties/support, and early socialization a considerable number of items presumably relating to each attribute were subjected to a range of factor analyses, bivariate correlational analyses, and reliability analyses (Kim 1975; Nunnally 1978). Those items that exceedingly overlapped the four dimensions were systematically taken out until items relating to the four constructs were finally discernible from each other. The items and their loadings are presented in Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 respectively.

In conjunction with factor analysis, the reliability of the anomie scale and the wealth/aspiration, social ties/support, and early socialization indices were evaluated using the standardized item alpha (Nunnally 1978). The standardized item alpha measured the total scale reliability of multi-item additive scales/indices (Hull & Nie 1979). The purpose of the reliability measure was to check the internal consistency of the measurement instrument. Scale/Index reliability was measured between 0.0 and 1.0 as a

positive value. The higher the value, the greater the reliability of the measurement instrument.

The standardized item alpha for the anomie scale and three indices are as follows: anomie (0.9332), wealth/aspiration (0.7309), social ties/support (0.7175), and early socialization (0.7238). The intercorrelations among the scale/indices' items are presented in Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 respectively. Although the three indices had somewhat lower levels of multicollinearity than the anomie scale, a reliability coefficient of over 0.7 is still relatively high for social science research (Nunnally 1978). Since the reliability coefficients for the anomie scale and the three indices were relatively high, it was concluded that composite indices could be developed for the four variables.

*Analyses:* Multiple correlation, discriminant analysis, logistic regression, and step-wise regression analyses were used to assess relationships among the study variables (see Endnote 4). Each of these parametric statistical analyses were used because of the robust nature and strength of each statistic (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975; Nunnally 1978; Champion 1981). Although the sample did not allow for inferences to be drawn from the overall NFL population, the findings did pertain to this study group in particular. The more powerful statistical analyses, hence, provided a more comprehensive description of the study group being examined (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975; Nunnally 1978; Champion 1981).

In order to use parametric analyses, the assumption was made that Likert-type scale/index scores met the requirements of ordered-metric measures (Labovitz 1967, 1970; Ableson & Tukey 1970; Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975; Siegal &



Castellan 1988; Hill & Lewicki 2006). According to Labovitz (1970), “Empirical evidence supports the treatment of ordinal variables *as if* they conform to interval scales. Although some small error may accompany the treatment of ordinal variables as interval, this is offset by the use of more powerful, more sensitive, better developed, and more clearly interpretable statistics with known sampling error” (515). In essence, it has been demonstrated that ordered-metric scales can be meaningfully analyzed by the use of parametric statistics (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975; Labovitz 1970).

Multiple correlation was used to test the hypotheses and to determine the direction of the relationships between independent variables and the three dependent variables. Discriminant analyses (Klecka 1975; MacLachlan 1992; Press & Wilson 1978) were used in order to distinguish between two or more groups of cases. The objective of this type of analysis was to weight and linearly combine the discriminating variables in such a way that the groups are forced to be statistically distinct. In essence, the goal of discriminant analysis was “to be able to ‘discriminate’ between the groups in the sense of being able to tell them apart” (Klecka 1975: 435). It should be noted that, theoretically, the assumption of discriminant analysis is that the discriminating variables have a multivariate normal distribution and equal variance-covariance matrices within each group. However, according to Klecka (1975), “in practice, the technique is very robust and these assumptions need not be strongly adhered to” (435). Additionally, discriminant analysis can be used with a nominal level dependent variable (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975). Many would claim than even a dichotomous variable is actually an interval level measure (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975).

Logistic regression analysis was used to verify the findings of each discriminant analysis (Menditto, Linhorst, Coleman & Beck 2006). Logistic regression is especially appropriate when the dependent variable is dichotomous in nature (Morgan & Teachman 1988). In assessing the covariates of law abiders versus law breakers and in assessing the covariates of happy versus unhappy, logistic regression was an appropriate statistic when interpreted along with the findings from discriminant analysis (Press & Wilson 1978).

Multiple regression analysis was utilized in examining the covariates of the anomie scale. In addition, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relative explanatory power of the independent variables when all variables were considered at the same time. In essence, multiple regression allows more than one independent variable to have an influence on the dependent variable (George & Mallery 2003).

Multiple correlation, discriminant, logistic regression, and multiple regression statistics were chosen to examine the relationships among the variables of law abiders versus law breakers, anomie, happy versus unhappy with life, wealth/aspiration, social ties/support, early socialization, rehabilitation/counseling, income after entering the NFL, age, race, and years played in the NFL.

## Chapter Four

### QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Before being subjected to multivariate analyses, the data were examined using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the central tendencies, frequency, and range patterns within the variables. Descriptive data for the attitude scales/indices are presented followed by the correlation, discriminant, logistic regression, and multiple regression analyses.

#### *Response to the Attitude Items*

The descriptive data for the anomie scale are presented in Table 10. The data basically reveal that many of the study participants held slightly anomic perceptions (perceptions that would appear to represent anomic characteristics and behaviors for this study group) toward life. Anomie scores are interpreted as follows: (a) scores of 0-1.59 represent a low level of anomie, (b) scores of 1.6-1.99 represent a moderate level of anomie, and (c) scores of 2.00-3.00 represent a high level of anomie.

On the first item, the mean score was 1.58 which indicated that on average a low to moderate level of study participants perceived the situation of the average person as getting worse not better. The second item had a mean of 1.53 revealing that on average a low to moderate level of study participants perceived the future to be bleak. The third item had a mean of 1.83, which revealed that, on average, a moderate level of respondents' perceptions were of "living for today." The fourth item also had a mean of 1.83, which indicated that on average a moderate level of study participants perceived

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Response to the Anomie Scale (N=104)

Statement	Weighting Value	Possible Responses					Mean	S.D.
		Strongly Agree 3	Agree 2	Disagree 1	Strongly Disagree 0			
1. In Spite of What people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse.		12.5 (13)	43.3 (45)	33.7 (35)	10.6 (11)	1.58	.844	
2. It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.		7.7 (8)	44.2 (46)	44.3 (43)	6.7 (7)	1.53	.737	
3. Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.		21.2 (22)	48.1 (50)	23.1 (24)	7.7 (8)	1.83	.853	
4. These days a person doesn't know who he can count on.		19.2 (20)	49.0 (51)	26.9 (28)	4.8 (5)	1.83	.794	
5. There's little use writing to public officials because they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man.		3.8 (4)	69.2 (72)	24.0 (25)	2.9 (3)	1.74	.574	
6. More and more I feel helpless in the face of what's happening in the world today.		7.7 (8)	30.8 (32)	54.8 (57)	6.7 (7)	1.39	.730	
7. There is too much drinking of alcoholic beverages today.		14.4 (15)	36.5 (38)	37.5 (39)	11.5 (12)	1.54	.880	
8. People should never smoke marijuana because it leads to a life of drugs.		12.5 (13)	33.7 (35)	27.9 (29)	26.0 (27)	1.33	.999	
9. Almost everyone finds leisure time more satisfying than work.		17.3 (18)	52.9 (55)	23.1 (24)	6.7 (7)	1.81	.801	
10. Today's sexual morality seems to be, "anything goes."		57.7 (60)	32.7 (34)	9.6 (10)	0.0 (0)	2.48	.666	

Items 1-5: Srole (1956)  
Item 6: Neal and Seeman (1964)  
Items 7-10: Abrahamson (1980)

that people do not have anyone they can count on. The fifth item had a mean of 1.74 which represented that a moderate level of respondents perceived that public officials are not interested in the problems of the average person. The sixth item had a mean score of 1.39, which indicated that on average study participants reported a low level of feeling helpless. The seventh item had a mean score of 1.54, which indicated that on average a moderate level of players in the study group perceived that people drink too much alcohol. The eighth item had a mean score of 1.33, which indicated that on average a low level of study participants perceived that people should not smoke marijuana. The ninth item had a mean score of 1.81, which revealed that on average a moderate level of respondents perceived that people typically enjoy leisure time more than work. And lastly, the tenth item had a mean score of 2.48, which indicated that on average a high level of NFL players in the study group perceived today's sexual morality as "anything goes."

The majority of items demonstrated that many of the NFL players in the study group held some degree of anomic perceptions, as six of the ten items fell in the moderate to high range of anomie, and two other items fell in the low/moderate range. The highest mean score that stands out, which is supported by the qualitative data, is the perception that traditional sexual behavior or morality is a thing of the past. Of the study group, 90 of 104 agreed that sexual morality nowadays appears to be "anything goes." Promiscuous or alternative sexual behavior appeared to be the norm for a high number of respondents. There were three other items that revealed relatively high mean scores: Items 3, 4, and 9. Item three may represent the anomic characteristic of instant gratification and not worrying about the future consequences of one's actions, as this was

a consistent qualitative finding as well. Item four potentially indicated another anomic characteristic and qualitative finding; that during times of change “quality” relationships are important but, for many in this study group, rare. And item nine appeared to reveal that many of the study participants found leisure time more important than work. This possibly helps to explain the mean score of item eight (the drug use item), as over half of the study group reported that they disagreed that people should never smoke marijuana. This conclusion is drawn in conjunction with the qualitative findings that revealed that a number of players in the study group reported drug use as a leisure activity, an activity that is typically viewed as outside of normative bounds and could be considered on some occasions as anomic.

The overall mean for the items of the anomie scale for the 104 current and former NFL players is 1.71. This mean represents an overall moderate level of anomie among the study participants. There were 43 players who fell in the low anomie category, 14 who are located in the moderate anomie category, and 47 study participants are interpreted to have high levels of anomie. This is consistent with the interview findings in the qualitative data.

The descriptive data for the wealth/aspiration index are presented in Table 11. The data appear to demonstrate that the perception of the importance of wealth and aspiration is a significant factor in many of the study participants’ lives. Wealth/aspiration scores are interpreted as follows: (a) scores of 0-1.59 represent low perceived importance of wealth/aspiration, (b) scores of 1.6-1.99 represent a moderate level of perceived importance of wealth/aspiration, and (c) scores of 2.00-3.00 represent a high level of perceived importance of wealth/aspiration.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Response to the Wealth/Aspiration Index (N=104)

Statement	Weighting Value	Possible Responses					Mean	S.D.
		Strongly Agree 3	Agree 2	Disagree 1	Strongly Disagree 0			
1. It is not natural for people to try hard to become wealthy.		17.3 (18)	58.7 (61)	22.1 (23)	1.9 (2)	1.91	.684	
2. It is natural for people to enjoy being wealthy.		26.0 (27)	53.8 (56)	20.2 (20)	0 (0)	2.06	.680	
3. I admire people who try to be the best at whatever they do.		59.3 (62)	36.5 (38)	3.8 (4)	0 (0)	2.56	.572	
		Standardized Item Alpha For Index Reliability = 0.731		Mean Item Score = 2.08		S.D. = 0.547		

The data are presented as percentages with frequencies contained with parentheses. The percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

Abrahamson (1980)

On the first item, the mean score was 1.91, which indicates that on average a moderate level of respondents perceived that it is not natural for people to try hard to become wealthy. The second item had a mean of 2.06, revealing that on average a high level of study participants perceived that it is natural for people to enjoy being wealthy. And the third item had a mean of 2.56, indicating that on average a high level of players in the study group had perceived admiration for people who try to be the best at whatever they do.

The data appeared to support the theory and the qualitative findings surrounding the importance of wealth discussed in earlier chapters. The desire to “accumulate wealth and to aspire” reveals a significant change in many of these athletes’ lifestyles, as many are instant millionaires after signing NFL contracts. Theoretically, this is consistent with Durkheim’s ([1897] 1951) anomie of affluence thesis. According to Durkheim ([1897] 1951), the more one has, the more one aspires to, especially during times of rapid social change and anomic conditions.

The overall item mean of the wealth/attainment index for the 104 current and former NFL players was 2.08. This mean represents an overall high level of aspiration for wealth. There were 22 players who fell in the low wealth/aspiration category, 12 who are located in the moderate wealth/aspiration category, and 70 respondents who had high levels of aspiration for wealth. Again, this is consistent with qualitative data.

The descriptive data for the social ties/support index are presented in Table 12. For the first item, 69 (66.3%), or approximately two-thirds of the study participants, reported having a relationship with God/higher power, while 35 (33.7%) reported not having a relationship with God/higher power. The second item revealed that the



Table 12: Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the Response to the Social Ties/Support Item (N=104)

Statement	Possible Responses				Mean	S.D.
	Weighting Value	Yes 1	No 0			
1. I have a personal relationship with God/Higher Power.		66.3 (69)	33.7 (35)		.663	.474
2. I am married.		48.1 (50)	51.9 (54)		.48	.508
3. I have graduated from college.		35.6 (37)	64.4 (67)		.36	.481
Standardized item Alpha for Index Reliability = 0.717      Mean Item = 0.5      S.D. = 0.392						

The data are presented as percentages with frequencies contained in parentheses. The percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

respondents' rate of marriage was nearly the same, as 50 (48.1%) or almost half reported being married. As for the other study participants, 54 (51.9%) reported not being married. The third item disclosed that 67 (64.4%) or nearly two-thirds of the NFL players in the study group had not completed college, while 37 (35.6%) reported having finished college.

The overall item mean of the social ties/support index for the 104 current and former NFL players was 0.50. This mean represents, arguably, a fairly moderate level of social ties/support among the study participants. In essence, approximately half of the study group could be considered to have adequate social ties/support. This is consistent with the qualitative data. Also consistent with the qualitative findings, and with Durkheim's theory, is that those who lack the buffering qualities of social ties/support agents such as religion, marriage, and education are typically more likely to exhibit anomic characteristics.

The descriptive data for the early socialization index are presented in Table 13. In terms of the first item, approximately two-thirds or 66 (63.5%) of the study participants reported being raised in a single parent/guardian household, while 38 (36.5%) reported growing up in a more traditional dual parent/guardian household. For the second item, 65 (62.5%) or nearly two-thirds of the respondents conveyed living in an urban locality for the first ten years of life. On the other hand, 39 (37.5%) reported that they had lived in a rural location for the first ten years of life.

The overall item mean of the early socialization index for the 104 current and former NFL players was 0.63. This mean suggests that a fairly low level of study participants were raised in a traditional environment. In essence, approximately two-

thirds of the study group could be considered to have received a nontraditional early socialization. This is consistent with the qualitative findings. Another consistency is that those who grew up in a nontraditional manner appear more likely to experience anomic states.

Table 13: Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Response to the Early Socialization Index (N=104)

Statement	Possible Responses			Mean	S.D.
	Weighting Value	1	0		
1. I was raised by one or two parents.		<u>Single</u>	<u>Two</u>	.634	.483
		63.5 (66)	36.5 (38)		
2. How would you describe where you lived for the first ten years of your life?		<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>	.625	.486
		62.5 (65)	37.5 (39)		

Standardized item Alpha for Index Reliability = 0.723      Mean Item = 0.63      S.D. = 0.428

The data are presented as percentages with frequencies contained in parentheses. The percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

Because there was variation in the study participants' attitudes and responses to criminal activity, anomie, and level of happiness, examination of possible explanatory variables and hypothesis testing is warranted. Hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple correlation analysis and the relative explanatory power of the variables was determined by the use of discriminant analysis, logistic regression, and step-wise regression analyses.

### *Multiple Correlation Analysis*

Pearson product moment correlations were calculated for all combinations of variables included in the study and the hypotheses derived from the qualitative data and theory were tested using these coefficients. These data are presented in Table 14. The level of significance chosen for hypothesis testing was the 0.01 alpha level. The results of the correlation analysis demonstrate that eight of ten independent variables were significantly correlated with the law abiders/breakers variable at the 0.01 level. The eight variables shown to be significantly related are: anomie, level of happiness, social ties/support, early socialization, counseling/rehabilitation, race, age, and wealth/aspiration. Each of these variables except for one (wealth/aspiration) shown to be significantly related with the law abiders/breakers variable were correlated in the hypothesized direction. This negative relationship between law abiders/breakers and wealth/aspiration could be interpreted, as those arrested after entrance into the NFL, as being more likely to have less futuristic wealth and aspiration orientations rather than, as originally conceived, simply a great desire for wealth and to aspire (see discussion of anomie scale below for further interpretation).

Table 14: Correlation Matrix for Law Breakers Verses Law Abiders, Level of Happiness, and Anomie Scale for Former and Current NFL Players (N=104)

	Law Abiders/ Breakers	Anomie Scale	Level of Happiness	Social Ties/ Support	Early Soc	Income After NFL	Yrs Played	Counseling /Rehab	Race	Age	Wealth/ Aspiration
Law Abiders/ Breakers	1.00										
Anomie Scale	0.50	1.00									
Level of Happiness	-0.43	-0.64	1.00								
Social Ties/Support	-0.50	-0.71	0.54	1.00							
Early Soc	0.42	0.64	-0.62	-0.55	1.00						
Income After NFL	0.17*	0.53	-0.40	-0.40	0.42	1.00					
Yrs Played	0.01*	0.00*	0.00*	0.02*	-0.02*	-0.15*	1.00				
Counseling/ Rehab	0.51	0.39	-0.51	-0.40	0.40	0.05*	0.04*	1.00			
Race	0.28	0.40	-0.34	-0.40	0.46	0.13*	-0.04*	0.22	1.00		
Age	-0.45	-0.54	0.38	0.53	-0.25	-0.47	0.18*	-0.20	-0.27	1.00	
Wealth/Aspiration	-0.42	-0.65	0.35	0.51	-0.38	-0.38	-0.02*	-0.22	-0.23	0.51	1.00

\*Not significant at the 0.01 level.

Income after entering the NFL and years played in the NFL were found to have low correlations with the law abiders/breakers variable. The strongest bivariate relationship was between the counseling/rehabilitation variable and the law abiders/breakers variable ( $r = 0.51$ ). It also should be noted that the two other variables with substantial correlations to law abiders/breakers were anomie ( $r = 0.50$ ) and social ties/support ( $r = -0.50$ ).

Nine of the ten independent variables were shown to be significantly correlated with the anomie scale at the 0.01 level. These data are also presented in Table 14. The only independent variable not shown to be significantly related to the anomie scale was years played in the NFL. All but one (wealth/aspiration) of the other independent variables were correlated with the anomie scale in the hypothesized direction. This requires additional interpretation. Originally it was thought that anomie and the study participants' desire for wealth and to aspire would be positively related. But, it could be concluded that this index stresses prescriptive rather than proscriptive (gratification) norms, or in other words, a more futuristic orientation. In essence, this index could be described as emphasizing more traditional attainment orientations; the opposite of what one may expect from an anomic individual who constantly seeks various forms of instant gratification.

Law breakers/abiders ( $r = 0.50$ ), level of happiness ( $r = -0.64$ ), social ties/support ( $r = -0.71$ ), early socialization ( $r = 0.64$ ), income after entering the NFL ( $r = 0.53$ ), age ( $r = -0.54$ ), and wealth/aspiration ( $r = -0.65$ ) displayed moderately strong bivariate relationships to the anomie scale. The magnitude of the correlation coefficients for the

anomie scale and the variables of years played in the NFL ( $r = 0.00$ ), counseling/rehabilitation ( $r = 0.39$ ), and race ( $r = 0.40$ ) were relatively low.

Also, nine of the ten independent variables were shown to be significantly related with the level of happiness variable at the 0.01 level. These data are also portrayed in Table 14. The only independent variable that appears to not be significantly correlated to the level of happiness variable was years played in the NFL. All but one (wealth/aspiration) of the other independent variables were correlated with the level of happiness variable in the hypothesized direction. As with the anomie to wealth/aspiration relationship, this negative correlation could be interpreted similarly.

The most substantial bivariate relationship was between anomie and the level of happiness variable ( $r = -0.64$ ). Two other correlations interpreted as moderately strong that also stand out are social ties/support and level of happiness ( $r = 0.54$ ) and counseling/rehabilitation to level of happiness ( $r = -0.51$ ).

In summary, the results of the multiple correlation findings for the law abiders/breakers variable reveal that NFL players in the study group that have been arrested after entrance into the NFL: (1) are likely to exhibit anomic characteristics, (2) are likely to be unhappy, (3) are likely to have few social ties or support networks, (4) are likely to have had a nontraditional early socialization, (5) are likely to have received counseling/rehabilitation, (6) are likely to be younger, (7) are likely to be African-American, and (8) are likely to have less futuristic orientations toward wealth and aspiration. The variables of income after entering the NFL and years played in the NFL were shown not to be significantly related to the law abiders/breakers variable.



The correlational analysis for the anomie scale reveal that those who exhibit anomic characteristics: (1) are likely to have been arrested, (2) are likely to be unhappy, (3) are likely to have inadequate social ties/support, (4) are likely to come from a nontraditional early socialization, (5) are likely to have a higher income, (6) are likely to have received counseling or rehabilitation, (7) are likely to be African-American, (8) are likely to be younger, and (9) are likely to have less futuristic orientations toward wealth/aspiration. Years played in the NFL was not significantly related to the anomie scale.

For the level of happiness variable, the correlational analysis shows that those who are unhappy with life: (1) are likely to have been arrested, (2) are likely to be anomic, (3) are likely to have few social ties or support systems, (4) are likely to come from nontraditional early socialization backgrounds, (5) are likely have a higher income, (6) are likely to have received counseling/rehabilitation, (7) are likely to be African-American, (8) are likely to be younger, and (9) are likely to have negligible futuristic orientations toward wealth/aspiration. Years played in the NFL was not significantly correlated to the level of happiness variable.

#### *Discriminant Analysis for Law Abiding Versus Law Breaking Players*

The data in this study were analyzed using discriminant analysis in order to differentiate between law abiders and law breakers. Discriminant analysis is recognized for the statistical ability to classify by differentiating variables (Klecka 1975). These data are presented in Table 15. In order to differentiate between law abiders and law breakers, the discriminant calculation was performed. The larger the coefficient, the larger the

Table 15: Logistic Regression and Discriminant Analysis for Law Abiding Versus Law Breaking Players After Their Entrance Into the NFL (N=104)

<u>Best Model Logistic Regression: Three Steps</u>							
Step	Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	D.F.	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
1	Counseling/Rehab	-2.32	.650	12.837	1	.001	.223
2	Age	-.263	.103	6.474	1	.011	.362
3	Anomie Scale	1.285	.641	4.020	1	.045	.390
	Constant	6.055	3.768	2.583	1	.108	
Chi Square for Model = 51.35				D.F. = 3	Sig. = .001		

<u>Best Model Discriminant Analysis: Three Steps</u>					
Step	Variables	Standardized Canonical Discriminant Coefficient	Wilks Lamda	F	Sig.
1	Counseling/Rehab	.652	.737	36.40	.001
2	Age	-.457	.614	31.72	.001
3	Anomie Scale	.388	.583	23.79	.001
Eigenvalue = 0.71		Canonical Correlation = .645			
Chi Square = 54.15					
Sig. = .001					

<u>Variables Entered Into the Analyses:</u>	
Anomie Scale	Level of Happiness
Social Ties/Support Index	Counseling/Rehabilitation
Early Socialization Index	Race
Income	Age
Yrs Played in the NFL	Wealth/Aspiration Index

value of that factor in discriminating between the two groups. For this reason, the size of the coefficient is the primary concern, not whether it is positive or negative.

As shown in Table 15, counseling/rehabilitation, age, and anomie are the three factors that most differentiate law abiders from law breakers. Social ties/support, early socialization, wealth/attainment, income, years played in the NFL, level of happiness, and race were relatively non-differentiated factors. In the discriminant calculation the canonical correlation was 0.645, eigenvalue was 0.71, and the chi-square was 54.1 at the 0.001 significance level. In essence, players from the study group appear to have a greater probability of being a law breaker if they have the following characteristics: (1) they have received counseling or rehabilitation services, (2) they are younger, and (3) they are anomic.

#### *Logistic Regression Analysis for Law Abiding Versus Law Breaking Players*

The data in this study were also analyzed using logistic regression in order to verify findings from the discriminant analysis. This was deemed important due to empirical findings that discriminant analysis has been “found to be generally inferior, although not always by substantial amounts” (Press & Wilson 1978: 699). In logistic regression, a predictive equation is developed that is formulated to use the best combination of predictors rather than considering just one factor at a time. The logistic regression findings for law abiders/breakers are presented in Table 15.

Logistic regression analysis was performed using a stepwise selection method. Of the 104 current and former NFL players in the study group, 33 were arrested after entering the NFL. The logistic regression analysis for this group resulted in the

development of an equation in which three variables made significant contributions to predictive power: (1) counseling/rehabilitation, (2) age, and (3) anomie. In the logistic regression calculation, the  $r^2$  was 0.390 and the chi-square was 51.35 at the 0.001 significance level. In essence, as found from the discriminant analysis, study participants appear to have a higher probability of being a law breaker if they have the following characteristics: (1) they have received counseling or rehabilitation, (2) they are younger, and (3) they are anomic.

Since qualitative data and the core theoretical considerations of this study suggest that the impact of anomie varies across levels of social ties/support, an additional logistic regression analysis was performed to test for an interaction effect between anomie and social ties/support. This further analysis indicated that there was some level of interaction effect and that, if only slightly, social ties/support was an important factor in law abiding versus law breaking behavior for players in the study group (see Endnote 5).

Also, another additional logistic regression analysis was performed including the binary variable player status (former versus current players) in order to see if this variable had an influence on law breaking players. The findings indicate that there is some level of influence, as current players appear to be slightly more likely to be law breakers (see Endnote 6).

### *Regression Analysis*

Step-wise multiple regression analysis (see Endnote 7) was conducted on the data to determine the relative explanatory power of the independent variables when all were considered simultaneously. The variance in the anomie scale was regressed against the

ten independent variables chosen from qualitative data and theory for the purpose of building the best (maximum explained variance) explanatory model. The best model is presented below in standardized regression coefficient form (beta) using the multiple linear regression equation:

$$y = B_1x_1 + B_2x_2 \dots B_nx_n + e$$

where:

y = dependent variable

B = standardized regression coefficient (beta)

x = score on independent variable

e = residual error

The regression findings for the anomie scale are presented in Table 16 (see Endnote 8). Five variables were shown to be significant in reducing the unexplained variance in the dependent variable. The five variable model explained 71.4% of the variance in the anomie scale variable. The best regression model is presented below in standardized partial regression coefficient form:

$$y = -0.710x_1 - 0.393x_2 - 0.325x_3 + 0.204x_4 + 0.130x_5 + e$$

where:

x<sub>1</sub> = Social Ties/Support

x<sub>2</sub> = Wealth/Aspiration

x<sub>3</sub> = Level of Happiness

x<sub>4</sub> = Early Socialization

x<sub>5</sub> = Income after NFL

e = Residual error

### *Discriminant Analysis for Happy Versus Unhappy Players*

Due to qualitative findings and multiple regression findings, it was reasoned appropriate to also analyze the data using discriminant analysis in order to differentiate between happy and unhappy players. As shown in Table 17, study participants appear to have a higher probability of being unhappy (1) if they are anomic, (2) if they were raised in a nontraditional manner during their early socialization, and (3) if they have received counseling or rehabilitation. For the discriminant analysis, the canonical correlation was 0.735, the eigenvalue was 1.18, and the chi-square was 78.16 at the 0.001 significance level.

Table 16: Step-Wise Regression for Anomie Scale with Current and Former NFL Players Presented in Standardized Regression Coefficient Form (N=104)

Step	Social Ties/ Support Index	Wealth/ Aspiration Index	Level of Happiness	Early Socialization	Income After NFL	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F Ratio or Entering Variable	Level of Significance
1	-.710					.500	103.86	.001
2	-.510	-.393				.611	81.94	.001
3	-.351	-.361	-.325			.684	75.22	.001
4	-.297	-.343	-.233	.204		.704	62.20	.001
5	-.281	-.317	-.213	.180	.130	.714	52.41	.001

Variables not Entering: Law Abiders versus Law Breakers, Age, Race, Counseling/Rehabilitation, Yrs Played NFL

Table 17: Logistic Regression and Discriminant Analysis for Happy Versus Unhappy with Life (N=104)

<u>Best Model Logistic Regression: Three Steps</u>							
Step	Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	D.F.	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
1	Anomie Scale	-2.43	.712	11.69	1	.001	.395
2	Early Soc Index	-.284	1.02	7.64	1	.006	.475
3	Counseling/Rehab	2.01	.80	6.212	1	.013	.512
	Constant	5.17	1.65	9.77	1	.002	
Chi Square for Model = 74.62				D.F. 3	Sig. = .001		

<u>Best Model Discriminant Analysis: Three Steps</u>					
Step	Variables	Standardized Canonical Discriminant Coefficient	Wilks Lamda	F	Sig.
1	Anomie Scale	.536	.591	70.55	.001
2	Early Soc Index	.464	.508	48.87	.001
3	Counseling/Rehab	.446	.459	39.21	.001
Eigenvalue = 1.18		Canonical Correlation = .735			
Chi Square =78.16					
Sig. = .001					

Variables Entered Into the Analyses:

Anomie Scale	Counseling/Rehabilitation
Social Ties/Support Index	Race
Early Socialization Index	Age
Income	Wealth/Aspiration Index
Yrs Played in the NFL	



### *Logistic Regression Analysis for Happy Versus Unhappy Players*

Again, in order to verify findings from the discriminant analysis, data were analyzed using logistic regression. Of the 104 players in the study group, 46 reported being unhappy with life. Similar to the discriminant analysis, respondents appear to have a greater probability of being unhappy (1) if they are anomic, (2) if they were brought up in a nontraditional manner during their early socialization, and (3) if they have received counseling/rehabilitation. For this “best” model, the  $r^2$  was 0.512 and the chi-square was 74.62 significant beyond the 0.001 level.

### *Synopsis of Quantitative Findings*

A synopsis of the research findings is presented below:

A) First, the responses to the dependent variable, law abiders/breakers, indicates that approximately one-third of the study participants have been arrested after their entrance into the NFL. Second, the responses to the dependent variable, anomie, reveal that an alarming 45 percent of the respondents are interpreted to exhibit various anomic characteristics. Third, the responses to the dependent variable, level of happiness, suggest that nearly half of the players in the study group are unhappy with life. The descriptive statistics appear to indicate that social ties/support and socialization factors have significant buffering qualities in relation to anomie and deviance. Also, age appears to be an important variable, as those who are younger seem more unable to cope with stressful life change than do the older athletes in the study sample.

B) The bivariate correlations indicate that the socio-demographic variable of years played in the NFL was, largely, a poor predictor of law abiders/breakers, anomie,

and level of happiness. The other ten variables appear to be important correlates of the three dependent variables. Overall, there appears to be a relationship between anomie, level of happiness, and law abiders/breakers. These variables also appear to be associated to social ties/support, early socialization, income, counseling/rehabilitation, age, and wealth/aspiration (future attainment orientations).

C) First, the multivariate statistics indicate that the independent variables of counseling/rehabilitation, age, and anomie appear to be important predicting variables of law abiders/breakers. Second, the multivariate statistics reveal that the independent variables of social ties/support, wealth/aspiration, level of happiness, early socialization, and income after the NFL appear to be important correlates of anomie. Third, the multivariate statistics indicate that the independent variables of anomie, early socialization, and counseling/rehabilitation appear to be important predictors of a players' level of happiness. The socio-demographic variable of years played in the NFL was generally a poor predictor of the three dependent variables.

## Chapter Five

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory research project has utilized a mixed-method (Seiber 1973; Creswell 1994, 2005; Jick 1979; Dexter 1970) approach to examine why some NFL players participate in deviant, and sometimes law breaking, behavior and others do not. Using Dexter's (1970) qualitative technique of elite and specialized interviewing along with Schatzman's and Strauss's (1973) naturalistic field method, access was gained into an exclusive group of current and former NFL players. The qualitative findings in conjunction with Durkheimian (social disorganization) theory provided the conceptualization of a quantitative instrument. Through a nonprobability snowball sample (Babbie 1986; Berg 2001), 104 NFL players were interviewed. A series of quantitative analyses were run to describe and assess relationships within this study group. In essence, this study entailed a series of steps that could be represented as a cumulative progression. Again it should be emphasized that these data are not generalizable. But interesting questions do come out of this study.

This research set out to explore three key questions: (1) What are the factors associated with law breaking behavior for NFL players in the study group? (2) Can levels of anomie be identified among NFL players in the study sample, and if so, what factors are associated with anomie? and (3) Do the law breakers exhibit anomic characteristics?

Counseling/rehabilitation, age, and anomie were found to be the discriminating variables in identifying who had participated in illegal behaviors (players who have been arrested since becoming a professional football player) versus those who had not. These variables suggested that those who had received counseling/rehabilitation services, those

who were younger, and those who possessed higher scores on the anomie scale were more likely to be law breakers within this group of players studied. These findings were confirmed through both discriminant analysis and logistic regression analysis and were very consistent with the findings from the qualitative data. The qualitative data revealed multiple instances where the presence of counseling and rehabilitation, the younger less experienced, and those who were having a difficult time because of the changes brought about by becoming a professional football player were involved in some type of deviant behavior.

Although the concept of anomie is complex, Durkheim's detailed and comprehensive insight provides a theoretical perspective by which the life circumstances affecting this study group can be conceptualized and described. Durkheim's work may date back 100 years, but his keen insight into the affects of rapid social change continues to provide a useful theoretical model (Clinard 1964; Orru 1987; Herbert 1991). His development of the sociological concept of anomie, even today, provides a theoretical, yet empirically testable, perspective for explaining social deviance. Although some contemporary theorists (Chambliss & Seidman 1971; Spitzer 1975; Blackshaw & Crabbe 2004) discount the role of Durkheim for understanding contemporary social change, other sociologists (Park & Burgess 1921; Parsons 1937; Merton 1938; Hirschi 1969; Giddens 1972; Harrison 1990) appreciate his contribution to the understanding of change and have based much of their own work on his theoretical and empirical work. One might go so far as to suggest that with the information explosion of today's digital age, Durkheim may be even more relevant and important as social scientists attempt to explain the effect of social change on any number of social groups. Durkheim needs to be "rediscovered"

and the research on anomie expanded if we are to have “sociological definitions” of the impact and result of social change.

The results of this study suggest that the sudden wealth (rapid change) of many players was associated at varying levels with these players’ personal anomie. The findings indicate when higher levels of anomie are present: (1) weaker social ties and fewer forms of support have been experienced by the players, (2) players possess less of a commitment to future aspirations and the investment in the attainment of wealth, (3) players are unhappy with life, (4) less constructive and productive agents of early socialization were present in the lives of the players, (5) they earned a higher income since becoming a professional football player compared to lesser earning players, and (6) higher levels of deviant and sometimes unlawful behavior were a part of their lives compared to law abiding and less deviant players.

Interestingly, the findings suggest that sudden wealth produces an increase in gratification acceptance and a decrease in future attainment orientations for this group of players. These results appear to be congruent with Durkheim’s ([1897] 1951) anomie of affluence thesis. Durkheim ([1897] 1951) noted that when rapid change occurs, social bonds are weakened, thus exciting “fevered imaginations” (256). Also, compatible with Durkheimian theory, is the observed relationship between size of income and anomie. As wealth was acquired, so too was an increase in anomic characteristics. However, it should be noted that some nonmeasured variable may be intervening in this relationship. Again, the exploratory nature of this research needs to be emphasized. The explanation of other intervening variables is worthy of future research. Qualitative findings do support the Durkheimian thesis and the direction of these measured associations. In the

interviews, player after player spoke of early socialization experiences, or lack thereof, and gave graphic explanations of how the NFL had created a life they were not ready to experience.

Closely associated to the theoretical construct of anomie is the level of happiness or unhappiness found within players in the study group. Anomie, early socialization, and counseling/rehabilitation were the significant predictors of whether a player was happy or unhappy with life. These variables imply that those who exhibited anomic characteristics, those that were raised in nontraditional early socialization structures, and those who had received counseling or rehabilitation services were more likely to be unhappy with their current life situation. As with law abiders/breakers, these findings were confirmed through discriminant analysis and logistic regression analysis. They, too, were fully consistent with the qualitative data. The degree of unhappiness among players interviewed was one of the most surprising findings from the interviews. Although this was a snowball sample, the implications posed by the degree of unhappiness mentioned in the interviews leads me to believe this is a widespread social psychological state of being for many NFL players. Although these findings cannot be generalized to the NFL as a whole, they do pose interesting researchable questions.

### *Important Aspects of the Study*

There were several findings that appear to stand out and are worth noting from this exploratory research. First, anomie was one of the significant predictors of law breaking players (players who were arrested). It would appear that anomie plays at least a partial role in whether some of these athletes fall victim to the correlates that

accompany deviant behavior. For this study group, 47 of the 104 (45%) players reported moderate to high levels of anomie as it was operationalized and measured in this study. It would therefore appear reasonable to suggest that some of the players in the study group were involved in behaviors and activities that could be labeled as *anomic deviance*. As Durkheim ([1897] 1951) suggested, there are different types of deviance (suicide). This type—*anomic*—characterizes the social state that leads to this particular type of deviance. Further, the *anomic* social state of a group or condition is thus identified as an explanation of personal anomie. This finding suggests the continued applicability of Durkheimian theory even as applied to the lives of players in the National Football League today.

A second finding that stands out was that nearly half of the study group reported being unhappy with life, a high percentage when compared to the American population in general and to many occupational work groups in particular (Saad 2004). Anomie was also the strongest predictor of unhappiness for players in the study group. With the early socialization index also being a highly associated correlate, this indicated that prior socialization factors played some role in how players adapted to the rapidly changing environment of professional football. Qualitative findings gave support and additional validity to these findings.

The third interesting dimension to this study was the methodological approach developed and used to gather these data. The fact that a high degree of compatibility was found between the qualitative data and quantitative data was important in regards to reliability and validity of the research. The categories discovered through the qualitative

field data were supported when operationalized and tested through the quantitative analyses.

The technique of elite and specialized interviews made the other data available for the study. No data would be available had it not been for the help of the two key informants. In other words, valid and reliable information from some social groups, as was the case for player information out of the NFL, is virtually impossible to obtain without informants who provide entrée into the closed group.

This study raises many questions about sudden life and economic change, anomie, and deviant behavior when it occurs in the lives of professional football players and even beyond to other groups which experience rapid professional and personal change. Variables could be, and need to be, refined so as to measure more accurately the essential concepts and constructs surrounding anomie, social ties/support, early socialization, wealth/aspiration, and the influence of fame, power, and money in professional football. Additional dimensions need to be explored in the creation of the anomie scale and other indices. Certainly, this exploratory study is just one step of several in order to improve the methodology for validity, reliability, and degree of representativeness of the life characteristics of professional football players.

#### *Further Exploration*

According to both the qualitative and quantitative findings, social ties/support appeared to play a significant role in buffering anomie and deviance. In the quantitative analyses, the social ties/support index was the number one predictor of anomie. In essence, the less social support players felt they had, the more anomic they appeared to



be. And, in the qualitative data, social ties/support was one of the core themes that emerged, as players continuously spoke of the importance of their attachment, or lack thereof, to social groups, and the regulation, or lack thereof, provided by social groups. Again, for those players that reported having few social support networks available to them, anomie appeared to be present. It was one of the most important findings of the study in regards to combating anomie and lessening the impact of anomic conditions. As is common in mixed-method approaches (Creswell 2005) and qualitative analyses (Schatzman & Strauss 1973), the methodological process is constantly unfolding. Given the findings from this study group, a closer look may reveal additional factors associated with social ties/support. Thus, it was felt that a closer examination of social support was warranted.

First, the items included in the social ties/support index (religion, marriage, and education) along with one additional item (altruism) were examined via a multiple correlation analysis. The results for the correlation analysis demonstrated that all four single item variables were significantly correlated with the anomie scale at the 0.01 level. The variables shown to be related were religion, marital status, education, and altruism. Each of the variables was correlated in the hypothesized direction. The strongest bivariate relationship was between the education variable and the anomie scale ( $r = -0.634$ ). In essence, the multiple correlation findings for the anomie scale revealed that NFL players in the study group that have exhibited anomic characteristics: (1) were less likely to have a relationship with God/higher power, (2) were less likely to be married, (3) were less likely to have graduated from college, and (4) were less likely to be altruistic (donate money or time to help the next generation). Moreover, those players

that were anomic appeared to have fewer social ties and support networks and were less charitable. The multiple correlations are presented in Table 18.

All of these findings were also consistent with the theoretical framework presented by this study. Durkheim ([1897] 1951, [1925] 1961, [1957] 2001) theorized that all of these variables or elements of “morality” that revolve around the “attachment to social groups” and “the spirit of discipline,” if present in one’s life, were important combatants to anomie (Marks 1974: 329). These “elements,” according to Durkheim ([1925] 1961) are the opposites of anomie (Marks 1974: 329). Just as Durkheim ([1925] 1961) claimed that both integration into social groups and discipline were scarce during his time in France, it appeared from the findings of this study that attachment and discipline are also scarce in today’s NFL, according to many of the players in the study group. Moreover, just as many players made explicit in the interviews, Durkheim ([1912] 1965) made himself clear regarding the lack of “a general binding nomos in modern civilization” (Marks 1974: 344).

Durkheim ([1912] 1965) claimed that the old gods had died and contemplated what new gods would replace them. In other words, he argued, that like occupational groups, families, education, and religion, there was something else that was needed but did not entirely exist yet. In discussing the importance of the relationships that were provided by traditional social groups, Durkheim ([1958] 2001) then also saw that “an increase in human sympathies” could possibly reduce anomie (212). According to Durkheim ([1958] 2001), “Charity is the feeling of human sympathy...It ignores and denies any special merit in gifts or mental capacity acquired by [individuals]. This, then,

Table 18: Correlation Matrix for Anomie Scale with Single Item Social Ties/Support Variables (N = 104)

	Anomie	Religion	Marital Status	Education	Altruism
Anomie	1.00	-.554*	-.515*	-.634*	-.492

\* $p < .01$  level

is the very acme of justice” (219-220). Thus, for Durkheim, if people are charitable to others, the crises of anomie could be greatly reduced.

So, on these theoretical grounds, the altruism variable was included in the supplemental analysis. Durkheim ([1957] 2001) spoke of the power of charitable people, or what he called the “cult of humanity” (219-220). For Durkheim, this “cult of humanity” was also a way, or form of consciousness, in which humans could raise their level of individual happiness, thus reducing anomie. Moreover, research (Luks 1988) has shown that charity is a key element to individual happiness. In relation to this study, the quantitative analyses found that anomie was the number one predictor of unhappiness. The qualitative data also suggested that there was a relationship between anomie and unhappiness. Thus, it appeared that charity in conjunction with social ties/support acted as a buffer against anomie for players in the study group. However, this combination of elements appeared to be rare for many of the athletes in the study group, as many of the players’ “arrogance” and “sense of entitlement” was not congruent with charity, service, and human sympathy; hence, a possible factor in their unhappiness.

To further investigate the importance of social ties/support items and the altruism item in relation to the anomie scale, multiple regression analysis was conducted. Multiple regression analysis was performed in order to determine the relative explanatory power of the independent variables when these four were considered at the same time. The regression findings for the anomie scale are presented in Table 19. The four variable model explained 54.2% of the variance in the anomie scale variable. The multiple regression reveals that the single item variables of religion, marital status, education, and altruism appear to be important predictors of anomie. Thus, these social support items in

Table 19: Partial Regression Coefficient for Regression of Anomie Scale on the Single Item Social Support Independent Variables (N = 104)

Independent Variable	Partial Regression Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient
Religion	-.308	-.232*
Marital Status	-.190	-.152*
Education	-.492	-.376*
Altruism	-.187	-.232*
<i>F</i> Statistic for Model	31.50	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.542	

\* $p < .01$  level

addition to the altruism item emerged as important factors in either enhancing or reducing anomie characteristics. These additional findings further suggest that aspects of social support, as well as altruism, need to be explored in greater detail.

### *Suggestions and Possible Applied Action Steps Supported by the Qualitative and Quantitative Findings*

It could be argued, based on the qualitative and quantitative findings and theory that the rapid life change players encounter going from college to the professional ranks will always be there. In essence, there will always be various levels of anomie in the lives of NFL players as a result of being suddenly wealthy. However, as reported in this study, social support, in many cases, can be a key buffer against this anomie. Thus, various social groups and institutions must emerge, and become manifest in the lives of these athletes, in order to provide the necessary relationships and support they are in desperate need of. In many cases, not only is integration and regulation needed but re-socialization becomes a key factor.

First, colleges and universities, it appears from these data, do not do enough to ground and socialize their student-athletes or prepare them for life after college. It seems that there needs to be a greater effort on the part of colleges and universities to help these young men acquire life-skills and to teach socialization skills to their many at-risk athletes (those from low socio-economic backgrounds, poor schools, and broken-homes). Many of these athletes' lives revolve around being only football players. In other words, many of these athletes have not been taught how to deal with typical everyday situations such as relationships, anger, and personal issues. Some athletes have not acquired the

socialization skills that many people outside of high-profile athletics learn. Their lives are football. They learn how to play hard and hit hard. And, in too many cases, socialization skills are not being taught by the athletes' families or guardians due to backgrounds full of violence, broken-homes, and various other unfortunate situations. Thus, it appears that colleges and universities need to add and emphasize a student-athlete life skills curriculum. Too many of these young men enter the professional ranks without "education." The majority never graduate from college and some are barely literate. The lack of adequate education can have detrimental effects on many players' decision making ability and their ability to cope with drastic life and economic change.

Second, these data suggest that NFL teams may need to show more support. At-risk players need to be provided additional support and structure by their teams and coaches. Coping mechanisms need to be instilled early in these athletes' careers. And, if players deviate (or break the law) consistently they need to be placed on suspension and required to undergo rehabilitation or further life-skills training. This suspension should not be deemed as necessarily disciplinary, but rather viewed as an opportunity for players to acquire further and more in-depth life skills development. For this to be successful, teams must hire more professional personnel with the expertise to assist these athletes in coping with their changing lives. This staff would also be able to offer support and help empower players—in essence, emphasizing empowerment instead of control. However, "character clauses" should be in players' contracts (most teams have something of this nature in player contracts but are rarely upheld) and they need to be taken seriously. Teams need to stress the risks and consequences associated with illegal conduct, especially crimes against women. But, again, teams must above all support their players,

empower their players, and equip their players with the life skills necessary for daily life during and after their professional careers. With the proper encouragement and support, much of the discipline may not be needed.

Third, if teams are unwilling to set some standards, help players acquire necessary coping skills, and support their players, then perhaps the NFL as a league may need to step in and develop consistent policies and support structures. It appears that the NFL commissioner needs to offer more support and skills development for teams and players, and more importantly help these young men adjust to all the life changes that occur as a result of being wealthy and famous professional athletes. The NFL has policies dealing with criminal behavior and various other forms of deviant behavior such as drug use and gambling, but those largely disciplinary policies appear not to be working. The league appears to be relatively reactive instead of proactive in this respect. These data indicate that the NFL needs to help at-risk players at the front end of their careers and provide them with adequate support, perhaps even mandatory support. And instead of simply trying to discipline and control players, the league needs to act more proactively towards player empowerment during the early stages of athletes' careers.

Furthermore, the commissioner may need to work more closely with outside organizations and the player's union in order to further protect the athletes. The NFL needs to insist that *all* agents (and various others) meet professional standards and protect their clients. The league should also require similar standards for the managers and coaches. According to the findings from this study, many players enter the NFL in a very vulnerable condition. They must be protected and given adequate opportunity to succeed. However, these data also suggest that many players require some structure or sense of



boundaries. Otherwise, deviance can be reproduced (especially if support is weak), as was the case for many of the players in the study group. In essence, the NFL needs consistency in policy, but more importantly consistency in support and empowerment.

Additionally, and in fairness to the NFL, the problem of deviance and unlawful behavior among players did not come about overnight, but is largely structural in nature. Deviance and criminal behavior in our society and the NFL are complex social problems, much too multifaceted and complicated for the NFL alone to solve. However, the commissioner and teams are not powerless to address much of the problem within their organizations. The commissioner, team owners, and managers, it could be argued, can reduce the occurrence of deviance and illegal behavior among players. Support must be consistent. And it appears that there needs to be less emphasis on simply “discipline.” According to one player, “Most guys laugh off fines...let me tell you, fines don’t stop players from doing anything, suspensions, now that hurts us more [because]...that’s what we do, we love to play...but, let me say again, that kind of stuff doesn’t affect us that much.”

Moreover, the qualitative and quantitative findings point toward further suggestions for how to combat the anomic and often deviant behavior of NFL players. Based on these data, one could argue, in addition to the suggestions above, that (1) the NFL needs to have more in-depth conversations with the NCAA and universities/colleges in order to better address the issues surrounding the drastic life change that occurs upon players entrance into the NFL; hence to better prepare the athletes for what they will encounter in relation to sudden life change, (2) players need more education, perhaps programs that assist them in finishing their college degrees, or at the minimum, required

in- and off-season workshops focused on acquiring additional life skills and coping mechanisms, (3) team, league, and societal rules and laws should be recognized (for all players, even the superstars), as too many players in the study group reported “no consequences,” (4) there needs to be more support and accountability during the non-playing or practicing times and during the off-season, as too many players indicated that they were “bored,” (5) a more formal “buddy system” needs to be instituted whereby responsible veteran or team alumni assist the young players (rookies), help them adjust to their new life, support them, and empower them, or, in essence, give them a positive peer relationship, (6) there needs to be more meaningful “charity” displayed by players who, according to one player, “have the resources to make a difference” and (7) there needs to be more help for the players in coping with their sudden wealth and fame at the front end, or when they enter the league, rather than just at the back end, or when they retire.

A consistent statement that was made by owners and front office managers was that “we cannot make them [their players] do anything.” It could be argued that they cannot make their players “do anything” (especially outside of work) but they can empower them by providing them with the tools necessary to be successful, both professionally and off the field. And regardless of their fame, players are employees of an organization that could and should, to some degree, hold players accountable for breaking team and league rules, as well as breaking the law. Therefore, there should be, as in other professional organizations, a code of conduct for athletes privileged enough to get paid millions of dollars to play sports (football). Some of this is starting to be done, as the Minnesota Vikings owner Zygi Wilf delivered a 77 page code of conduct to his team in response to the “sex boat” scandal during the 2005 season. However, it appears

to have had little effect on some Viking's players (or is not being enforced for certain star players) as there were several mishaps during the 2006 preseason. But again this accountability and these conduct codes need to be implemented by enhancing support instead of enforcement. In essence, while there does need to be some regulation, one could argue that the key to combating anomie and deviance lies in social support, skills development, and empowerment.

And, perhaps, if player deviance was acknowledged from the perspective of helping and educating players who have made bad decisions and social support was widely available for players with personal issues, teams might perform at higher levels simply because there would be fewer distractions and less negative media attention. This has the potential to increase winning percentages, and ultimately, profits for team owners. In essence, if players do not have social support available to them, the outcome frequently results in player deviance, team turmoil, and, for the owners, bad investments. This was largely the case for the players in the study group and the various others that commented on the current state of deviance in the NFL.

### *Future Research*

There are numerous ways future research could be pursued. With broader access to NFL players, a more comprehensive research project could be undertaken. Future research pertaining to the above applied action steps could lend further insight into improving the life of NFL players. By helping team owners and coaches to understand and assist players in coping with the affects of rapid fame and fortune, the applied aspects might help to reduce the anomic deviance and unhappiness which was found in both the

qualitative and quantitative findings. Players spoke often of the inability to cope with the emotional pain and suffering since becoming a professional football player. An area that needs to be addressed is the degree of influence many of the players bring from prior socialization and life experience. This prior set of experiences appeared to play a role in the presence of anomie and level of happiness. These data indicated that early socialization and the role of social ties were very important predictors of anomie and deviance for this study group. Also, the increasing role of religion as a social bond appeared to have a significant influence in players' lives. Further explanation into that phenomenon is warranted. Hence, a more comprehensive model for explaining anomic deviance is needed.

Most people are aware that there are problems in the NFL. According to Lapchick (2000), "Our athletes are coming from a generation of despairing youth cut adrift from the American Dream" (15). In other words, many young athletes are coming from early socialization experiences that entail "balancing life and death" (Lapchick 2000: 15). NFL teams are drafting players that have (1) increasingly observed the violent death of friends, peers, and family members, (2) who are fathers before they reach the NFL, (3) who have witnessed drug abuse by friends and family, (4) who have witnessed abuse and battering in their own home, and (5) who were raised in a single parent or guardian household (Lapchick 2000). Thus, universities/colleges and the NFL needs professionals who can deal with all of these unfortunate factors and can aid in "re-socializing" these athletes. However, according to players in the study group, few teams are equipped with people that can help guide and support them throughout their professional careers. Thus, these elements of early socialization warrant further research.

This research indicated that factors, which are of importance to NFL players, and could potentially assist in owners, coaches, players, and the general public's understanding of the effects of these changes were important and could be understood more completely through theory and research. Although this study focused on only a small number of NFL players, there is a larger phenomenon here that Durkheim ([1897] 1951) pointed out over 100 years ago. When the rules of life change rapidly, many people have difficulty adjusting. In many cases, if people do not have social ties and support during life-changing events, anomie and deviance can result. This normative breakdown can be present in many venues other than professional football. There should be a fresh discovery of Durkheim's ([1897] 1951) insight on social change. Anomie should be viewed as a very important perspective to explore and apply in new and emerging instances in the twenty-first century. This study can help reignite inquiry into rapid life change, anomie, and deviance.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide (Questionnaire)

My name is Eric Carter and I am a graduate student. I am conducting a small quantitative study on life within the NFL. All data will be kept confidential. Your willingness to assist me by filling out this questionnaire would be greatly appreciated.

This questionnaire is a series of statements about your personal attitudes and beliefs. Please read each statement and decide to what extent describes you or your beliefs. There are no right or wrong answers. You will probably agree with some of the statements and disagree with others. Please indicate your own personal feelings about each statement below by circling the answer (or writing your answer in the blank provided) that best describes your attitude or feeling. Please be truthful and describe your beliefs and feeling as they really are.

SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

- |   |       |   |    |    |
|---|-------|---|----|----|
| 1) In spite of what people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse.  | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 2) It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.                               | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 3) Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.                                | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 4) These days a person doesn't really know who he can count on.   | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 5) There's little use writing to public officials because they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man. | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 6) More and more I feel helpless in the face of what's happening in the world today.  | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 7) Who was/is your hero?  | <hr/> |   |    |    |
| 8) There is too much drinking of alcoholic beverages today.   | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 9) People should never smoke marijuana because it leads to a life of drugs.   | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 10) Almost everyone finds leisure time more satisfying than work.   | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 11) Today's sexual morality seems to be, "anything goes."   | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 12) Are NFL players role models?  | Yes   |   | No |    |
| 13) It is more important for people to make sacrifices in order to build a happy marriage.                                  | SA    | A | D  | SD |
| 14) It is natural for people to try hard to become wealthy.   | SA    | A | D  | SD |

15) It is natural for people to enjoy being wealthy.	SA	A	D	SD
16) I admire people who try to be the best at whatever they do.	SA	A	D	SD
17) What do you do to relax?	<hr/>			
18) I believe there is nothing wrong with drinking alcohol.	SA	A	D	SD
19) I believe there is nothing wrong with drinking alcohol before the age of 21.	SA	A	D	SD
20) I believe there is nothing wrong with using tobacco products.	SA	A	D	SD
21) I believe there is nothing wrong with using marijuana.	SA	A	D	SD
22) I believe there is nothing wrong with using stronger drugs such as cocaine, steroids, heroin, etc.	SA	A	D	SD
23) Which drug do you think is the most widely used by players in the NFL?	alcohol pain killers	marijuana other	cocaine	steroids
24) As a child, did you have a pet?	Yes	No		
25) Do you have a pet now?	Yes	No		
26) I believe there is a living God/Higher Power.	SA	A	D	SD
27) I have a personal relationship with my God/Higher Power.	SA	A	D	SD
28) I believe most players in the NFL believe in a God/Higher Power.	SA	A	D	SD
29) I pray to my God/Higher Power.	SA	A	D	SD
30) I attend church/worship services of some kind	once a week once a year	once a month never		
31) Are you willing to help the next generation by donating money and time?	Yes	No		
32) I believe race relations are better than they were 25 years ago.	SA	A	D	SD
33) I believe there is racism in the NFL today.	SA	A	D	SD
34) I believe racism in the NFL today is	very bad there's a lot	bad	there's some	
35) What would you say the #1 social problem is today?	crime family	environment discrimination	drugs other	

- 36) I feel that NFL players make too much money. SA A D SD
- 37) I believe there are only so many material things you can buy with a lot of money. SA A D SD
- 38) I believe money can buy happiness. SA A D SD

Sociodemographic Section

- 39) Age \_\_\_\_\_
- 40) Race \_\_\_\_\_
- 41) I am married. Yes No
- 42) I was married before entering the NFL. Yes No
- 43) I have been married for \_\_\_\_\_ years.
- 44) I have been married (1, 2, 3, more than 3) \_\_\_\_\_ times.
- 45) How many children do you have? 0 1 2 3 more than 3 not sure
- 45) My approximate yearly income before entering the NFL was 0-10,000 10-15,000 16-20,000 21-25,000 25,000 or more
- 46) Now my approximate yearly income after entering the NFL is 0-500,000 501,000-1 million 1-5 million above 5 million
- 47) My parent/s or legal guardian's approximate yearly income is 0-10,000 10-20,000 21-30,000 31-40,000 41-50,000 above 50,000
- 48) I was raised by (both parents, single parent, grandparents, single grandparent, other). If other, who? \_\_\_\_\_
- 49) If raised by a single parent, whom were you raised by? (mother, father, grandmother, other) If other, who? \_\_\_\_\_
- 50) I have graduated from college. Yes No
- 51) I have been arrested. Yes No
- 52) If you have been arrested, was it before the NFL while in the NFL both before & during
- 53) If you have been arrested, approximately how many times? 1 2 3 4 5 more than 5
- 54) If you have been arrested, have you been convicted of the charges against you? Yes No

- |   |  |                            |                            |                 |
|---|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 55) If you were arrested and then convicted of the charges against you, did you receive a | misdemeanor                                    | felony                     |                            |                 |
| 56) Have you ever received counseling or inpatient rehabilitation?                        | Yes  | No                         |                            |                 |
| 57) How would you describe your family's social class?                                    | very poor<br>wealthy                           | poor                       | middle class               |                 |
| 58) How would describe where you lived for the 1 <sup>st</sup> 10 years of your life?     | rural farm<br>small city<br>major metropolitan | rural non-farm<br>suburban | small town<br>metropolitan |                 |
| 59) What part of the country did you grow up in?  | Northeast<br>Southeast                         | Northwest<br>Southwest     | Midwest<br>Midsouth        |                 |
| 60) Which statement best describes the way you feel about your life?                      | very happy<br>unhappy                          | happy                      | unhappy                    | very<br>unhappy |

## APPENDIX B

### Rights of Human Subjects Documents



University Research  
 Compliance Office  
 203 Fairchild Hall  
 Lower Mezzanine  
 Manhattan, KS 66506-1103  
 785.332.8224  
 Fax: 785.332.5944  
<http://www.ksu.edu/research/comply>

Proposal Number: 3843

TO: Robert Schaeffer  
 SASW  
 211 Waters Hall

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair  
 Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: April 11, 2006

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "An exploratory analysis of anomie in the NFL."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. **This proposal is approved until April 11, 2009.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
- There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the Committee prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews will be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if appropriate and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

When deemed appropriate by the IRB and prior to involving human subjects, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each subject or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after the project ends. Each subject must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for his or her personal records. The identification of particular human subjects in any publication is an invasion of privacy and requires a separately executed informed consent.

It is important that your human subjects project is consistent with submissions to funding/contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding/contract entity of any changes in your project that affects the use of human subjects.



## APPENDIX C

### Endnotes

## Endnotes

1. It could be argued that subcultural and learning theories are applicable for the study of deviant behavior found within the NFL among players. No doubt, both of these perspectives provide insight into the larger study of deviance. And certain aspects of both perspectives could be utilized in understanding the complex world of professional football. At several points during this study, one could argue that some elements of subcultural and learning theory were present. At these points, the study possesses some eclectic characteristics, particularly in the formation of some of the theoretical constructs which were derived from qualitative data and later translated into quantitative indices. An argument could be made that there were slight elements of subcultural thought and learning theory present in the formation of these constructs/indices. Although this may be the case, the thrust of the theoretical framework is clearly Durkheimian (anomie, social control, social support) in origin and application. Hence, the development and discussion of theory utilized is based on the original work of Durkheim and others who have used anomie as a construct. This construct represents a condition which seems to apply more appropriately to the inductive findings derived from the field work in terms of being with and interviewing the NFL players from the study group.
2. Methodologically, one might ask if these quantitative data might be affected by the method of data collection. It is recognized that employing two different methods to administer the survey has the potential of introducing some level of

bias into the survey data. However, differences between the two groups were deemed, at most, minimal. This conclusion was reached via the input of the two key informants and qualitative interviews. For this study, 73 questionnaires were completed with the researcher being present, by either assisting the respondent complete the questionnaire, or by them completing it on their own, on-site. Both of these were employed and were determined by the “social situation” and by the comfort level of the player who had agreed to participate in the study. The other 31 were completed by telephone survey. In these cases, an informant gained access to the respondent and assisted in making the phone call. Once trust was established, the researcher asked the questions and spoke conversationally to the respondent. It was through this type of interaction that the researcher acquired the information needed for the questionnaire. Just as Schatzman and Strauss (1973) emphasize, a key goal for the researcher is to keep the respondent comfortable and in a natural state of being so as not to bias the data and, also, to have an “in-depth experience” of data collection that is natural to the social situation. Every attempt was made during the field work and the collection of quantitative data to make this case. Strikingly similar responses were apparent no matter how these data were gathered. This became very clear during the data collection process. Due to this observation, these data were not separated or analyzed according to whether or not they were in-person self-administered surveys or telephone surveys. The major objective was to obtain the data. Some quantitative methodologists who assume that quantitative techniques are less biased than qualitative techniques might suggest that analyses should be run based on the type

of data collection method. While this is a very traditional quantitative assumption and could be done in future research, it became very clear that such sub-sets of data would lend little, if any, insight into this exploratory research. Therefore, these data were treated as one. The assumption was made that this study would possess greater validity and reliability by having a greater number of players in the study group. The qualitative finding that little difference was observed in types of responses (whether telephone or in-person) justified the bundling of data together. The most important aspect of whether the technique was going to work was the role of the informants who gained the researcher access to a given player. Without this access, little or no data would be available for this study. In sum, the data were treated as one group for quantitative analyses, while differentiation was only made qualitatively.

3. It is recognized that “qualitatively distinct” variables should not be summed into quantitative indices. However, the role of construct validity must be emphasized in the formation of the constructs/indices. Although it may appear at first glance that the variables included in the indices are qualitatively distinct, the players themselves categorized these variables similarly. There was little qualitative distinction acknowledged by the study participants. Thus, the indices were created based on three findings. First, the constructs emerged out of the inductive data. This is very consistent with the field data collection, formation, and integration utilized in the research. A sense of commonality in terms of the players’ behaviors and attitudes were largely reported together by the

respondents. Second, the constructs needed to possess theoretical coherence and be identified in some dimension of theory. The constructs have a close association to Durkheim's early work as well as the other Durkheimian (social control, social support) based theory utilized in this study. And, at times, one might argue that elements of subcultural or learning theory could be applied as well. This is a question for additional study and application of theory in future research. Third, the indices needed to possess adequate levels of statistical association for the quantitative analyses. Correlation analysis was used to assess the level of association between variables. It was further assessed through factor analysis to see if such constructs loaded into a common factor. Many of the variables were binary in format. This is a limitation due to the restriction of variance when using a variable with only two response categories. When the variance is restricted, greater error is possible in assessing true levels of association. This needs to be recognized in assessing the statistical association of the indices which possess binary variable formats. However, many researchers (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent 1975) have noted that dichotomous variables can be used as if they were interval-level measures. Some statisticians would argue, as noted in the text, that the use of more powerful statistics compensates for measurement error, hence, justifying the use of statistics normally applied in inferential analyses. In this case, the use of parametric statistics are based on such arguments as given by Ablelson and Tukey (1959), Labovitz (1967, 1970), and Nie et al. (1975). Yet, for this study, no inference is being suggested or reported. The findings are descriptive in nature and intended

to fulfill the objective of the study, which was to explore possible levels of association between, and among, variables through quantitative techniques in order to see if such relationships are consistent with qualitative data. Based on these three supporting approaches, the indices were used in the primary analyses. However, given the possibility for higher levels of error when using binary variables, separate analyses were run on the primary dependent variables using single item variables. The results of these analyses are reported in endnote eight. As suggested in endnote eight, very little difference to the findings exist. This appears to lend greater verification for the validity and reliability of the constructs. In sum, the indices possess characteristics of all three of the above findings: inductive, theoretical, and statistical.

4. Clearly, the methodological technique, which is a blended approach, is intended to be exploratory in nature. In other words, to focus on just the qualitative findings, or to just focus on the quantitative findings alone is to sacrifice the “wholeness” of this research. Doing this fails to communicate the complexity of the research. The research was based on a cumulative process where by the early data allowed for the next steps and the formation of the theoretical constructs. These became typologies which then became indices that allowed for interpretation given the qualitative grouping and the quantitative analyses. The study group was a nonrandom collection acquired via a snowball sample technique. Whether it represents the larger NFL community is a question that cannot be answered. Hence, it must be assumed that it does not. Given this

assumption, the research is exploratory. An assumption could then be made that every level of association that was observed whether it be through qualitative or quantitative means suggests that some relationship was present. For statistical purposes, levels of significance mean very little since inference is not intended to be made. Yet, levels of significance were reported in the primary quantitative analyses since some would argue that they do provide some descriptive insight to these weights of association. However, such levels need to be seen as only nominally insightful to what the primary purpose of what this research is trying to accomplish.

5. An additional logistic regression analysis was performed to test for an interaction effect between anomie and social support. The multiplicative term ( $B = -.753$ ) suggests that there is an interaction effect. This further analysis revealed that social ties/support is an underlying factor in law abiding versus law breaking behavior. As suggested by the qualitative findings, the multiplicative term implies that as the level of social support goes up, the effect of anomie goes down in relation to law breaking behavior. This additional analysis further confirms the theoretical propositions and qualitative findings, and is consistent with, and supports, the multiple regression findings. Indeed, for this study group, social support appears to be an important buffer between anomie and unlawful behavior. However, as reported in the original model, rehabilitation/counseling, age, and anomie still appear to have the greatest influence on law abiding versus law breaking players for this particular study group.

6. A supplemental logistic regression analysis was performed including the variable player status (former versus current players) in order to see if this had an influence on player arrests. The findings suggest that there is some level of influence ( $B = -.231$ ). In essence, current (younger) players appear more likely to be arrested. This seems to confirm the results from the original analysis in which age appeared to have a significant influence on arrests (the younger the player, the more likely he was to have been arrested). The same basic trend was found. This binary variable (former versus current players) was also added in supplemental analyses to all other models. In each model the analysis suggests that player status does have a slight influence on player arrests. Again, this in conjunction with age appears to represent that younger players are more likely to be arrested. More importantly, these additional analyses suggest that the maturation process of players is an important element regarding player arrests. Further exploration of this factor should be considered in future research.
  
7. An additional OLS regression analysis was calculated in order to compare the findings from the stepwise regression analysis. Similarly to the original model, this model explained 71% of the variance in the anomie scale variable. Also, as found in the stepwise regression analysis, social ties/support, wealth/aspiration, level of happiness, early socialization, and income after NFL still appear to have the greatest influence on anomie. The findings were virtually identical.



8. An additional stepwise regression analysis was performed using the individual binary variables that, in the original model, were included in the social ties/support and early socialization indices. This supplementary analysis was run in order to verify the findings from the original analysis. In essence, the same basic trend was found. Wealth/aspiration (-.336), level of happiness (-.263), education (-.195) (social ties/support), location (.182) (early socialization), and religion (-.148) (social ties/support) appeared to have the greatest influence on anomie. This model explained 70 % of the variance in the anomie scale. Also, an additional OLS regression analysis was performed using the binary variables that were included in the indices. Again, the same fundamental trend was found. Most importantly, for purposes of this initial, exploratory research, general trends were being investigated quantitatively since they were present in the qualitative data. This additional breakdown of variables gives further support for “general trends” observed both qualitatively and quantitatively.