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Contact: Dr. Eric Carter
Phone: 502-863-7968
Email: eric_carter@georgetowncollege.edu

New Study: Does Religious Faith and Participation Reduce Bad Behavior Among NFL Players?

GEORGETOWN, Ky. – The 2014 NFL season has been engulfed by dialogue surrounding the deviance and unlawful behavior of many high profile NFL players. Recently, there have been a number of players linked to deviance and illegal behavior ranging from breaches of ethics to substance abuse to domestic violence to child abuse. Important questions regarding what might mitigate this bad behavior have sparked a national debate not only in the NFL but in the media and public as well.

Do faith and religious participation actually buffer deviant and illegal behavior?

Recent research from two sociologists and a sports writer reveals that for a sample of 104 NFL players, faith and participation in a religious community actually deter deviant and illegal behavior. Lead researcher Dr. Eric Carter, associate professor of sociology from Georgetown (Ky.) College and author of the book “Boys Gone Wild: Fame, Fortune, and Deviance Among Professional Football Players,” along with Dr. Michael Carter, professor of sociology and president of Campbellsville (Ky.) University, and Mike May, independent sports writer and communications consultant in the sports industry (based in Wellington, Florida), found that religious behavior reduces deviant and law-breaking behavior and increases happiness and well-being among NFL players who agreed to participate in the study.

“While this study doesn’t allow us to generalize to the entire NFL population, it does encourage additional research into the role of religion as an important support and integrative mechanism for professional athletes negotiating the balance of instant fame and wealth, well-being, and lawful behavior,” said Dr. Eric Carter.

According to research congruent with Carter’s findings from “Boys Gone Wild,” players appear to have a higher probability of engaging in deviant, unethical, or illegal behavior when they are less integrated into a religious community.

“We suggest, for these players, religion provides the necessary social and emotional support for success and happiness in the anxious and uncertain social context of the NFL,” said Dr. Michael Carter.

This research currently appears in Volume 1 (1, Pages 31-32) of *Catholic Today: Sports and Entertainment*, “[Does Religion Impact the Lives of NFL Players?](#)” and is forthcoming in Volume 2 (2) of the *Journal of Sociology and Social Work*, “Anomie, Deviance, and the Religious Factor: Data from 104 NFL Players.”

Dr. Eric Carter can be contacted at Georgetown College, Department of Sociology, 400 E. College St., Georgetown, KY 40324.