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The Decline in Baseball Participation Amongst African American Youth

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The Decline in Baseball Participation Amongst African American Youth

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Abstract

The basis for this thesis was to study the decline in baseball participation amongst African American youth through the lens of social learning theory. This was done in conjunction with interviews with 10 young African American non-baseball players, ages 11-13, who resided in an urban setting in a northeastern city. Because of the paucity of African Americans in Major League Baseball today, social learning theory, a philosophy heavily predicated on the influence of role models, was seen as a viable concept for this study.

The results of the study indicated that baseball is not a primary sport for this demographic, as basketball and football have catapulted in popularity. Much of this can be attributed to the influence of siblings, parents, video games, professional basketball and football role models, exposure to certain leisure activities, and a lack of action, an aspect of sports that entices many of today's youth. As a result, baseball cannot come close to offering the amount of African American role models sports like basketball and football can. There also appears to be a connection between favorite athlete and participation in that sport. Thus, if baseball does not have enough marketable athletes to entice the young African American community, its popularity will take a backseat to sports that provide such.

Chapter I- Introduction

Twenty-seven percent of Major League Baseball players in 1975 were African American (Comeaux and Harrison, 2004). However, that number has since dwindled significantly. By 1999, only 13% of the league's players were African American (Lapchick, 2010). In 2007, it dipped to just 8.2% (Lapchick, 2010). While those totals have increased over the last three seasons, the lack of an African American presence is still a significant issue (Lapchick, 2010).

This study used the concepts of Social Learning Theory, in addition to interviews with young, inner city African American male athletes to determine the underlying causes that have led to a decrease in baseball participation amongst this group. Prior studies have proposed that it is not culturally acceptable for African Americans to participate in baseball (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Ogden & Rose, 2005). Meanwhile, basketball and football have emerged in popularity amongst the African American community (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Rein & Shields, 2007). Others have cited socialization factors such as parental involvement (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Harris, 1994; Ogden, 2002; Phillip, 1999), the mass media (Wilson & Sparks, 1993), peer influence (Phillip, 1998), and a lack of role model persuasion (Castine & Roberts, 1974; Rein & Shields, 2007) as detriments. A lack of resources can also be a constraint for African Americans looking to play the sport (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Ogden, 2000; Ogden, 2002; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Ogden & Rose, 2005). By exploring this concern through the lens of Social Learning Theory, this study will offer an understanding of the reasons young

African American males have for not choosing to play baseball, once an immensely popular sport for the demographic.

Historical Perspective

Baseball became increasingly popular in America after the Civil War, in particular amongst working class men of diverse backgrounds (Coakley, 2007). The first professional league was formed in 1871 with the National Association (Rubinstein, 2003). However, the game was segregated. Because African American teams were not permitted in mainstream major and minor leagues, they formed their own leagues, both at the amateur and professional level (Lanctot, 2008).

There was no law in major league baseball that forbade African Americans from participating. Instead, an unwritten rule existed amongst owners to keep African Americans off the playing fields. "American baseball was a conservatively-run game that did not welcome innovation. Invariably, the owners of Major League clubs reflected traditional values and were opposed to radical experiments of any kind" (Rubinstein, 2003, p. 3).

In 1947, the Brooklyn Dodgers became the first Major League Baseball team to integrate with the signing of Negro League star Jackie Robinson (Harnischfeger & Corey, 2010). Despite the barrage of insults and taunts from fans, Robinson won Rookie of the Year honors, and the Dodgers secured the pennant (Rubinstein, 2003). Over the next decade, many of the Negro League's prominent players followed suit. By the end of the 1950s, every Major League Team had at least one African American. As players began to exponentially make the jump to the majors, the Negro Leagues crumbled (Rubinstein, 2003). Major League Baseball continued to thrive. "By the mid-1950s, black stars such

as Willie Mays were among the most visible in the game" (Rubinstein, 2003, p. 6).

Seventeen percent of major league players in 1959 were African American (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004). Not only were African Americans continuing to play baseball in the major leagues in the 60s and 70s, they were very good at it. From 1950-70, an African American won the Most Valuable Player Award in the National League 16 times ("Situation report: sport," 1970). From a financial standpoint, they were also successful. In 1970, four of the six players in Major League Baseball who made over $125,000 per year were African American ("Situation report: sport," 1970). Participation numbers continued to increase before peaking in 1975 (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004).

However, the idea of young African Americans viewing baseball as the lone sport to pursue a career in came to a halt. It began to change in the 1970s and 80s as basketball and football gained prominence and more exposure (McNary, 2006). Baseball began to gradually lag in competition. "Baseball, once the top choice for black fans in America, was now a distinct third, maybe lower, and it seemed the Major Leagues weren't too concerned" (McNary, 2006, p. 88).

Major League Baseball began to attract other minorities, in particular Latin Americans, as teams used those counties to extract talent (Thibault, 2009). Academies were constructed to detect and develop prospects. The idea was to invest little for a high reward. Breton (2000) spoke with an executive with a team in the major leagues who was quoted as saying, "Instead of signing four [American] guys at $25,000 each, you sign 20 [Dominican] guys for $5,000 each" (Breton, 2000, p. 13).

Steadily, the investments showed as the number of Latino players in Major League Baseball increased dramatically, while American players, both Caucasian and

African American, declined. In 1990, 70% of the league was Caucasian; 17% were African American, and just 13% were Latino (Lapchick, 2010). Ten years later, Caucasians made up just 60% of the league, while African American totals dropped to 13% (Lapchick, 2010). The Latino number, however, doubled to 26% (Lapchick, 2010).

In 2001, the Seattle Mariners inked a contract with outfielder Ichiro Suzuki. He became the first non-pitcher to sign with a major league team. As a result of his success, teams began to heavily scout Asian players (Blenkinsopp, 2002). While players had contractual obligations to their teams in Japan and South Korea, the obstacles were not too difficult for major league teams to obtain the players they desired (Blenkinsopp, 2002). Again, much like it did with players from the Negro Leagues and Latin America, teams embraced the low-risk, high-reward approach in signing these players. This time, it put a greater dent in African American representation in Major League Baseball. In 2007, the league was comprised of 31% international players and 29.1% Latino (Lapchick, 2010). However, the African American total, which was at 13% just seven years earlier, dropped to 8.2% (Lapchick, 2010).

Social Learning Theory Overview

Social learning theory is based on the concept that individuals, particularly youth, observe models, whether parental or other outside influences, and develop similar trains of thought and/or act in a similar fashion. Through observational learning, people behave through imitation of those in their surroundings (Bandura, 1977). "Except for elementary reflexes, people are not equipped with inborn repertoires of behavior. They must learn them. New response patterns can be acquired either by direct experience or by observation" (Bandura, 1977, p. 16).

Albert Bandura, considered one of the pioneers of social learning theory, proposed three primary components to the theory: modeling, vicarious learning, and imitation (Bandura, 1977). Models are the source of a character's ability to learn. Without that relationship, observers lack the capacity to make necessary cognitive digestions. To support this, Bandura stated "if children had no opportunity to hear the utterances of models, it would be virtually impossible to teach them the linguistic skills that constitute a language" (Bandura, 1977, p. 12.).

Vicarious learning, also known as observational learning, follows. During this period, the observer forms thoughts on how the newly observed actions are carried out (Bandura, 1977). In the future, those examinations operate as a guide for behavior. Bandura specialized in research where children, upon witnessing violent behaviors, imitated the actions. One experiment that he performed involved three different conditions. In one, children witnessed their role models being sternly reprimanded for their actions. In another, children witnessed their role models receive food and other forms of praise for their behavior. In the third, no reactions were given to the role models (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Later, a post-test revealed that those who saw the reprimanding result were drastically less likely to emulate their role models' actions than those in the other two conditions (Bandura & Walters, 1963). He concluded that aggressive behavior was less prevalent in youth after observing their role models being scolded for such behavior.

Imitation encompasses the act of carrying out the product of the observation. In order for social learning to be fulfilled, imitation is required (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Without that "final test", there is not a way to determine if social learning has in fact

taken place. It is evident that social learning has occurred when the observer begins to duplicate its model's actions and/or thoughts without their presence. By performing that task, the process has come to fruition. For example, if a child watches a television program that advertises a particular cereal and is influenced to consume the product, then follows through with the action on its own, social learning has taken place.

     Social learning theory is integral to this study because people tend to get involved with sports through the influence of role models. Parents, peers, the mass media, and public figures play prominent roles in an individual's decision to engage in athletic competition (Castine & Roberts, 1974; Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Harris, 1994; Ogden, 2002; Phillip, 1998; Phillip, 1999; Rein & Shields, 2007; Wilson & Sparks, 1993). According to Harris (1994), African Americans can identify with sports well because athletics, along with entertainment, are two of the preeminent areas to find role models. Role models are essential to the development of African American youth and can have a considerable influence on the individual's athletic career. To an extent, social learning theory can play a role in explicating the gradual decline in African American baseball participation. Because those numbers have sloped downward over time, social learning theory's explanation of imitation through role models provides a plausible perspective in explaining why African Americans are not *currently* playing baseball.

     Several authors have examined reasons for the lack of African American role models in baseball. Numerous studies have indicated that it is not culturally acceptable for African Americans to participate in baseball (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Ogden & Rose, 2005). Meanwhile, basketball and football have emerged in popularity amongst the African American

community (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Rein & Shields, 2007). Others have cited socialization factors such as parental involvement (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Harris, 1994; Ogden, 2002; Phillip, 1999;), the mass media (Wilson & Sparks, 1993), peer influence (Phillip, 1998), and a lack of role model persuasion (Castine & Roberts, 1974; Rein & Shields, 2007) as detriments. A lack of resources can also be a constraint for African Americans looking to play the sport (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Ogden, 2000; Ogden, 2002; Ogden & Hilt, 2003;; Ogden & Rose, 2005).

Social learning theory can be tied to these explanations. Role models are the crux of the theory in and of itself. If basketball and football provide an abundance of role models, they have a distinct advantage in obtaining youth interest. It does not have to come by way of personnel, either. If parents and siblings have gravitated to these sports and outwardly demonstrate their support via participation, verbiage, or through audio/visual consumption, children are likely to emulate those interests. If that is the case, it would support Bandura's claim that observational learning is reinforced better when the role model communicates to the observer the benefits of embracing their behavior (Bandura, 1977).

It is the intent of this study to examine what sports provide the most role models, along with the reasons that young African Americans are drawn to them. It also seeks to investigate the role of family members in the decision to participate in sports. The results of this study can be used as a framework to boost interest in baseball for the African American community. For example, if other sports have provided more visibility of superstars that African American youth feel they can relate to, perhaps the current model being used Major League Baseball needs to be modified. If parents are the primary

influence in the participant's lives, and they are apathetic toward baseball, officials should focus on implementing its marketing strategy to that demographic. It could be a matter of television visibility or more efficient ways of promoting baseball's African American stars. Regardless, this study seeks examine these influences and provide a basis for recommendations to improve interest in what was once the most popular sport for African Americans.

Research Question

With the emergence of the National Negro League, baseball was the top spectator sport for African Americans in the 1920s (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004). In what is known as the barnstorming period of the Negro Leagues, star players like Leroy "Satchel" Paige and Joe "Smokey" Williams would attract thousands of fans when traveling across the country (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004). Their success motivated young African Americans to participate in the sport. The results were clearly evident as an increasing number of African Americans joined Major League Baseball over the next several decades.

Conversely, since the mid-1970s, African American participation in professional baseball has considerably declined. By 2007, only 8.2% of the league's opening rosters were of African American descent (Lapchick, 2010). While the league has made substantial strides with respect to overall diversity, much of that can be attributed to the influx of Latino and international players (Lapchick, 2010). Meanwhile, African American players still hold a sizeable majority in both the NBA and NFL (Lapchick, 2010). Such a dearth of participation is also reflected at the collegiate level. According

to the NCAA's 2008-09 student-athlete ethnicity report, only 4.2% of baseball players at the Division I, II, and III levels combined were African American (NCAA, 2010).

It is hypothesized that the same occurrence is evident at youth levels. Major League Baseball has recognized this issue and instituted the "Reviving Baseball in the Inner City" program. Totals from 2010 indicate that of the junior program, which represents ages 12-and-under, 48% of participants are African American (Lapchick, 2010). However, in the teenage years, there is a drop-off (D. James, personal communication, November 9, 2010). By exploring this concern, this study will offer an understanding of the reasons young African American males have for not electing to play baseball, once an immensely popular sport for that demographic.

Purpose

Baseball has gone from being one of the most accepted activities amongst African Americans to an afterthought. It is evident at the major league level, as African American participation has dipped below 10% in six of the last seven seasons (Lapchick. 2010). College baseball has seen a similar outcome, which leads to a trickle-down effect to youth levels.

The influence of socialization is essential in explaining one's decision to play sports. Because of that, the purpose of this research was to explain the drop-off in baseball participation after the age of 12. In addition, this study seeks to determine whether or not socialization factors such as role models, parental involvement, peer influence, and the mass media play a significant role in the downward slope of African American baseball participation. And if so, to what extent does each factor play in the decline?

Chapter II- Literature Review

The literature review will highlight prior research that investigates the lack of African American participation in baseball. Because most youth organizations do not track the race or ethnicity of their players, a reasonable estimate of how many African Americans are playing baseball is inconceivable. A viable rationalization for the decrease in baseball participation at youth levels has come at the expense of basketball (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Ogden & Rose, 2005) and its absorption of African American culture. Social learning theory, based on the idea that humans are influenced by role models in their lives (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963), can also provide insight to the subject matter. Specifically, socialization factors such as parental involvement, external role models, and media and peer influence, can fall under the social learning theory tree (Castine & Roberts, 1974; Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Harris, 1994; Ogden, 2002; Phillip, 1999; Rein & Shields, 2007; Wilson & Sparks, 1993). These topics, along with the hefty socioeconomic factors that are involved with baseball, have all been proposed toward explaining the issue.

This study will focus heavily on the angles of social learning theory and analyze whether or not it provides a reasonable rationalization in explaining the decrease in baseball participation amongst African American youth. Through words and actions, parents shape their children during their early years. As children develop, so do those patterns and behaviors, while also absorbing new ones (Hultsman, 1993). Hence, parents are the primary role models in the early of stages of a child's life and exude the most influence when it comes to imitating actions and conveyance of beliefs. (Bandura, 1977).

As children become more exposed to outside influences, they accrue additional role models, such as teachers, coaches, and even peers. In fact, Hultsman (1993), ranked peer influence as the second-greatest reason factor in youth participation amongst recreational activities. In addition, highly publicized individuals, particularly the successful ones, can also both intentionally and unintentionally induce imitation (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Sharing similarities with those role models can enhance their influence (Bandura, 1977). By watching them succeed, the observed results can be just as effective as direct experience with those consequences (Bandura, 1977). Much of this can be attributed to the emergence of mass media, which serves as a conduit for these influences and can enhance that message.

The rise and fall of baseball amongst African Americans

It is important to understand the relationship between baseball and African Americans over the years. Historically, baseball was seen as the primary sport for African Americans (Lanctot, 2008). Ogden and Rose (2005) point out that, in many cases, the day-to-day activities of African Americans revolved around baseball in the early twentieth century. It wasn't out of the ordinary for church services to be re-scheduled to accommodate important games on Sunday afternoons (Ogden & Rose, 2005). Negro League baseball was also an avenue for African American entrepreneurship. As African American businesses grew, there was more of an opportunity to invest in baseball (Lanctot, 2008). The sport became more prevalent, and with the help of African American entrepreneurs, teams and leagues began to grow. "In the pre-television era, traveling teams brought a higher level of baseball to fans in the towns and cities of America" (Tygiel, 1992, p. 25).

World War II helped stimulate the sport, especially for African Americans. It created jobs, which spurred the economy (Lanctot, 2008). Attendance at Negro League games even surpassed those in the major leagues (Rubinstein, 2003). "[Major] league officials could not help but be encouraged by the earlier example of World War I, which had provided a major stimulus to black baseball by expanding the attendance base and economically stabilizing the black population," (Lanctot, 2008, p. 98). Baseball's success was a benefit to the communities, as local businesses also profited from increased attendance at games. "In Kansas City and other towns, games became social events" (Tygiel, 1992, p. 25).

The 1950s brought about significant change to baseball at the expense of the Negro League (Fort & Maxcy, 2001; Lanctot, 2008; Tygiel, 1992). The dwindling of the league's talent-base was the catalyst in its downfall. Most important, its talent-base began to dwindle (Fort & Maxcy, 2001; Lanctot, 2008). After the success of stars like Jackie Robinson, major league baseball continued to sign the Negro League's best players. Even rising stars like "John Roseboro, Maury Wills, and Frank Robinson" (Lanctot, 2008, p. 367) bypassed playing in the Negro Leagues and went straight to the majors, abating what was once a league flush with talent (Lanctot, 2008). As a result, the Negro League competition itself became less enticing to its fan base (Fort & Maxcy, 2001; Lanctot, 2008; Rubinstein, 2003; Tygiel, 1992). "People wanted to go Brooklynites," recalls Monarch pitcher Hilton Smith. "Even if we were playing here in Kansas City, people wanted to go over to St. Louis to see Jackie" (Tygiel, 1992, p. 27).

Fort & Maxcy (2001) proposed that this was more a case of Major League Baseball trying to eliminate a competing entity, as opposed to an attempt to showcase some of America's best African American players.

> MLB unabashedly raided AAB, offering paltry compensation, if any, when players jumped existing AAB contracts. And AAB could not fight back because the talent raiding was a one-way street, and their only other outlet, White minor league baseball, was completely locked up by MLB. As a result, not a single owner of an AAB team was offered any sort of cheap access to MLB through franchise purchase or expansion. Instead, great players were simply skimmed off the top, and the rest were left to fade away with their leagues (Fort & Maxcy, 2001, p. 36).

Just four teams remained in 1953 (Tygiel, 1992). The Negro League was in such dire straits that its best players made their money through barnstorming (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Fort & Maxcy, 2001; Jackson, 2009; Tygiel, 1992). After the season, the league's best players would team up to play popular exhibition games across the country (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Fort & Maxcy, 2001; Jackson, 2009; Tygiel, 1992). However, that novelty wore off by the end of the 1950's (Jackson, 2009).

Sports writers such as Wendell Smith, one of the most powerful figures in the industry, championed the idea of integration as advancement for African Americans as a whole (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Lamb, 2009; Lanctot; 2008). Smith lambasted Major League Baseball, saying that young African American males could fight against discrimination overseas during time of war but faced their own battle back home when it came to baseball (Lamb, 2009). Even though he was at odds with Major League

Baseball, Smith felt the league would at its top form with the inclusion of African Americans (Lamb, 2009; Lanctot; 2008). His call for integration was influential in swaying African American public opinion, which did not help the Negro League's cause (Lanctot, 2008).

Basketball's emergence as a staple of African American culture

As years passed, basketball began to supplant baseball as the chief sport for African Americans. In fact, its popularity grew so much that many African Americans would now deem it a fixture of their culture (B. Savage, personal communication, March 4, 2011). The assimilation of this culture originates at the youth level and is cultivated during adolescence. Harrison, Harrison, and Moore (2002) claim that when young African Americans begin to define their identities, they lean toward partaking in activities that are marked for their culture.

> Participation in sports or physical activities that identify the individuals 'blackness' are likely sought in an effort to completely immerse themselves in 'blackness'. Physical activities that are identified as 'white' may be shunned even if the individual shows potential for outstanding performance in the sport or activity (Harrison et al. 2002, p. 124).

Leisure activities can correlate with an identity of a group (de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2008). Comeaux and Harrison (2004) proposed basketball as an activity that is marked for young African American culture and suggest that being a successful basketball player can score popularity points in the community. For young African American male athletes, "exuberant expressions that are either vocalized or produced through the body

are more culturally accepted and prevalent in football and basketball, as opposed to baseball" (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004, p. 72).

It is not uncommon to see basketball courts portrayed in an urban setting (Ogden & Hilt, 2003). For African Americans, these courts are seen as "sanctuaries of resistance and self-determination in an otherwise oppressive and hostile inner city" (Ogden & Hilt, 2003, p. 217). Basketball, thus, has become the quintessential sport for that form of African American expression (Ogden & Hilt, 2003). As a result, many young African Americans produce a swagger to champion their culture in response to outside oppression (Hurt, 1996). This takes place on basketball courts in the playgrounds, not baseball diamonds (Hurt, 1996).

Mass media and popular culture's persuasion of basketball as a cultural norm

When evaluating social learning theory, mass media is a significant component. Per Bandura and Walters (1963), "audiovisual mass media are extremely influential sources of social behavior patterns" (Bandura & Walters, 1963, p. 49). Even though that statement was published almost 50 years ago, it still has credence today, as watching television and playing video games have become prominent leisure activities. As a result, the exponential enlargement of the mass media has made it one of the biggest venues for role modeling. "Models presented in televised form are so effective in capturing attention that viewers learn much of what they see without requiring any special incentives to do so" (Bandura, 1977, p. 25).

Companies and even sports enterprises themselves have utilized their marketable African American players to garner interest and business from black youth (Wilson & Sparks, 1993). Not only did the NBA align with Disney in the early 1990s in an effort to

combine the two entities to sell merchandise, Nike paired Michael Jordan with Bugs

Bunny for commercials (McDonald, 1996). "By the 1990s, the NBA had been

successfully 'Disneyfied'. The complete reversal of financial fortunes included a

complete line of commodities: NBA licensed caps, jerseys, t-shirts, basketballs, videos,

etc." (McDonald, 1996, p. 349). Examples like this, incorporating, an NBA star with

Disney cartoon characters, had a positive effect on luring not just youth in general, but

young African Americans, to basketball.

Wilson and Sparks (1993) found that young African Americans cited apparel such

as basketball jerseys and sneakers as cultural norms, which aid toward fitting in with

society. It also helps to form African American male identity (Ogden & Hilt, 2003). Star

African American athletes, most of which play basketball, have become cultural icons to

the community (Ogden, 2002). In Wilson and Sparks' (1993) study, young males were

said to be enticed by the performance of stars like Jordan and former slam dunk contest

winner Dee Brown. They wanted to emulate those players by performing in a similar

fashion and wearing apparel that those players endorsed. "The importance of having

'athlete-endorsed' apparel is crucial for these youth, and within the peer group, owning

this apparel gave these youth a sense of cultural power and belonging" (Wilson & Sparks,

1993, p. 421).

> On Philadelphia playgrounds, kids and young adults of all ages wore
>
> [Allen] Iverson number three jerseys. Not only that, countless wore long,
>
> protective sleeves on their left arms, from their biceps to just below their
>
> wrists. Iverson, of course, had played the entire season like that to protect

a still-tender surgically repaired elbow. Yet, because he had, the sleeve

had been adopted as an inner-city style statement. (Platt, 2002, p. 9)

Per Wilson and Sparks' (1993) study, the NBA also scored points with young

African Americans via a television advertisement starring former Golden State Warriors

teammates Chris Webber and Latrell Sprewell. The pair hung out in a barbershop and

talked trash on other players (Wilson & Sparks, 1993). The commercial was a hit, as it

seemed to resonate with African Americans, who hold barbershops as sacred in similar

fashion (Wilson & Sparks, 1993). The NBA successfully used this idea to capitalize on a

staple of African American male culture such as the barbershop, and used it to enhance

the sport's marketability amongst the demographic.

In recent years, urban panache has also been commercialized through video

games (Giardina & Donnelly, 2008). The NBA Street series has successfully merged

playground basketball and NBA players to further connect to young African American

youth (Giardina & Donnelly, 2008). Even baseball versions of video games can take

precedence over participation in the sport. Ogden (2002) interviewed youth baseball

coaches in the Midwest to dissect the lack of participation on the sandlots. Some coaches

pointed to the emergence of the video game culture, claiming that players are more

intrigued by playing virtual editions of baseball as opposed to the real thing (Ogden,

2002). All of this supports Bandura's claim that "both children and adults acquire

attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through filmed and televised

modeling" (Bandura, 1977, p. 39). People interpret reality through what they consume

from mass media, making it a high-powered influential tool.

Basketball and hip-hop: a holy alliance

According to Watkins (2007), hip-hop has become the most noticeable staple of youth culture across the globe. "It is the voice of the streets" (Watkins, 2007, p. 63). Because of that and its popularity in the inner city, basketball's partnership with hip-hop has also played an influential role in the development of the African American athlete (Harrison et al., 2002). Like sports, hip-hop is also seen as an avenue for African American expression against an unjust society (Cunningham, 2009; Hurt, 1996). Hurt (1996) saw a similarity in expression between hip-hop videos and actions on the basketball court. He claimed that the way African Americans sneer at opponents on the courts and in hip-hop videos illustrated "a fashion that is exclusive to black male culture" (Hurt, 1996, p. 107).

Much of the marriage between basketball and hip-hop can be attributed to former NBA star Allen Iverson. The flashy guard came from a poor area in Newport News, Virginia and his playground-style of play fascinated the masses. He was lightning-quick, had a killer crossover, and was relentless when it came to physical contact, even though he was a shade under six-feet tall. His physical appearance, ripe with tattoos and cornrows, only further invigorated the hip hop community and its youth (Harrison et al., 2002).

> [Iverson] defied the sports punditocracy and NBA old guard with the tattoos and by catalyzing a youth culture trend as the first basketball star to braid his hair in cornrows, a style prevalent among black prison inmates. The sportswriters and league elders alike were used to athletes, from Julius Erving to Michael Jordan, who subscribed to their middle class 'role model' mores; they were mystified by Iverson's in-your-face persona. It

was a classic culture clash; they saw Iverson as a basketball player, when,

in fact, he had already transcended his sport and become a hip-hop icon.

(Platt, 2002, p. 7)

Iverson's brash attitude was also a catalyst toward his popularity (Cunningham, 2009; Harrison et al., 2002). His aversion toward team practices was widely reported. He often traveled with a group of childhood friends and also dabbled in the rap business (Cunningham, 2009; Harrison et al., 2002). All of this, according to Harrison et al., was seen as a form of "openly defying European American authority" (Harrison et al., 2002, 131). This further symbolized basketball as a form of revolt, a major sell to African American youth.

The previous generations of ballplayers, from Erving to Jordan, embodied

the integrationist vision found in the politics of their day and were made

over for the comfort of white America, even while Madison Avenue

marketed the likes of Joe Namath and John McEnroe as revels in the

tradition of James Dean and Elvis. They had to make concessions Iverson

would never consider. Erving, for instance, cut his trademark Afro in

1979 when he decided he wanted to be a businessman…Now comes

Iverson's story, containing the four elements that characterize the

generation of black youth that came of age during the Reagan eighties:

basketball, rap, dope dealing, and the ethic of 'getting paid. (Platt, 2002, p.

7)

Basketball: a ticket to social mobility

Role models are a necessity in the social learning process. Those that are seen in a positive manner have a greater impact on the observer. People are more likely to follow their model's footsteps if the outcomes are positive (Bandura, 1977). If there are negative consequences from a role model's behavior, more than likely, the observer will not model that action or thought (Bandura, 1977).

In addition, Bandura (1977) offered that people in higher status are more likely to be emulated in comparison to those of lower status. "The behavior of models who have gained distinction is more likely to be successful, and hence to have greater functional values for observers, than that of models who are relatively low in vocational, intellectual, or social competence" (Bandura, 1977, p. 89). For the person who isn't incredibly knowledgeable about a given field, this plays a major role in their socialization to that area. "As a general rule, seeing behavior succeed for others increases the tendency to behave in similar ways" (Bandura, 1977, p. 117). Observing such actions not only informs the observer but can also serve as a tool for motivation (Bandura, 1977).

This all relates to basketball's influence on young African Americans, as the sport is often viewed as a conduit for social mobility (Ogden & Hilt, 2003). Direct social mobility can occur when an individual from a lower class upbringing uses sports as an avenue to acquire wealth and status in life (Cunningham & Singer, 2010). Basketball is perceived as the sport that African Americans can use as a means to get out of the inner city and become successful (Ogden & Hilt, 2003). Seeing hoops stars like Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett, and Dwight Howard effectively leap from high school to the NBA has only exacerbated that belief. African American youth are easily influenced by those success stories and strive to behave in similar fashion.

However, it may not be a realistic goal. Oftentimes, it can be deceiving (Wilson & Sparks, 1993). Kellner (1996) pointed to Michael Jordan, who epitomized "the fantasy that anyone can make it in the society of competition and status, that one can climb the class ladder and overcome the limitations of race and class" (Kellner, 1996, p. 462).

Baseball has not been able to compete with the likes of basketball and football in regards to the vision of social mobility. Even though the NBA no longer allows players to go right to the league following high school, and the NCAA mandates that football players spend at least three years in college, the perception amongst African American youth in the inner city is that it is much easier to succeed in those sports than baseball with its extensive minor league system (L. M. Carpenter, personal communication, February 18, 2011). Ogden (2000) pointed to the lack of scholarships available for baseball as another deterrent. Division I baseball programs are only allowed to offer 11.7 scholarships for what is typically a 35-player roster (J. Penders, personal communication, November 18, 2009). This only hurts lower-income students.

> It's a travesty, really, if you look at how lily white our sport has become at the college level and even in professional baseball. It's very white American. I think the negative is that there are minorities who are poor and raised in this country and can't get to the highest levels of baseball. College baseball has a lot to do with that. The kids that can afford to come to school are the ones that we wind up recruiting to come [to UConn]. (J. Penders, personal communication, November 18, 2009)

Parental and peer influence

In the early stages of a child's life, family members, particularly parents, serve as the predominate role models (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Interaction with family members is often the gateway to the development of one's socialization (James, 2001).

According to Bandura and Walters (1963), certain lessons in life cannot be learned by reading instructions or even through verbiage. They are absorbed through extensive observation, followed with imitation and aid of a role model (Bandura & Walters, 1963). As an example, Bandura and Walters (1963) cited that it would not be wise for a parent to let a young teenager learn how to drive a vehicle by way of "trial and error" (Bandura & Walters, 1963, p. 52). The teenager should spend considerable time learning the nuances from their role model, then gradually practice with their help. This leads to the belief that through practice and observation with a close role model, an individual can successfully succeed at a given activity. From a sports perspective, it would be a disadvantage for children to try to learn a certain sport on their own. It would be to their benefit if the parent spent time to guide and teach them the sport.

Imitation does not always occur as a result of verbal lessons, either (Bandura & Walters, 1963). When growing up, children often use their toys to imitate actions of their parents. While watching a father repair home appliances, young males with toys that resemble tools will often try to emulate those actions (Bandura & Walters, 1963). In a sports sense, if a child sees one of their parents playing a certain sport, they are more likely to want to emulate them using that type of equipment. For example, if it's basketball, they may crave a mini hoop and ball. If it's baseball, they may want a mini glove or bat of their own. Not only will children imitate these behaviors with their toys, they'll accrue "characteristic or idiosyncratic parental patterns of response, including

attitudes, mannerisms, gestures, and even voice inflections, which the parents have certainly never attempted directly to teach" (Bandura & Walters, 1963, p. 48).

Thus, parental involvement is exceptionally important in examining the decline of African American youth baseball. Hultsman (1993) studied outside influences being obstructers to adolescent recreational activities and argued that parental influence was the greatest of all sources in a child's development when it came to selecting or foregoing a leisure activity. The results showed that 76.1% of the students in the study cited parental influence as a reason for not joining an activity (Hultsman, 1993). Harris (1994) contended "participation and/or interest in sports by parents is often one of the antecedents of sport participation by children" (Harris, 1994, p. 40).

Comeaux and Harrison (2004) polled young African American males to gauge their perception of baseball. Sixty-six percent said their parents had an influence in the decision to play or not (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004). Sixty-five percent of participants whose main sport was basketball and 96% whose main sport was football said the main authority figure in their lives played and preferred basketball or football, as opposed to just 42% with baseball (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004).

Specifically for African Americans, Phillip's (1999) study had adults rank leisure activities that they felt were important for their children to participate in. Of the 20 activities, playing basketball scored the third highest behind going to a museum and the zoo. Because parents have such an important role in the socialization of their children, it can be said that their approval of certain sports can be reciprocated by their offspring (Harris, 1994).

Race can also play an integral role in parental influence (Phillip, 1999). The history of racial discrimination in America can lead toward African Americans not feeling comfortable sharing activities with European Americans (Phillip, 1999). As a result, there can be a carryover effect in their child's selection of leisure patterns. Phillip's (1999) studies concluded that lower-class African Americans were more likely to be apprehensive toward activities with European Americans, while middle-class and above were less resistant. African Americans tend to diagnose certain activities and settings in terms of acceptance (Phillip, 1999). Consequently, leisure preferences can be affected (Phillip, 1999). Hence, if African American parents or guardians look down on a certain leisure activity due to racial discomfort, their children will likely develop the same beliefs and attitudes and be less incline to partake in the activity. This does not appear to be an issue with basketball, as it collected the highest mean score for activities in which African American adults felt welcome (Phillip, 1999).

Ogden and Rose (2005) inferred that Caucasian-laden crowds at major league baseball games may lead to African Americans feeling unwelcome. Their study analyzed crowd shots at major league games and claimed an overwhelmingly small amount of solely African American shots, as opposed to an abundance of Caucasian-only shots (Ogden & Rose, 2005). This advanced the thought that African Americans are aware of the Caucasian-driven atmosphere, which can make the activity uncomfortable.

As a child grows and becomes exposed to peers, its model base widens (Bandura, 1969). When it comes to leisure activities, peers have a plethora of influence on each other because they spend more time with each other compared to parents or coaches (Phillip, 1998). Since peer groups are normally friends, they also tend to share the same

interests (Phillip, 1998). In a study to determine whether race or gender play factors in adolescent peer leisure choices, basketball was ranked as the top activity (Phillip, 1998). Peer influence may have played a role, as 45.6% of African American males claimed to spend between three and four hours a day outside of school with their friends. Thirty-seven percent also said that their friends had a strong influence on their decision of leisure activity.

Outside role models

As children evolve, role models extend outside of family or peers. According to Harris (1994), African Americans can identify with sports well because that and entertainment are two of the best avenues to find role models. Observers who can identify well with their models and share similarities are more likely to emulate them (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Ogden and Hilt (2003) point to the profusion of African American role models in basketball coupled with the lack thereof in baseball as another detriment to participation on the diamonds. At 77%, the NBA has the highest percentage of African Americans of the four major sports in America (Lapchick, 2010).

In 2010, the Harris Poll ran a survey to figure out America's favorite athletes. Three basketball players made the top-10, including Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant, who finished tied for first with golfing sensation Tiger Woods (Corso, 2010). Even Michael Jordan, whose playing days came to a close in 2003, still ranked among the top-10 (Corso, 2010). Only one major league baseball player, New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter, made the list (Corso, 2010). Amongst the men surveyed, Woods was the consensus favorite, while Bryant was the overall choice for African Americans, including those ages 13-33 (Corso, 2010). "It has been an axiom throughout baseball

history- kids who play the sport find stars to emulate and remain fans throughout their lives" (Rein & Shields, 2007, p. 73). However, based off the Harris Poll numbers, baseball has not been able to produce stars that all ethnic backgrounds can connect with. "If baseball is to compete in the crowded sports marketplace, it needs to reignite its star base by capitalizing on the large number of potential stars and crossing them over into other sectors of popular culture" (Rein & Shields, 2007, p. 68).

Prior to high school, African Americans tend to play the same positions as their sports idols (Castine & Roberts, 1974). According to Castine and Roberts, "black youth may try to emulate visible black athletes and thus concentrate upon positions in which blacks are more prominent" (Castine & Roberts, 1974, p. 61). Because of that, African American role models are exceptionally key to the development of African American youth and have a significant influence over that youth's athletic career.

Castine and Roberts (1974) performed a study to determine the influence of role models on African American athletes. Before high school, 70.5% of the athletes claimed to have idols. Sports figures were considered to be idols for 94.5% of the respondents. Fifty-six percent said they played the same position as their sports idol (Castine & Roberts, 1974). It should also be noted that every African American athlete involved in the study chose an African American athlete as his or her sports idol. None chose a Caucasian athlete (Castine & Roberts, 1974).

Baseball: a socioeconomic disadvantage

The economic aspect of playing baseball can serve as another barrier to African American participation. Ogden and Rose (2005) point that, in order to have an enticing baseball field, it has to be well groomed. In the inner city though, there tends to be less

of an attempt to maintain the upkeep of fields, whereas a basketball court does not need as much attention (Ogden & Hilt, 2003). In wealthier, suburban areas, this does not appear to be an issue (Ogden & Rose, 2005).

Rein and Shields (2007) deemed sandlots as staples of youth baseball. In urban areas though, maintaining those diamonds can often be put on the backburner. As a result, the intimate connections that youth can have with the sandlot have dwindled significantly (Rein & Shields, 2007).

> The empty lots where pickup games used to be played have been paved over by housing developments. Kids are so busy and programmed that finding eighteen players at one time to play has become even more difficult. Other sports are cutting into what used to be sandlot baseball time, with basketball only requiring several people" (Rein and Shields, 2007, p. 73).

Playing at competitive levels can also be a financial burden. "Equipment, travel costs, and other expenditures related to playing select ball can add up to several hundred dollars for each player. For many African American families, such costs are beyond the family budget" (Ogden, 2000, p. 201). With basketball, considering the lack of equipment necessary, options can be much cheaper (Ogden, 2002). The higher the level of competition for baseball, the more traveling will coincide. In Ogden's (2000) study of African Americans and pick-up ball, the baseball coaches interviewed said it could be tough for those with lesser income to afford the extensive travel costs. It can also be a time and availability hassle for those coming from single-parent homes (Ogden, 2000).

You have to go after kids who can afford it. I look locally, where there were really good players when I was growing up, they were in East Hartford. Now they're in Glastonbury and South Windsor, further out from the city and more into suburbia. They're whiter. It's as simple as that. For the most part, it's terrible to say, because that's where the game is being played most often. Those are the kids who can afford it for the most part. (J. Penders, personal communication, November 18, 2009).

This literature review provides explanations for the lack of baseball participation amongst African American youth. Along with discussing baseball's lack of presence in modern African American culture, in addition to socioeconomic issues, socialization categories such as parental involvement, role modeling, and media and peer influences, were highlighted. Some of the socialization topics discussed will correlate with social learning theory, the basis for this research.

<u>Chapter III – Research Method</u>

Method of Inquiry: Deductive Analysis Overview

This qualitative study used a deductive analysis approach to examine the data that was collected amongst ten African American youth. The goal of the research was to obtain viable explanations regarding the lack of African American youth participating in baseball, and the study was guided by concepts of Social learning theory. Through deductive analysis, the primary goal was not to generate theory, but instead, to verify it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

When performing deductive analysis, Patton (1980) proposed setting the experimental design, collecting the data, then concluding with a content analysis. To test a hypothesis, Glaser (1965) proposed coding the qualitative data followed by an extensive analysis. Data relevant to the hypothesis is studied in an attempt to dissect a correlation (or lack thereof) to the hypothesis. Information that is deemed critical to the foundation of the study is highlighted. Themes and categories are extracted from the data and used for analytical purposes (Janesick, 2000).

"The task is to compare one unit of information with the next in looking for recurring regularities of the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 177). Therefore, the goal is to determine one central theme that is evident amongst all the data collected, along with specific findings that support that theme. The researcher may, "after either proving or disproving his hypotheses, attempt to explain his findings with some more general ideas suggested by his data" (Glaser, 1965, p. 438). Within that step of the research endeavor, there can be some degree of theory development and generation.

The specific goal of this study was to identify themes that explained the decline in baseball participation amongst African American youth. Given that the study was grounded in social learning theory, it sought to confirm the hypothesis that numerous socialization factors play a strong role in explaining this decline. Thus, deductive analysis was the best fit for this study.

Because I grew up in a different environment from the participants, I could only speculate as to what the reasons were for the decline. By allowing the participants of the study to share their thoughts and reasons for why they elected to play other sports, I could use that data in congruence with social learning theory to explain the downward participation trend. Once the investigation reached its saturation point, an analysis of the most frequent and legitimate themes was used to elucidate the findings.

Purpose

The purpose of this analysis was to use aspects of social learning theory as groundwork to ascertain the influences that lead young African American males to participate or forego baseball activity. Questions were comprised to determine current sports interests and participation rates, along with role models, and other outside factors, including family members and peers, which led to their decision to play certain sports.

Design

This study used a standardized open-ended interview style (Patton, 1980). The interview protocol was used as a strict guideline during data collection. In most cases, the same exact questions were asked to the participants. The questions were pre-determined and in a specific order. Spontaneous conversation was generated in very few

of the interviews. A pilot interview was initially conducted to gauge the effectiveness of the questions, along with any implementations that might benefit the protocol.

The interview protocol was divided into two sections. The first focused on the participant's background, while the second was relegated to sports participation factors and interests. Through data collection, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. In an urban city in the northeast, what are the most popular sports played by African American males, ages 11-through-15?

2. Who are the most popular athletic role models amongst young African American males, and what is their influence?

3. What influence do parents and siblings have when it comes to sport participation?

4. If baseball isn't a favorite sport, what are some of the reasons other sports are of interest?

Participants

Snowball sampling was used to obtain participants for this study. The sample came via connections I have with after-school programs. All 10 participants were African American males, between the ages of 11 and 13, thus fitting the criteria sought for evaluating baseball participation amongst African American youth. All 10 were considered non-baseball players. One had played in a league when he was younger but later opted to specialize in another sport. For the purpose of this study, even if a participant had played baseball in the past, if they had not participated in an organized baseball league in the past three years, they were not considered to be a baseball player. The participants had played an array of other sports, including basketball, football,

lacrosse, and soccer. They consisted of five 13-year-olds, four 12-year-olds, and one 11-year-old.

Getting to talk to the participants was not an easy task. Initially, the entire study was to take place in Philadelphia, as many of my youth development program connections resided there. Thus, it was also critical to speak with young African American males in Philadelphia who chose to play sports other than baseball. Connections through previous employment gave me an opportunity to interview youth on two basketball teams in West Philadelphia. Both prospects failed to come to fruition due to scheduling conflicts and incomplete parental consent forms. Numerous calls were made to my connections with the team to re-schedule but were not returned. Thus, in the best interest of the study, I felt it was best to start a new recruitment pool in another area.

My connections identified a handful of youth programs that would be suitable to recruit the necessary participants for the study. Approval was granted by the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board to amend the recruitment pool.

From those two programs, I was able to find 10 youth for the study. Again, obtaining signed parental consent forms was difficult. Eventually, completed forms were collected, which enabled the interviews to follow.

Participant Backgrounds

Pseudonym	Age	Sports-played	Baseball experience
Ozzie	13	Basketball, flag football, rugby, lacrosse, baseball	Minimal

Jeremy	13	Basketball, soccer, flag football, baseball	Minimal
Ben	13	Basketball, football	None
Tyrone	13	Basketball, football, baseball	Moderate
Jaden	12	Soccer	None
Curtis	12	Football, basketball	None
Randall	11	Football, basketball	None
Marcus	12	Football, basketball, baseball	Minimal
Darryl	13	Basketball, football, baseball	Minimal
Andre	12	Basketball, football, soccer	None

Setting

      The interviews took place at a location convenient to each participant. In this case, they were all conducted in accordance to each participant's after school program. However, the pilot interview was completed with a 14-year-old athlete in Philadelphia. Upon receiving approval from the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited and provided with parental permission forms in order to conduct the interviews.

Before each interview, I assured the participant that the confidentiality of all data was protected and gave them a pseudonym. I also informed each participant that, if any at any time, they did not want to answer a question, it would be allowed. In addition, if they changed their mind at a later time and did not want to be a part of the study, they could contact the principal investigator or myself and exercise that option. All corresponding audio files from the interviews were stored on my computer, which is password protected. Once the interviews were transcribed, the files were placed in a password-protected folder in my computer. A copy of the interviews were also printed out and locked in a filing cabinet in my home.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed within 24 hours after it occurred. Upon completion of all the interviews, data analysis followed. Themes from participant responses were comprised. In addition, I kept a miniature notebook during the interview process and jotted down observations and thoughts. This came in handy for future interviews, as I evaluated the best and least-responsive questions and categories.

Guba (1978) stressed the need for classifying data. Frequent patterns and significant responses that are extracted should be sorted into categories (Guba, 1978). "Since qualitative analysts do not have statistical tests to tell them when an observation or pattern is significant, they must rely on their own intelligence, experience, and judgment" (Patton, 1980, p. 313). As reaching the point of data saturation concludes the collection process, then same theory applies when it comes to classification.

When reviewing the content from the interviews, information that was deemed essential to the nature of the study was highlighted. That totaled to 116 pieces of

information. From those pieces, themes and categories were comprised in relation to the study's hypothesis.

Data analysis was not delegated to just one person. This study employed triangulation (Patton, 1980), in which peer and mentor debriefing of the data was utilized to ensure the utmost accuracy of the analysis. The principal investigator, along with three graduate students, took part in the debriefing. Per Patton, "where an evaluator has assistance in conducting the analysis, it is helpful to have more than one person classify the data…Important insights can emerge from the different ways in which two people look at the same set of data" (Patton, 1980, p. 300). This also reinforces the validity of any noteworthy data collected.

Limitations

Only a select group were permitted as candidates to participate in this study-African American males between the ages of 11 and 15. Finding kids in that bracket who were interested in participating was quite difficult, as some individuals simply lacked the desire to converse about their experiences. Obtaining parental consent only added to the difficulty. However, the incentive of having a chance to win a gift card to a local sporting goods stimulated interest in participation.

As previously stated, it should also be noted that participants were not considered baseball players even if they had prior experience in the sport. This study sought to engage current players who chose not to participate in an organized league.

Chapter IV- Results

Baseball is lagging in this study's selected area, as basketball and football appear to be the most popular sports for young African American males. There are a multitude of reasons for this, and these results focus on the socialization aspects surrounding these youth. In speaking with the 10 participants of this study, seven themes, most of them related to Social learning theory, emerged, which helped explain the decline in baseball participation amongst African American youth. They included:

1. Sibling and parental influence

2. Video game influence

3. Lack of professional role models

4. Success has a positive impact

5. A basketball culture

6. Exposure to basketball events

7. Baseball is boring

Theme one- Sibling and parental influence

Sibling influence toward basketball and football

Siblings have had the greatest influence on sport participation for those involved with this study. Nine of the ten participants had an older brother that served as a role model. The findings show that older brothers have played a significant role in getting the younger ones onto the sports escalator. By that, we mean getting kids to commence participation in sports, developing them, and invoking enough interest to inspire one to specialize in certain athletic activities.

Six participants in the study distinctively cited the influence of siblings as a catalyst toward their involvement with sports. Of those six, three have made basketball their primary sport, two have gravitated to both football and basketball, while one has elected to partake in football.

Jeremy's acclimation toward basketball was a direct result of the relationship he had with his brother. "My older brother, he was a big fan of basketball. He played basketball for a lot of teams. He would invite me to come play with him at certain places, so I grew a passion for basketball through that."

Andre has four brothers, and all of them play basketball. As a youngster, he would watch them perform and wanted to take part. "I'd tag along and want to be like them."

Andre's fondest sports memory relates to the tutelage his brothers bestowed upon him. "When I first started playing basketball, I really didn't know how to play. But then with my brothers helping me out, it got easier and easier each time. They helped me a lot."

Randall plays wide receiver and credits his development to his brothers' penchant for teaching him strategies to enhance his skills. "I just like playing big football games with my brothers. It's just really fun. We can play for hours and have so much fun that we keep playing."

Parental influence toward basketball and football

Some participants indicated that parental influence drove them toward sport involvement. Because football and basketball are part of his family tradition, Ben has been enticed to follow suit. Tyrone also spoke of sports being a "family thing" at home.

In my house, we have two [sports]. Everybody really likes football. It's

the same thing with basketball… My mom and my dad both kind of

taught me how to play basketball. My dad and step dad, mainly my step

dad, taught me how to play football."

Whereas most followed the sport they observed, Ozzie's case was different.

Watching his dad play softball inspired him to become active in athletics in

general. It did not take the form of baseball or softball, though. Nevertheless, he began

playing basketball, and his dad taught him the basic skills for the game. His interest in

basketball expanded when he began playing with friends at a neighborhood program.

Theme two: Video game influence

Video gaming has become an exceptionally popular industry. It allows fans that

identify with teams and sports in real life to do so virtually. Those in this study showed

that it is evident for their age and social brackets. In addition, the Madden football and

NBA 2K series have spurred youth to become more attached to the likes of football and

basketball through these video games.

Randall said that playing Madden makes him more interested in football. Darryl

deemed it "a fun way to play sports". Curtis has developed an attachment to the

Pittsburgh Steelers by playing as them in the Madden series on his Xbox 360.

I always pick them when I play football on my Xbox 360. I went and

traded all my favorite players, like Randy Moss to the Steelers. I just like

the way they play. Even when they lose, I still like them.

He also owns NFL Blitz and NBA Street, a pair of games that alters the setting

from the stadium and arena and into the streets for playground-style action. In NBA

2K11, Curtis also enjoyed the fact he and his friends found a feature in which they were able to unlock celebrity hip hop stars like Bow Wow and Drake.

Randall has an Xbox 360, and the Madden games are his favorite. He is a big fan of DeSean Jackson in real life, so he always picks the Eagles in the game. "I also like Michael Vick. He's good in those games." When asked if the Madden games made him like football even more, Randall nodded. "Yeah, I'd say so. It's fun."

Conversely, none of the participants said baseball was a sport they consistently play on their console. In fact, Marcus said even if he wanted to purchase a baseball game, it's not an easy find in his area. "I'd think about baseball, but when I go to the store, I think it's harder to find a baseball game. It's easier to see football [games]. It's just there. They are more popular."

Theme three: Lack of professional role models

Participants were asked to name their favorite athlete in all of sports. Out of the 10, half chose LeBron James or Kobe Bryant. Ozzie said his father grew up liking Bryant, so he has done the same. He also likes the way Bryant shoots, along with his attitude. Tyrone said "When it comes to the NBA, I like the Lakers because of my boy Kobe. He plays with confidence."

Curtis began playing football after watching it on television. After seeing Randy Moss make dazzling plays as a receiver, he decided he wanted to do the same.

> I really like Randy Moss because a lot of the times when they throw it to
> him, he catches it with one hand. He just always seems to make the catch.
> Even when he gets hit in the air and flips, he doesn't let go of the ball.

Curtis tried to emulate Moss' style in a recent game, which he said was his favorite sports moment.

> The quarterback threw the ball, and I was able to make a nice catch to score the touchdown. It was tough because when you have gear on, it's not as easy to move. He threw it short, and I was able to come back and get it. I caught it and started running down the sideline. This boy tried to catch me, but he jumped, and I made it in the end zone.

Randall plays wide receiver and tries to model his game off Jackson, his favorite player. "I like the way he plays. He's fast. He's probably the fastest player in the league. When he returned that punt and scored a touchdown against the Giants, that was fun to watch."

Andre got involved with basketball due to the influence of James. "The thing that really made me want to play basketball is that my favorite player plays it, LeBron James. I've liked him since he came into the league…I want to be like LeBron." In fact, Andre was never much a Miami Heat fan, but they are now his top team since James signed with them last summer.

Derek Jeter, though no one's favorite overall athlete, was the most popular choice for just baseball players. Curtis lauded Jeter for his defensive abilities, yet he could not remember what position Jeter plays. He also cited watching a no-hitter in baseball as his favorite sports moment on television but could not recollect who the pitcher was.

Immersion through mass media

Through commercials, the NBA and NFL have been able to market their stars exceptionally well to this base. With the exception of a few mentions of Jeter, at least

one basketball or football player was chosen when asked what athletes are seen the most through commercials. Ben mentioned Bryant, James, and Dwight Howard when asked who was most popular in commercials on television. "I think of the McDonald's and Gatorade commercials [with them]. That new McDonald's one when LeBron and Dwight Howard are playing for the food, I really like that one." A recent advertisement with James and teammate Dwyane Wade for Nationwide was another favorite. Said Jeremy: "Dwyane Wade is in a lot of commercials now. I like him. Because he's on the same team with LeBron, too, I like him even more because they are together." When asked what sport he thinks is advertised the most in his neighborhood, Tyrone said basketball. "People around here play that the most."

After seeing a commercial starring James, the Miami Heat forward became Jeremy's favorite athlete. "He's good, and I just think he's a good person. I've seen commercials with him supporting kids in Africa. I saw that and liked him because of that."

Theme four: Success has a positive impact

Experiencing success further invoked interest in athletic endeavors. While some players spoke of bonding with family members as a favorite sports moment, most cited winning or competing in championship games. Tyrone plays both flag and contact football. Both teams fared well this season, making them his top memories. "This season, for flag football, we won the championship. For my contact football league, we went to the state championship and got to play in Massachusetts. That was really fun."

For Ozzie, both moments came in football and basketball. "Last year, our basketball team was undefeated and got to the semifinals. We ended up losing but still got a trophy. My flag football team last year won the championship, too."

In terms of off-the-field experiences, watching successful teams also generated interest in the sport. Said Tyrone: "Watching UConn [basketball] win makes you want to try it more." Though Jeremy is a Heat fan, his favorite moment on television was seeing the Lakers win the title last season. "My mom likes the Lakers a lot. If we say something bad about the Lakers, she'll get so mad."

Sports apparel

Interest in these teams was further displayed through sports apparel, another avenue to demonstrate fandom. This was quite evident with the UConn men's basketball team, influential off a national championship. Tyrone has a jersey. "UConn stuff is pretty popular. At home, I've got a UConn jersey." Ben is hoping to get his own. "A lot of people around here wear UConn shirts. I'm trying to get a Kemba Walker jersey."

Curtis, a big-time Lakers fan, has a jersey of his favorite team at home. "I really like the Lakers. I've liked them for a long time. I have a Lakers jersey. It doesn't have a name or number on it or anything, just a plain jersey."

However, when it came to hats, the most popular one was that of the New York Yankees. This type of apparel would contradict interest in a certain sport, as baseball lagged in popularity. But the Yankees' brand of success appears to have scored recognition points. Darryl got one because "they have 27 championships". His favorite television moment came when the Yankees defeated the Phillies in the 2009 World Series. Curtis said he got one because he also likes New York teams.

Theme five: A basketball culture

When it came to after-school or recess activities for this group, basketball was the top sport, followed by football. According to Tyrone, playing basketball after school is the thing to do in his neighborhood. "When we come out, that's what we do. We play basketball. In the neighborhood, when it's football season, we'll play football. But mostly, we play basketball." Randall echoed that, saying basketball is the most popular sport played in the neighborhood. "Most of my friends and the kids in the neighborhood play basketball when they get home. It's popular."

It's not necessarily a matter of peer influence, though. Most said while they enjoy playing basketball or football with their friends, they do it out of desire for the sport, not simply because their acquaintances are playing.

There are also more opportunities for these sports in this location. When baseball is promoted, Ben said, kids could be turned away by the expensive costs. "Down at [one of the area's recreational centers], sometimes they'll try to get us to play soccer or baseball. But they charge you a lot for those sports." That's not an issue with basketball, according to Curtis.

> There's a lot of leagues around here. They also play basketball all-year-round. When it gets warmer, they can play outside. But when it's cold, they have a gym they can play in. Schools have the gym, or they can go to [other recreation centers].

Theme six: Exposure to basketball events

Basketball and football were the most popular sporting events in terms of attendance. With the exception of Tyrone, who once saw the Yankees play, none of the

participants had ever been to a baseball game. Tyrone has been to an assortment of

sporting events but likes going to UConn basketball games best because of the program's

success on the court.

> I like basketball better because I get to watch both UConn teams play... I
>
> really like watching UConn basketball. They win a lot. They're my
>
> favorites. Just look at UConn winning the championship. I want to play
>
> like Kemba [Walker].

Ozzie also frequently attends UConn basketball games. On occasions, he and his

friends will get tickets to other local university basketball games. Upon recollecting, one

of his favorite sports viewing moments came in a game against   a school from a

neighboring state. "[The team we were rooting for] beat them by like 22. One of the

players was hitting everything. He was hitting threes. He was hitting everything. I liked

it."

Sometimes Jeremy and his friends will watch high school basketball games at a

local high school.   He once had the opportunity to go to an NBA game with a program

he belongs to. After the game, he met former one of the team's star players. "I got an

autographed jersey. That was my favorite moment."

Theme seven: Baseball is boring

In comparison to basketball and football, baseball is seen as a trite sport. Because

of that, participants who have played some degree of baseball have since quit. Not only

are kids not enthused with the prospect of playing baseball, but also when they decide to

play it, the sport has a short shelf life. Darryl started out in a league, then grew apathetic.

Ozzie said he tried to play baseball when he was younger but didn't like it because it was boring.

> It's a slow game. I like to play contact sports. I mean, I'll play it a little bit with my family every now and then but not in a league or anything. I have two favorites, football and basketball. I like basketball because it can be a contact sport. It goes fast. There's a lot of scoring. Football is the same.

Marcus also gave baseball a try at an earlier age but found his skills to be better suited for fast-paced sports. "I played a little bit years ago but not recently at all. It's alright. Football is just so fun. I think I'm so fast, so being able to run like that makes me like football. It's a good skill to have." Watching football highlights on television has been the biggest influence in Marcus' decision to play the sport. "I like ESPN and watching cool plays and stuff like that. But really, whatever channel football is on, I'll watch it." Tyrone also thinks football best suits his athletic abilities. "With football, I play quarterback and running back or wide receiver. I like it because I normally have the ball and can run with it and make plays."

Andre and Curtis enjoy football because the tackling aspect will allow them to let their anger out. Randall feels the same way, citing his fondness for physical contact. "Football and basketball just entertain me a lot. I have a lot of fun playing those sports. They're fast. I like hitting. I like contact." He "kind of" likes baseball but hasn't played much. "I don't really know. I just haven't really gotten that involved. I just like the other sports like football and basketball a lot better."

To recap, seven themes emerged after speaking with the 10 participants of this study in regards to the decline in baseball participation amongst African American youth. They were:

1. Sibling and parental influence

2. Video game influence

3. Lack of professional role models

4. Success has a positive impact

5. A basketball culture

6. Exposure to basketball events

7. Baseball is boring

Chapter V- Discussion

Research has shown that socialization aspects such as family involvement, external role models, and media influence play an integral role in explaining why African American youth are not playing baseball (Castine & Roberts, 1974; Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Harris, 1994; Ogden, 2002; Phillip, 1999; Rein & Shields, 2007; Wilson & Sparks, 1993). Social learning theory, a product of Albert Bandura, is based on the concept that through observing models, individuals develop similar trains of thought and act in a similar fashion. This can be specifically applied to the aforementioned socialization aspects. This study used those ideas, in addition to interviews with young, inner-city African American male athletes, to investigate the issue.

Research Question #1: In an urban city in the northeast, what are the most popular sports played by African American males, ages 11- through 15-years-old?

Football and basketball are the two primary sports played by young African American males. Of the 10 participants in this study, five chose football as their favorite sport, while four picked basketball, and one voted for soccer. Other sports played by the participants include flag football, rugby, lacrosse, and baseball. The following research questions pertain to the reasons why certain sports were selected and what influenced those decisions.

Research Question #2: Who are the most popular athletic role models amongst young African American males, and what is their influence?

Bandura and Walters (1963) claimed that observers who can identify well with their models and share similarities with them are more likely to emulate them. With regards to sports, this was further supported by Castine and Roberts (1974), in which

every African American athlete in their study selected an African American player as their top sports idol. Considering 77% of the NBA and 67% of NFL players are African American (Lapchick, 2010), baseball, at 9.1% (Lapchick, 2010) cannot come close to offering the amount of African American role models the other two can.

That was evident in this study, as 8 of the 10 participants' favorite athletes were African American. Of that group, all were football and basketball players. These results were also similar to that of the 2010 Harris Poll, in which basketball star Kobe Bryant was the top choice for favorite athlete amongst African Americans (Corso, 2010). In the current study, LeBron James was the top star chosen, followed by Bryant.

It should also be noted that in 8 of the 10 selections in this study, the favorite athlete matched the participant's favorite sport. Those who cited basketball as a favorite sport considered James and Bryant to be their favorite athletes. With the exception of one, those who liked football the most chose Miles Austin, DeSean Jackson, Randy Moss, and Jason Whitten (all NFL players). In addition, two of the participants in the current study who played football said that Moss and Jackson inspired emulation on the field. Thus, based off this study, there appears to be a connection between favorite athlete and participation in that sport. With regards to baseball, there were no players chosen as favorite overall athletes. No one picked baseball as his favorite sport, either. This is not a surprise, though, because non-baseball players were interviewed for this study.

According to Castine and Roberts (1974), this is a product of the way African American males tend to be socialized through sports.

Socialization in this sense may be viewed as the process in which certain

skills, traits, dispositions, and attitudes associated with performing certain

sports roles are instilled during childhood. Black youths may try to

emulate visible black athletes and thus concentrate upon positions in

which blacks are made prominent (Castine & Roberts, 1974, p. 61).

The influence of these athletes has also been strengthened due to exposure

through television, particularly commercials. Per the opinion of this study's participants,

basketball and football players were the most popular seen on television, namely James,

Bryant, Dwight Howard, and Dwyane Wade. This supports Bandura and Walters'

assertion that the emergence of audiovisual mass media has a potent effect on social

behavior, being able to expand an observer's model base (Bandura & Walters, 1963).

From a marketing standpoint, this is a valuable way to connect with a consumer.

In order to maximize your product, you must know the tendencies of your consumer base

(Fink, 2010). A strong element toward enticing that base is through athlete endorsement

(Fink, 2010). Being that fast food restaurants tend to cater to low-income individuals,

mainly in urban areas (Block, Scribner, & DeSalvo, 2004), it is a strategically sound

decision for McDonald's to entice children with a commercial starring James and

Howard. In the same fashion, when marketing to inner-city youth, it makes sense to pair

Michael Jordan with Nike sneakers. As Wilson and Sparks (1993) mentioned, young

African Americans cite sports apparel like jerseys and sneakers as a way to fit in with

society. They also are enamored by performances of star athletes, and thus want to wear

apparel that those players endorse. Agree with it or not, the strategy works. One of the

participants in this study mentioned that basketball has become the so popular in the inner

city because of the competition amongst each other to sport the newest and hippest sneakers. This takes advantage of a vulnerable population.

However, athletes should be mindful of how strong an influence they exude. In the past, Charles Barkley said he was a basketball player, not a role model (Gelman & Springen, 1993). However, the results from this study indicate that his status as a professional athlete would make him a prime role model, especially to young African Americans. Thus players, especially those of noteworthy caliber, should be aware of the impact they have when endorsing these products.

Research Question #3: What influence do parents and siblings have when it comes to sport participation?

While role models such as professional athletes can influence youth to like a certain sport and emulate them when they do play, this study showed that siblings provoked the most influence in getting kids to *try* sports. Parental influence was also a factor in commencing sport participation. This supports Bandura and Walters' claim that family members serve as the predominate role models early on in a child's life (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Hultsman (1993) defended this, claiming that parental influence is the greatest of all sources when it comes to a child deciding to partake in a leisure activity.

In Comeaux and Harrison's (2004) study, African American youth were polled in an effort to gauge the perception of baseball. Sixty-six percent said their parents' views had an influence on their opinion of the sport (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004). In addition, 96% of the football players in the study said the main authority figure in their lives played football, which influenced them to take up the sport (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004).

Nonetheless, parental influence can wane when children get older. As they age and absorb other role models, whether it is through peers, teachers, or the media, their actions and imitations, through observations, expand (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Harris, 1994).

My results showed that sibling influence was the main reason six of the participants became involved with sports. Growing up, they wanted to fit in with their older brothers and did so by learning to play their sports. Three were influenced to play basketball through their brothers, while two picked up both basketball and football, and one, just football.

Nine of the ten participants had older brothers, which made this influence possible. In addition, the key cog is that their brothers played sports, which led to their interest in participating. This was the stepping-stone toward involvement in the sport. In this case, it spurred the participants to play football or basketball.

Specifically, one of the participants emphasized being tutored on the nuances of football from his brothers and how that enabled him to become a better player. This reinforces the thought that social learning theory is best performed through extensive observation, followed with imitation and the aid of a role model (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Through observation and practice, individuals have a better chance at succeeding in a given activity. As a result, the majority of those in this study began playing football or basketball, which eventually developed into a favorite sporting activity.

Parental influence was a factor but not as strong. Two participants claimed it was a reason they began playing sports. It was common for parents to give their kids encouragement during sporting activities, but none served as coaches. In one case, a

participant said watching his dad play softball inspired him to play sports in general, just not baseball or softball.

Research Question #4: If baseball isn't a favorite sport, what are some of the reasons other sports are of interest?

Football and basketball thrive off fast-paced action, an element that baseball lacks. One of the themes extracted from data collection was that baseball is boring, and it is too slow. This was evident in terms of watching and participating in sports. The pace of football seemed to suit the athletic skill sets of the participants. All of the football players interviewed played either quarterback, running back, wide receiver, or cornerback- positions predicated on speed, hard hits, and quick decision-making.

While a pair of participants said that they like to watch all sports, the most common choices were basketball and football due to the contact and speed aspects. Hockey, a sport not played by anyone in the group, also was mentioned because of the same qualities, along with the fighting that goes with the sport. This evidence appears to support Rein and Shields' (2007, p. 66) claim that "the athletic feats of baseball players may, on the surface, appear less impressive than the full-contact sport of football, the nonstop action in basketball, and the daredevil feats in extreme sports."

Not only are youth staying away from the baseball diamonds, they are becoming more attached to the likes of football and basketball through video games, which offer action-packed, visually seductive forms of entertainment. Jackson, von Eye, Witt, Zhao, and Fitzgerald (2010) found that 68% of American homes have video game systems. In particular, sports games have generated great interest. In 2009, Electronic Arts Sports

reportedly sold over 10 million copies of its FIFA (soccer) and Madden (football) games ("Fiscal Highlights", n.d.).

The Madden and NBA 2K franchises were the most popular games amongst the current participant group. Every participant in this study who had a video game console owned one of the Madden games. They also agreed with the notion that the Madden franchise invoked interest in football overall. One said it provided him with "a fun way to play sports". In fact, the Madden series has recently increased awareness and its excitement for its 2012 edition by allowing fans to vote for who will grace the game's cover (ESPN.com, 2011).

The NBA series was enticing because of its features where hip-hop sensations such as Bow-Wow and Drake and former stars like Jordan could be unlocked. While it would be an overstatement to say that the inclusion of hip-hop aspects to the NBA 2K series is a significant reason why kids in this area are not interested in baseball, the connection has helped boost interest in basketball over the past two decades. One cannot underestimate the power of hip-hop amongst young African Americans, as it has become a staple of African American youth (Roach, 2004; Chang 2007; Watkins, 2007).

"No youth trend is more visible around the world today than hip-hop" (Watkins, 2007, p. 63). The language of hip-hop has become a worldwide phenomenon, especially for youth because it is an activity that brings their background and upbringing to life (Roach, 2004; Chang, 2007). Because young African Americans connect with it as part of their culture, interest in hip-hop has grown exponentially.

> More than 59 million rap albums were sold in the United States alone [in
> 2006]. But that number represents only a small part of hip-hop's

influence. It sells an estimated $10 billion worth of trend-setting luxury

and consumer goods every year- not just in movies, shoes, and clothing

but in everything from snack crackers and soda drinks to cars and

computers. (Chang, 2007, p.60-61).

By combining hip-hop's influence and video games, you have a pair of extremely

popular fixtures to entice not only American youth, but in particular, those who are

African American. In consequence, the selling points of a game like NBA 2K11 can

have a detrimental effect on the perception of baseball. None of the participants listed it

as a sport they consistently play on their console. However, it should be noted that one

participant mentioned that if he goes to a store in his area looking for a baseball game, it

is easier to find the football and basketball ones because they are advertised more often.

Implication for Sport Managers

Continue investing in RBI

Per the results of this study, it is obvious that baseball needs to cultivate ways to

become more of an attraction option for African American youth. First off, by the sheer

numbers, it appears that the "Reviving Baseball in the Inner City" program has been

successful. In 2010, the program had grown to 295 leagues, serving approximately

170,000 youth (D. James, personal communication, November 9, 2010). In speaking

with RBI's director, he said they are not going to see the benefits of the program

overnight. Because the majority of the kids are under the age of 12, it may take between

5 and 10 years to gauge if they stuck with baseball and continued to progress in the sport.

That is understandable. Thus, if baseball is to compete with basketball and football in

terms of African American role models, it will have to produce its own. A successful RBI program would be a strong foundation toward accomplishing that.

The sport would also be strengthened if RBI spurs an increase in African American college baseball players. By putting players in a position to obtain a scholarship, the program will have achieved its goal of granting its participants a form of mobility. It would also boost African American participation numbers at the collegiate level, which are currently woefully low. According to the NCAA's 2008-09 student-athlete ethnicity report, only 4.2% of baseball players at the Division I, II, and III levels combined were African American (NCAA, 2010).

Hence, I would recommend that Major League Baseball continue to support RBI. Because it is focused on getting and developing kids in the inner city, it has a chance to produce the next C.C. Sabathia or Carl Crawford in a few years. If African American participation numbers will increase as a result, the program will have done its job.

Increase African American presence in MLB central office

In addition, Major League Baseball should seek to employ more African Americans in its upper management level. Being able to garner ideas from that demographic would be of tremendous help. In 2009, only 10% of the league's central office staff was African American (Lapchick, 2010). In any organization, if you are looking to connect with a certain a group, it would be beneficial to work in conjunction with those in that sector.

Cultivate marketable African American stars

Increasing the numbers of African American players in Major League Baseball would be a positive. However, even if the number of African American players in the

league grew by five percent, it may not guarantee that African Americans will be flooding the gates to consume baseball. The sport will have to nurture provocative stars to sell on a national level. While stars like Ryan Howard and Jimmy Rollins of the Philadelphia Phillies may induce interest in that region, they do not appear to have the cache that NBA starts like Bryant and James have across the country. Even in Philadelphia, where Howard is extremely popular, a youth basketball coach told me that his players are more familiar with a reserve player from the 76ers than they are with Howard. If baseball wants to attract more African American youth, it should attempt to match its highly recognizable African American players with products that resonate in the inner city.

Couple aesthetically pleasing plays with its African American stars in advertisement

The participants in this study indicated that they prefer other sports because baseball lacks fast-paced action aspects. In promoting the sport, whether it be through television, radio, or print, baseball should utilize images and plays that fit that mold, whether it be home runs, diving catches, and collisions at the plate. Because some of the participants mentioned their enjoyment of watching hockey because of its fighting features, a sport they had never even played, promoting these facets could be beneficial. This is not implying that baseball has not already attempted said suggestions in the past. However, by coupling these aspects of the game with its most popular African American players may radiate an increased positive perception in the inner city.

Playable fields in the inner city

Baseball would also benefit if organizations made a concerted effort to collaborate with recreational centers in urban areas to maintain the proper upkeep of

fields. One basketball coach whom I spoke with during this study said he would love to start a baseball league, but no one from the city had made an attempt to groom the field ever since he was there. Ogden and Rose (2005) talked about the necessity of having an enticing baseball field to garner participants. Unfortunately, in the inner city, especially in this type of economic climate, field maintenance may not be a priority. It is Ogden and Rose's (2005) opinion that these issues are less likely to occur in suburban, whiter areas.

Television and radio coverage

Based on the aspect of social learning theory that youth tend to emulate what they see on television, it may also benefit baseball to encourage its teams to hire more African Americans for radio and television coverage. In 2009, only 4% of radio and television announcers in the major leagues were African American, as opposed to 18% for the NBA and 11% for the NFL (Lapchick, 2010). Having more African American role models through a powerful medium like television may increase the amount of kids watching and listening to games, which can lead to a boost in overall participation rates.

Limitations and Future Research

This study sought to ascertain the socialization influences, particularly those relating to social learning theory, that lead young African American males to not partake in baseball. While the 10 participants interviewed for this study helped to identify those influences, a generalization cannot be made about all African American males ages 11- to 15-years-old based on the results.

In addition, the intent of the study initially was to interview 10 current baseball players of the same age, sex, and demographics to investigate the influences that led them

to play baseball. A comparative analysis between the two groups- baseball and non-baseball players- would have given a better illustration of the influences between the two. Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful in completing interviews with baseball players for this study. Numerous attempts were made to conduct the interviews. However, incomplete parental consent forms deterred it from happening.

When this study began, I spoke with the director of Major League Baseball's RBI program to collect information on the demographics of the program's participants and to gain a better understanding of the relationship between young African American males and baseball. It was his opinion that there is currently an uptick in interest for the 12-years-old and under age bracket of the RBI program. Conversely, around the teenage years is when their numbers begin to fade. He felt that during that time period, African American males were choosing to specialize in basketball or football or drop out of sports altogether. Considering that 9 of the 10 participants in this study were 12 years of age or older, and the majority chose to specialize in non-baseball sports, it gives a glimpse to some of the underlying causes in explaining the drop-off.

Despite not emerging as a theme, there were indications that self-esteem could play a role in the decision to not play baseball. One participant said he thinks kids do not play because if they strike out, people will laugh at them. This aspect should be further evaluated, along with research into the connection (or lack thereof) between self-esteem and specific sports. I also feel this study would be enhanced if it took a mix of a qualitative and quantitative approach to the data analysis. Based on many of the interview questions, much of the data, especially those where the kids were asked to rank

sports and athletes, would be well served via a quantitative analysis. The follow-up questions would be the foundation for the qualitative approach.

This study could also be augmented by speaking more in depth to the participants about general leisure preferences and not be so sport-specific. Having that information could lead to more socialization connections with the lack of baseball participation. This research would also benefit by examining other geographic regions, such as those that have a sizeable African American population and a Major League Baseball presence, in particular a successful franchise. There were indications from a few participants that success in sports is valuable in invoking interest. Thus, if a local team demonstrates consistent success, would that play a significant role in inspiring an uptick in baseball participation?

To build upon this study, I also recommend examining the generation previous to the participants who were interviewed. My findings indicated that parental influence played a role in a child's decision to participate in a certain sport. From that, the majority of participants' parents did not play baseball. Evaluating the conditions of African American baseball participation during their upbringing could be a reason they chose not to play, which, in turn, influenced their children to forego also.

Based on the results of this study, another aspect to consider would be to examine the older siblings of those in the study.   My results indicated that they were the primary influence toward the participants choosing to play non-baseball sports. If they did not have older brothers as models, it would be worth finding out what factors led to their decision to participate in football or basketball.

Overall, this study is important because of its evaluation of the current state of baseball participant by inner city African American youth. Not only did the results of this study contribute to the literature, they are also useful to youth baseball organizations. By identifying the reasons why African American youth are choosing to play other sports, more attention can be focused on ways to encourage baseball participation.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

I am going to be asking some questions about your interest and participation in sports, along with role models and people you look up to. For this study, I am exploring why young African American males do or do not play baseball, and the factors that go with that decision.

Background and Demographic Questions

- How old are you?

- What city and state did you grow up in?

- Do you currently reside there?

  o How long?

- What grade are you in?

- What school do you attend?

  o Private or public school?

- Do you live with your parents? Who else resides with you?

  o If grandparents live with them, the following parental questions will apply also.

Specific Questions on Participation, Interests, and Influences in Sports

- How long have you played sports?

  o What made you want to get involved with sports?

- What sports have you played?

  o Amongst those sports, what positions did you play?

  o What about each sport makes you want to play it?

- If you did not play baseball, why does it not invoke interest?

- Did your parents/guardian play sports?

- Are sports popular in your home?

- What sports are offered in your neighborhood?

- What is your favorite sport to play? Why?

- What is your favorite sport to watch on TV? Why?

- What is your favorite sports team?

  - What about that team makes you like them so much?

- Thinking back, what has been your favorite sports moment as a player? What made it so special?

  - What has been the favorite sports moment that you've watched? Why?

- Who is your favorite athlete in all of sports? Why?

- If you had to name a favorite athlete in each sport- baseball, basketball, and football- who would they be, and why?

- Are there athletes that are in commercials, movies, or TV shows that you like and have stood out to you?

- What is your favorite sports movie?

- Are there any sports books that you particularly enjoy?

- Do you read the newspaper at all?

  - If so, what section do you read the most?

    - If sports, what topics/sports grab your interest the most?

- If a team is more successful, does it influence you to watch or follow them more? What teams has this occurred with?

- What sport do you think is advertised the most in commercials?

- Do you play video games at all?

    o If so, which ones?

    o What are features of the games that you like?

- What are your parents' favorite sports to watch?

- Have your parents ever mentioned in the past about a specific player or moment that was their favorite in sports? If so, what was it and why?

- Has a parent/guardian ever been a coach in a sport for you?

    o If so, what sport?

- How often do you go to professional sporting events?

    o How often do you go to college sporting events?

    o How often do you go to high school sport events?

- Have you gone to sporting events with family members?

    o If so, what kinds of games?

        ▪ Any favorite memories from those games?

- Overall, what is your favorite sport to attend? What makes it so fun to attend?

- Do you have any siblings? Do they reside with you?

    o If yes, are they involved with sports?

        ▪ Have they influenced any sports decisions for you?

        ▪ Do they mention sports moments from the past a lot?

        ▪ Do you play sports with them?

            - If so, how often?

- Do the majority of your friends play sports?

- o   Do they play on the same teams as you?

- Have any of your friends influenced you to like a particular sport?,

  - o   Have any of your friends influenced you to play a particular sport?

  - o   Have any of your friends influenced you to watch a particular sport?

- Do you have to wear uniforms at school?

  - o   If not, what sport attire is most popular at school?

- In your neighborhood, what sport attire do you notice is worn the most?

- Do you have any jerseys or sports attire of your own?

  - o   If so, which ones? What made you choose them?

- Do you have cable TV at home? What teams do you watch the most on TV?

- Does sports being on cable TV effect whether or not you will watch it?

Concluding Question

- Is there anything you want to add in regards to these topics that I didn't ask?