

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
DOMINICAN BASEBALL PLAYERS TRANSITIONING FROM THE DOMINICAN MINOR
LEAGUE CAMPS TO A SUCCESSFUL MAJOR LEAGUE CAREER

By

Samuel Lima

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University June 2023

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Doctor of Philosophy Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study, informed by Schlossberg's Transition Theory, was to understand the lived experiences of native-born Dominican baseball players entering the Major League Baseball (MLB) Dominican Republic (DR) academies, transitioning through MLB's developmental system, and exiting the developmental system into a successful major-league career. This study sought to answer the following research questions: RQ1: What social, cultural, and language challenges are experienced by Dominican players during their transition through the major league developmental system; RQ2: What learning and cognitive challenges are experienced by Dominican players during their transition through the MLB's developmental system; and RQ3: What psychological and mental health challenges are experienced by Dominican players during their transition through the MLB's developmental system. The study employed interviews of a purposive sampling of nine native Dominican MLB players who have transitioned through the developmental system from the DR and whose achievements represent a level of success that provided a rich source of information (Patton, 2022). The study identified three main themes that helped describe this population's lived experiences, challenges, and success. This study analyzed relevant factors of acculturation and language adjustability, educational levels, emotional maturity, and psychological resiliency. A qualitative analysis explored the challenging circumstances Dominican players experience across the seven-to-twelve-year transition to a successful major league career.

Keywords: Native Dominican baseball players, Major League Baseball, cultural, language, education, psychological, mental health wellbeing, Resiliency, Schlossberg's transitional theory

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for providing the resources and strength to complete this journey. Without God, I would never have had the courage to begin my doctoral journey, and certainly never persevered through to completion. And, to my father and mother, who braved the uncertainties and challenges to transplant their young family to this greatest country on God's green Earth. They were consistent examples of God's hands and feet on this Earth, and I am forever grateful for their love and support.

Acknowledgments

I am eternally grateful to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the incredibly blessed life I have been given, for an opportunity to serve and defend our great nation while in uniform, and now be privileged to serve our fellow citizens by providing affordable mental health support.

I want to thank my wife, Anne, who walked with me through this process. Without her unwavering support, this would not have been possible. I want to acknowledge my brother-in-Christ friend and mentor, Pablo Neftali Cruz Hernandez, who, after playing many years of professional baseball in the 1960s, in the MLB developmental system with the Pittsburgh Pirates organization and in the Dominican baseball league. He dedicated his life to serving his countryman by sharing his baseball and life experience with those starting their journey in the MLB developmental system in Boca Chica, DR. After years of conversations about the lack of resources and the need for support in the Dominican MLB academies, this study became a reality. His love for the game and, more importantly, his desire to help his countryman one day reach a level playing field with their American counterparts ignited my desire to focus this study on the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players as they chase their dreams. His unrelenting desire to see things improve for those who followed him, and our common faith inspired me to begin this journey.

This study would not have been possible were it not for the participants who gave up precious time during their offseason and spring training to be part of the study. Their willingness to take time away from their busy schedules and families, and share their personal experiences, is a testament to their genuine desire to contribute to aiding future opportunities for their countrymen ~ and is noteworthy!

I would also like to thank Dr. Joy Mwendwa, who served on my committee and as one of my advisors, for her encouragement, understanding, and guidance throughout my program and the dissertation process. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank Dr. Maldonado for taking on the challenge to chair my committee and Dr. Davila for serving on my committee.

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List of Abbreviations

Major League Baseball (MLB)

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Certified Employee Assistance Professional (CEAP)

DR (Dominican Republic)

Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)

Mental Performance Coach (MPC)

United States (US)

Chapter One: Introduction

Each July, a fresh batch of 16 to 21-year-old native Dominican players transition into a Major League Baseball (MLB) Dominican training camp with aspirations of becoming a professional athlete contracted with an MLB team. Mostly, these players are recruited from private Dominican academies into MLB's developmental system (Ruiz et al., 2020; Mitchel, 2020). Many of these youth come from areas outside of Santo Domingo, having experienced a difficult childhood in poverty-level conditions. Their formal education has been limited, as their athletic potential was identified. They were dropped out of the education system, pursuing an opportunity to escape their impoverished conditions by moving to one of the DR's many baseball academies (Franz & Cook, 2020; Campisi, 2013). Each new group competes to feed into a pipeline of players from the Dominican Republic (DR) that currently comprise approximately 27% of players in the MLB system. Suppose an individual is fortunate to be signed, they will move on to compete for coverage spots throughout the developmental system in the US, with the dream of one day making it to the major leagues. Although they may play for the love of the game or the desire for fame and fortune, for most Dominicans, the prospect of attaining a financial benefit by making it to and having a successful major-league career is the lure. This end-state is a primary goal for the player and their extended family, who are most often destined to benefit (Anderson, 2016).

While research has been conducted on many aspects of the Dominican academies, there is limited research on Dominican players transitioning through the developmental system (Bouchet et al., 2013; Campisi, 2013; Lihosit, 2016). Players face unique challenges from a social-cultural, educational, and well-being (mental health) perspective. An examination from

this perspective sheds light on what differentiates those who succeed and make it to a successful major league career and those who cannot navigate the process successfully.

Background

To understand the relationship between Dominican baseball and those who shape policy formally and informally through United States (US) legal and MLB procedural processes, a have to acknowledge the history and domination of the region and specifically of the DR by the US (Chambers, 2017; Spagnuolo, 2003; Weil Parrinello, 2016). Major League Baseball has been in the region with a greater presence in the DR than any other baseball-producing talent nation for over a century (Cuellar, 2014; Klein, 1989; Klein, 2014; Lihosit, 2016; Zirin, 2005). This presence and MLB's relationship with and influence over the training camp system, housing over 1400 players ages 16-21, has not been without controversy and accusations of player exploitation. The lack of effective support by MLB and its clubs during the transition processes of Dominican players, specifically addressing concerns in multiculturalism, education, and mental health, has been noted (Campisi, 2013; Nagy et al., 2019). To further complicate matters, MLB's search for baseball talent on the DR has created an industry of private academies and bird-dog scouts (*buscones*) who prey on impoverished families in the country's rural areas. These families have limited economic opportunity and can be enticed to sacrifice a son, the age of a middle schooler in the US, to academies in exchange for a free training opportunity and some immediate other things (i.e., groceries, other commodities, or cash) or promises of future compensation (Klein, 2007; Klein, 1989; Mitchel, 2020;). The buscones and heads of the academies become de facto trainers, advisors, and guardians for the players. They are their link to an eventual potential opportunity to be viewed by a pro-scout (Franz & Cook, 2020). Due to the lack of education and financial and business acumen, impoverished parents are

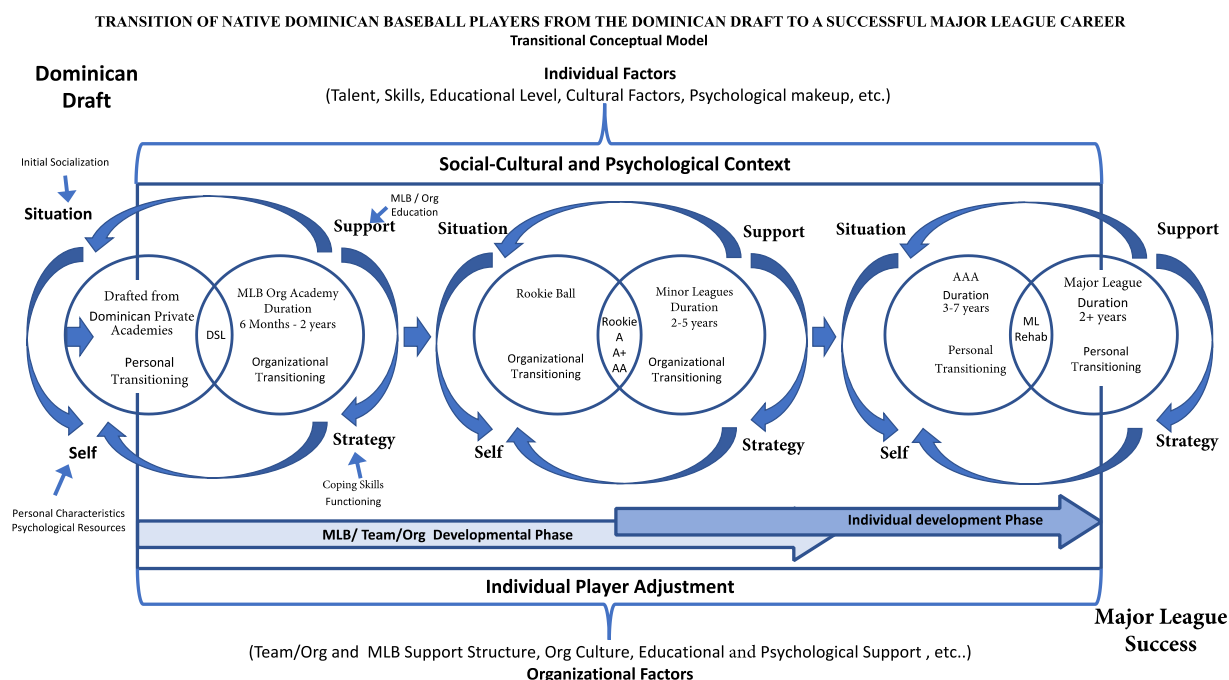
disadvantaged in negotiating agreements with buscones and the academies. Often these agreements stipulate the forfeiture of significant portions of the monies if the adolescent is eventually contracted to enter an MLB camp. The player personally may see only a fraction of the contracted amount, leaving the youth with little or no direct financial benefit from the signing. The parent who has negotiated the contract for the minor and whose account the money is deposited often takes the balance for the extended family or themselves (Bouchet et al., 2013; Carter, 2011; Klein, 2014). This momentous first step into the world of MLB does not generally mean a financial windfall for the athlete. It is often coupled with complex emotional issues. What is his responsibility to the *familia*, many not necessarily blood relatives? What if he fails? There is much for adolescents to grapple with in an increasingly competitive environment (Bermudez & Carteret, 2011; Juckett, 2013; Mancini, 2013;).

As these children initially transition from their homes to the local academies, they have less contact with their parents, who often live hours away. Their development takes on a very intentional and pragmatic approach, with baseball skills and acumen paramount. This approach requires a daily routine of specific monitored exercises and practice game activities. Their progress is continuously assessed and measured against expectations designed to identify those with the most potential. The opportunity for continued education provided by the buscones and academies is often oversold to appease the mothers giving up their children. According to child developmental theories that emphasize the importance of home and educational influences on outcomes, this disruption affects the child's sense of self and overall sense of emotional, psychological, and physical security (Berlin, 2021). This initial transition is intended to condition a crop of children to focus only on the physicality and mechanics of the game with little regard for their developing intellect and attainment of basic knowledge and literacy. The intent is to

identify talented individuals and prepare them for the scrutiny of the tryouts on the DR by major league scouts. The sole focus is on measurements of athletic abilities that indicate a potential for on-field success.

Figure 1

MLB Transitional Conceptual Model



The Dominican connection to baseball runs a century deep in the DR's culture, language, and economy. The investment of MLB and the resources that return to the DR are contingent on players' success in MLB. Across the DR, national pride in baseball begins with loyalty to their local equivalent of MLB teams. With every MLB Dominican player's success story, the allure of baseball as a means to escape poverty is reinforced. Unfortunately, the reality is that the percentage of players that make it to the major leagues is low. Most players that leave the DR will play for several years in competitive developmental programs across the US with high uncertainty for low pay. Ultimately, most will return to their homeland with shattered dreams that, for many, were not their own (Kusterman, 2013). A few others will remain working in

baseball in some capacity by integrating into the US or Canadian organizations as trainers, coaches, or other supporting roles. This work allows a few to provide their families with a better life than back home. Their lack of education and personal development often limits their professional development and earning potential.

Those who are successful in first being identified to try out in front of a major league scout and then selected to be under contract to enter one of the MLB camps on the DR will begin a new transitional phase of their journey. This new journey comes with a heightened level of both support and scrutiny. However, the quantity and quality of the support will vary significantly depending on the club and the financial resources allocated for the Dominican camp (Kline, 2009). Kline addressed resource deficiency issues, financial inequities relative to North American players, and other difficulties in their transitional journey from the initial camps in the DR to the minor league systems in Arizona and Florida. However, no studies have focused on understanding the Dominican language and culture's role in facilitating (education, psychological factors, and mental health issues) players' success as they navigate this journey. (Bowman et al., 2021; France & Petitpas, 2020; Osmer, 2011; Ruiz et al., 2020).

There is a lack of recognition and understanding of key factors and deficiencies in the overall support structure for Dominican players transitioning to and through the MLB minor league system to a successful major league career. The study examined through qualitative interviews the following factors: (a) the impact of culture and language proficiency and its effect on the developmental process and timelines, (b) the impact of the player's educational level on his ability to process new knowledge, and (c) impact of psychological and mental health wellness as it relates to the transition to include issues of childhood and adolescent trauma associated with the transitions starting with the initial move to an academy. This research refined

and extended existing knowledge on the impact of these universal aspects on Dominican players from entry into MLB Dominican club system and transition to the US and MLB's affiliate developmental system and eventual success in the major leagues.

Situation to Self

As a bilingual, bicultural Latin American immigrant to the United States working in support of several Major League Baseball (MLB) organizations, this study is relevant to my professional work and resonates with me personally. Today, I regularly collaborate with club staff, native Dominican players, and their families from the start of their journey in the Dominican camps and throughout their transitions in the MLB developmental system. I relate to their challenges as they must adjust to significant cultural differences and professional expectations while handicapped by minimal life experience and insufficient education, all of which are being observed and assessed in a highly pressurized environment (Wasch, 2009). As an immigrant child with no English language skills transplanted to New Jersey, I struggled through primary school and entering college. As a young Marine, I struggled, often hindered by self-doubt. Ultimately those struggles produced grit, knowledge, and skills that have allowed me to succeed in multiple venues. Through this study, I hoped to identify and translate to resource managers the areas of intervention that will increase the probability of successful organizational outcomes. While providing support to afford these youngsters a viable shot at achieving the dreams and goals that they carry in their hearts. The complexity of the emotional weight of carrying the expectations of family and community is a human struggle I relate to. As a Certified Employee Assistance Professional and Licensed Mental Health Counselor /Dedicated Mental Health Clinician working directly with this population, I have seen many individuals fail to reach their aspirations, not for lack of athletic talent but due to their inability to assimilate into the

language and culture, and to manage their mental health. It is a complex system that could be described as trafficking in human desperation (Bullock et al. 1., 2018; Wasch, 2009). This begins with agents in the DR selling 'hope' to parents who turn their boys into a system of academies. This is a gamble on the prospect that one day their son will be one of the chosen 2% that secure a major league contract and, with it, the financial ability to bring their clan out of poverty (Klein, 1989).

Through this phenomenological study using Schlossberg's transition theory, I have captured lived experiences of the fortunate few who navigate this journey to a successful major league career (Schlossberg, 1981). I have identified cultural, language, educational, psychological, and mental health wellness aspects that can be used to develop best practices related to core education, American culture assimilation, English language training, and psychological support. As an outcome, this knowledge will be used to develop support to provide talented athletes the opportunity to develop resilience, enhancing their ability to perform in this professional space. This will include educational support starting in the MLB Dominican camps and throughout the developmental system to increase their general educational levels and to begin their introduction to the English language and American culture. Upon entry into the Dominican MLB camps, psychological and mental health wellness will be assessed to connect each player with individual mental health counseling and/or other appropriate mental health services that will follow them throughout their development and into the major leagues.

Problem Statement

There is a gap in the existing research addressing the impact of culture, language, educational level, and mental health well-being that prevents effective intervention strategies to mitigate the premature attrition of native Dominican players with talent. Due to a lack of initial

screening at the MLB Dominican camps, some fail to progress and transition to the US developmental system, where enhanced resources are available. In practice, major league organizations do not standardize processes to identify and recruit prospects in the DR. The processes fail to identify potential factors and deficiencies in this population. If recognized and addressed, organizations may be able to maximize the opportunity for high-potential prospects to successfully matriculate through developmental programs to succeed at the major league level (Klein, 2007). The evident cultural differences, familial expectations, and impacts of truncated education and economic support need to be examined (Franz & Cook, 2020). This study examined the journey of those players that have successfully transitioned from initial recruitment in the DR to stable and successful major league careers. Although Dominican baseball players have the highest percentage (10.26%) of any country outside the United States entering the major leagues, the Dominican contribution to the minor league system is over a quarter (26.5%) of the leagues' population, with a significant percentage of native Dominican players unable to make the full journey to the big leagues. This is due to limitations in their ability to fully transition because of cultural challenges, educational or language deficiencies, and other psychological limitations (Gentile & Buzzelli, 2021). This study was needed to fill a gap in the existing literature, which failed to identify the cultural, educational, and psychological elements that significantly impact the potential of native Dominican baseball players to successfully progress from initial recruitment to a successful major league career. This research provided the foundation for future work to develop screening and intervention strategies. (Ulrich, 2015; Wasch, 2009). The research focused on a population sample of successful Dominican major league baseball players who have consistently played in the major leagues for two to five years. Research has been conducted on the Dominican academies and their challenges and deficiencies,

as well as on the financial gap between the US and international players, specifically in Latin America. There is an emphasis on the deflated value of Dominican players. A gap in research exists when looking at the components of Dominican Major League success through the lens of the cultural, educational, or psychological impact (Gentile, 2022; Klein, 1989; Klein, 2009). This study provided a view into a common journey for native Dominican players. It revealed significant information that could shape future resources to enhance present educational initiatives or create new ones where they do not already exist. It has focused on raising educational deficiencies, developing the English language, US cultural competencies, and providing mental health screenings and counseling in the DR and throughout the MLB developmental system.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to capture the impact of the individual's culture, language, educational level, and mental health well-being that prevents effective intervention strategies to mitigate the premature attrition of native Dominican players with talent. These Dominican baseball players were asked to describe their experiences moving into and transitioning through the major-league/minor-league systems beginning at the MLB's DR camps and through the US developmental system. The study was conducted to determine if a major league player was found in the major leagues. The study was guided by Schlossberg's transition theory. It was used to understand how individual players cope with significant factors during their entry, transition, and exit from the developmental system to a successful major league career (Schlossberg, 1981). This study defined significant factors as education, culture and language, and psychological and mental health wellness. Major league success was defined as having played in the major leagues for two to five consecutive years (Hanna, 2016).

Significance of the Study

As in all businesses, MLB and individual baseball organizations' investment of resources are specifically driven by the desire to maximize financial profit. This research is intended to provide insight into when and where resources can be best invested. (Ulrich, 2015; Wasch, 2009). Some studies and articles were written looking at factors related to the experience of Dominican-born baseball players and the issues associated with their journey into the MLB system. However, there is a gap in the data pertaining to the impacts of education, culture and language, and psychological and mental health wellness. Specifically, it is necessary to understand how these factors impact the pragmatic daily processing of information and instruction and how they do/do not support positive, productive interactions with staff and teammates. This study sought to discern to what degree these aspects impact other psychological factors that universally affect mental well-being and an individual's ability to make healthy personal choices crucial to goal attainment. It also used the qualitative data developed by previous studies that have focused on the theoretical process of recruitment into local Dominican academies, the acquisition of players into the major league team camps in the DR, and the consequential differences between the international player market and US-based market (Leonard, 2013). Furthering this knowledge was obtained by exploring the factors that might have been significant in differentiating a successful journey towards success in the major leagues. This study utilized the previously published data to explore the identified gap in the data through extensive qualitative interviews with Dominican players that have successfully made the journey from the DR to a successful major league career.

Some studies have attempted to look at the journey from the humble impoverished, and simple life on the DR to an escape through a journey toward greatness in baseball. However,

those have focused on the journey's financial or procedural aspects. Few have attempted to explore from a qualitative empirical perspective the human factors reported by those who have made a successful journey. This qualitative research collected data and was utilized to make recommendations to modify existing programs at the MLB level and those at the individual club's level. There were also aspects of this study that will be useful in developing and fielding new programs and procedures to address aspects of recruitment, educational, and mental health support applicable at each developmental phase. The lessons learned within the context of the international baseball market apply and are useful beyond the DR to a wider Caribbean and Latin American population, other minorities, and marginalized populations attracted to entering the global baseball market (Garofalo, 2010; Zaslau, 2017). As MLB continues to expand baseball globally, the outcome of this study provided significance to become a foundational document for the game's globalization (Lihosit, 2016). The study's outcome will improve the lives of individuals in the MLB pipeline and some that have yet to be enticed by the allure of a life away from their meager existence. These lessons will support athletes during their baseball journey and, more importantly, provide them lessons, resources, and training that will impact generations in their native DR and the communities in which they live during and after their baseball careers.

Research Questions

Main Research Question

Looking at lived experiences of Dominican baseball players transitioning from MLB Dominican camps through minor league affiliate level play into a successful US major league career, the research questions included:

RQ1

Describe the impact of culture and language in their transition to a successful major league career?

RQ2

Describe the impact of educational level in their transition to a successful major league career?

RQ3

Describe the impacts of psychological and mental health wellness on their transition to a successful major league career?

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework was designed to explore the lived experiences of Dominican baseball players moving into the local MLB Dominican camps through the MLB developmental system in the US and exiting into a successful MLB major league career. The native Dominican player's journey is comprised of the following interrelated concepts from the current literature: MLB, MLB developmental system, native Dominican baseball players, educational levels, culture, language, acculturation, psychological, mental health well-being, assimilation, resiliency, attrition, retention, journey impact on native player families, and successful major league career. In all respects, the conceptual framework supported the proposed study. Additionally, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory provided a theoretical framework for organizing and analyzing data collected during this study, exploring the lived experiences of Dominican players moving into and through the MLB developmental system and exiting into a successful MLB major league career.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory provides the framework for analyzing human adaptation to transition and is the foundation for the current study. Schlossberg (1981) defined *transition* as an event (or nonevent) or occurrence (or nonoccurrence) that inherently changes a person's self-view and worldview, assumptions, behavior, and relationships resulting in an individual's development or regression depending on whether they are effective versus ineffective. In addition, a transition is defined by the individual's perspective. Schlossberg (1981) described 'adaptation' as an individual's process involving moving from a preoccupation with the transition to self-integration of the transition. This can also be viewed as a movement from disorganization to organization in the individual's life. Schlossberg's (1981) model proposed that adaptation to a particular transition is not static but rather complex as the individual moves through different stages or phases of transition throughout life. As a rule, the individual's adaption can be evaluated by considering the individual's perceived or actual resources-to-deficits ratio and examining whether a balance or imbalance exists, understanding that changes in an individual's situation will inherently influence changes in the resources-deficits ratio. It is also understood that an individual's resources-deficits ratio is not fixed throughout life. Schlossberg (1981) originally suggested that an individual's adaptation to transition is impacted by three sets of interacting variables: individual characteristics, the transition, and the pre- and post-transition environments and supports (Burns, 2010; Swain, 1991).

Definitions

The following terms have been defined for the purpose of this study.

1. *Acculturation* – The result of a group of individuals with different cultural backgrounds coming into continuous contact with one another (Gentile & Buzzelli, 2021)
2. *Assimilation* – Learning English and American culture to adjust to American life and provide an opportunity to connect with teammates. (Wasch, 2009)
3. *Culture* – In terms of Latino culture, which has several normative values that include *simpatia* (kindness) emphasizes politeness and conflict avoidance; *personalismo* (friendliness) emphasizes connection; and *respeto* (respect) implies attentive concern for their personhood (Jackett, G., 2013).
4. *Ethnicity* – Includes language and colonial legacies associated with baseball in the DR (Wise, N., 2015)
5. *Education* – Formal instruction from a structured system in the DR or through the Academies leading to a graduation certificate (Bouchet et al., 2013)
6. *Familismo*- The term Latinos use to describe their supreme collective loyalty to extended family is familismo (Carteret, 2011).
7. *Intellect* – Part of identified individual resilience factors along with social competence and motivation (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013)
8. *Mental Health* – In the context of Dominican players, maintaining original cultural values, psychological adjustments, and development (Worthington et al., 2007).
9. *Multicultural* – Coming from diverse backgrounds (Anderson, 2016)
10. *Psychological* – Aspects of transition referring to mental attributes, mental health, or mental well-being (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013; Campisi, 2013).

11. *Latino* - The term Latino denotes all persons living in the United States whose origins can be traced to the Spanish-speaking regions of Latin America, including the Caribbean, Mexico, Central American, and South America (Carteret, 2011).
12. *Transition* - Changes due to stages of progression and moving through levels to adjust and adapt (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013).
13. *Well-being* is feeling safe physically, emotionally, and psychologically (Cuellar, 2014).
14. *Resiliency* – As it relates to Dominican players and their different training norms in contrast to US training programs, the ability to not incur injuries that affect practice and game participation (Bullock et al., 2018).

Summary

Through this study, a gap was filled in the existing literature by focusing on culture and language, educational level, and psychological and mental health wellness elements impacting the developmental process of Dominican baseball players. Individual experiences were examined from initial local Dominican recruitment through the numerous transitions into and through the MLB developmental process to a successful major league career (Wasch, 2009). This phenomenological study was guided by Schlossberg's transition theory, and through qualitative interviews of Dominican major league players who had successfully navigated this transitional journey by understanding their lived experiences. These included how they coped in their individual journeys to identify and describe the commonalities in their experiences from the initial recruitment of native Dominican players to a successful major league career (Schlossberg, 1981). This transitional phenomenon supported athletes in managing the psychosocial and psychological stressors associated with personal and career development as professional athletes. As the dedicated mental health clinician for two major league organizations working extensively

with a population of American-born adolescents, the domains of language and culture, educational levels, psychological and mental health wellness factors significantly impacted mental well-being and successful career outcomes were found to be true. This study focused on understanding the impact of these three specific domains on the development of the resilience necessary to successfully navigate the transitions in the venue of professional baseball. The data and understanding garnered through this study provided a basis for developing new approaches and will assist in refining existing efforts by MLB, individual clubs, and other entities involved in sports talent.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

This chapter reviewed the literature related to this study which explores the lived experiences of native-born Dominican baseball players entering from the MLB DR academies, transitioning through MLB's developmental system, and exiting the developmental system into a successful major-league career. The literature review was structured by main themes commencing with the history of native Dominican baseball players; before addressing current findings relative to the impact of culture, language, educational level, and psychological mental health well-being through three distinct phases of transition. Phases comprising of native players transitioning into the MLB DR baseball camps This transition included the MLB developmental system into the US and out of the MLB developmental system into a successful career with a major league club. The review incorporated strategies for scrutinizing the literature, this study's environment, context, relevance, and significance. A literature review of the problem before beginning the literature review was completed.

Strategies used for investigating literature include Liberty University online library academic search engine and the Google Scholar search engine for peer reviewed journal articles that have been published within the last five years. The investigation was later expanded to consider relevant research that had taken place within the last 10 years. Key terms used for the investigation consisted of a variety of combinations with each configuration of key terms containing *native Dominican baseball players, native, native Dominican, native Dominican baseball player, native Dominican camps, major-leagues, major-league baseball, major leagues developmental system, native culture, cultural, language, Spanish language, education, educational level, psychological, mental health wellbeing, resiliency of native Dominican*

baseball players. Since the investigation resulted in information on the history of Dominican baseball and its relationship to major league baseball, *Dominican baseball history* was added to each of the combinations of key terms. Next, this study's situation, contacts, relevance, and significance will be discussed.

The objective of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how native Dominican baseball players came into the major leagues developmental camps in the DR and to capture their lived experiences as they transitioned through the major-league developmental system into the US and into a successful major-league career. The experiences of the study's participants were examined in terms of events or non-events that had a significant impact or affected progress in their transition in terms of their educational levels, language, culture, and psychological and/or mental health wellbeing. These events associated with their transitions had other relevant outcomes that affected a shift of values, expectations, and an awakening to the needs of appropriate boundaries within the context of their developing personal and professional identities. This study's significance will be addressed next.

The significance of this study scrutinized the existing processes and applications that address issues related to language, culture, educational levels, and psychological and mental health well-being of native-born Dominican baseball players entering from the MLB DR academies, transitioning through MLB's developmental system, and exiting the developmental system into a successful major-league career. Additionally, the experience of leaving the family system for what could be a five to seven-year journey further stressed the individual, who may carry a degree of inherent childhood trauma and the pressure of expectations both on themselves and from their extended familia. Therefore, additional research was required to address the impact of culture, language, educational level, and psychological and mental health well-being

for native Dominican baseball players transitioning through the MLB developmental system.

Exploring the lived experiences of native-born Dominican baseball players entering from the MLB DR academies, transitioning through MLB's developmental system, and exiting the developmental system into a successful major-league career has practical significance due to its ramifications in the literature base on the transitional process that impacts retention and progression. The fluidity and precision of the transition are impacted by intersecting factors that (a) align with acculturation and language, (b) the native player's ability to cognitively process new information and its correlation with educational level, and (c) the significance of past and existing childhood trauma impacting psychological functioning and mental health well-being. The accompanying contribution to the literature base within each of the areas above and their interconnectedness motivated future qualitative and quantitative studies. This study carried theoretical significance due to its ramifications in further applying Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework was expanded to further study other Latin American baseball players and their transitional experiences related to the same factors within their culture.

This study carried a significant practical application important in informing management-level staff responsible for budgets and resource allocation. Employee assistance programs (EAP) and certified employee assistance professionals (CEAP) across all clubs in MLB. Additionally, individual team medical staff, professional educators, psychologists, licensed mental health counselors (LMHC), mental performance coaches (MPC), nutritionists, and supporting staff at every level of MLB and individual organizations will benefit from these findings. The study's purpose was to employ its findings to improve existing support structures and/or develop new organizational programs to support and facilitate improvements in cultural and language

integration, educational development, and improve mental health well-being through assessments, psychoeducation, and treatment. This study also provided far-reaching implications for the overall international baseball market and potential policy changes that will impact the recruitment of native Dominican and Latin American players (Campisi, 2013).

Although there is extensive research on the history of baseball in the DR and the issues associated with MLB recruiting in this inexpensive labor market, there is little information examining the lived experiences of native Dominican players and their ordeal getting successfully through the MLB developmental system (Anderson, 2016; Bouchet et al., 2013; Bullock et al., 2018). There was insufficient information when examining the factors that contributed to the success of native Dominican players and the importance of the phasing and timing of the application of resources in the areas of assimilation of culture, language, the significance of educational levels, and psychological factors associated with mental health well-being. By examining the lived experiences of Dominican baseball players moving through the MLB development system, as it relates to previously mentioned factors, the body of research increased understanding of how these factors affected change throughout the transition.

Related Literature

This review of the present literature was related to this study which explored the lived experiences of native-born Dominican baseball players entering DR academies, transitioning through MLB's developmental system, and exiting the developmental system into a successful major-league career. The following concepts were culture, language assimilation, educational levels and their impact on progression, and psychological and mental health well-being overall effects on transition (Anderson, 2016; Alexander, 2006; Bermudez & Mancini, 2013; Bouchet, 2013; Bullock et al., 2018; Campisi, 2013; Carteret, 2011; Chambers, 2017; Creswell & Poth,

2018; Cuellar, 2014; Franz & Cook, 2020; Hanna, 2016; Hays & Singh, 2012; James et al., 2021; Juckett, 2013; Klein, 1989; Klein, 2007; Klein, 2009; Kusterman, 2013; Leonard, 2013; Lihosit, 2016; Mitchel, 2020; Nagy et al., 2019; McKenna, 2017; Osmer, 2011; Parsons, 2014; Patton, 2014; Ruiz et al., 2020; Soth-McNett & Moreno, 2007; Spagnuolo, 2003; Ulrich, 2015; Walden, 2019; Weil, 2016; Wise, 2015; Worthington,; Wasch, 2009; Zaslau, 2017; Zirin, 2005).

Culture and Language Assimilation

There is a long history of the struggle that Latin American players face to make it into and through the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues. Relative to their light-skinned Latin counterparts, this struggle has been particularly difficult for the dark-skinned native Dominican players. Before the 1970s, darker-skinned players faced barriers similar to those of African American players. Although baseball was one of the few venues where integration was taking place in America, the complexity of the times in American society was reflected in the opportunities impacted by issues of race, ethnicity, and nationality (McGovern, 2017). Race, nationality, and language abilities continue to have a great influence on the roles and opportunities available to Latin players not just while playing the game but also, and in some cases more importantly, transitioning to a future role in coaching, managing roles, and front office senior level jobs within a club. The reality is that Latin American players are medium to dark-skinned players who generally do not have the same level of education as their lighter-skinned counterparts. Therefore, they encountered significant challenges to overcome not only because of their limited education but also to a greater degree of the perception and stigma associated with their struggles with language acquisition, lack of formal education, national identity, and skin color (Gentile, 2022).

McGovern (2017) looked at the plight of the dark-skinned native Dominican player as further exacerbated by the racial gap in the leadership of MLB. At the highest levels and throughout its developmental affiliates, there is a significant absence of cultural and racial diversity. This, directly and indirectly, affects Latin American players, who make up one-third of the major-league/minor-league system athletes. The dark-skinned native Dominican is being impacted not only because of their skin color but also due to their lack of formal education as compared to light-skinned Latin players and their white American counterparts (Burgos, 2007); Waters & Ueda, 2007; Weinbach & Mattingly, 2018).

Historically, MLB Latin players and their African American counterparts have and continue to struggle with more obscure racial discrimination. Many Latin American baseball players have felt and still feel that American-born African American players do not have to deal with the language and cultural barriers they must navigate. This is particularly impactful for the dark-skinned Dominican players who must compete with lighter-skinned Latin peers who, in many cases, have a higher education level because of their access to formal education in their home country. Additionally, there remains a disparity between those from the capital in their own island nation who are not limited by their parents' economic situation. Therefore, they have been afforded an academic education and a choice of baseball academy education on the DR. Dark-skin native Dominican players drafted from the country's interior face challenges due to a lack of formal education and cultural challenges not only from practices and traditions being different from those of more educated countrymen but also due to their deficiencies in their native Spanish language. These deficiencies are magnified as they are introduced to learning English, they will need to become successful in progressing through the MLB developmental system (Lapchick, 2015; Parsons et al., 2011).

Culture matters because it is foundational to how lives are structured and an interpretation of the world. A cultural framework and the accompanying language create pathways to express and explain how to live. It is also critical to new knowledge acquisition, particularly baseball-specific knowledge, which is part of the mission of the Dominican academies (Campisi, 2013; Carteret, 2011). Native Dominican players find themselves at a significant disadvantage because of their deficit in structured cultural understanding, having left formal education in early middle school to join an academy, at times not by their choosing (Franz & Cook, 2020). In the process of transitioning through the MLB developmental system, being able to assimilate into the American culture is key to achieving a certain level of success. However, language acquisition is even more critical since it is foundational to assimilating into the American culture and acquiring the skills necessary to navigate their careers in MLB. The principal issue with focusing support throughout the MLB system is that each organization independently chooses the level, type, and location of investment. As in any business, this allocation of resources needs to equate to a return to the bottom-line. This calculus starts with cultural and academic evaluations at the entry point at MLB Dominican academies, where initial culture and language training is presently taking place. However, in many cases, the support and investment are neither structured nor appropriately staffed to benefit the native Dominican player.

Baseball is a business, and businesses require calculated decision-making leading to a positive financial outcome, and the structuring and staffing of critical training junctions throughout the MLB developmental system needed to be identified. The best source of this information is the native Dominican players that have experienced this transition. By exploring the lived experiences of successful native Dominican players who have traversed the MLB

developmental system intending to identify aspects of culture and language training that were instrumental in their success, this study filled in the gaps in the literature that led to the necessary structure and staffing of resources that will benefit native Dominican players as well as the organizations that they work for (Bouchet et al., 2013; Wasch, 2009).

Battochio et al. (2013) postulated that when transitioning through the MLB developmental system, the impact of assimilating to American culture and language becomes critical to transitioning success. There is a required functional ability to communicate in the language of coaches and support infrastructure in sport-specific language that not only facilitates personal functioning but also helps to establish close relationships with teammates. Regarding cultural and language acquisition, in the case of native Dominican baseball players, it is important to understand that a foundational aspect of language requires an academic component or foundation to build upon. In many cases, these young native Dominican players have not acquired and understood the basics of phonology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics in their language. These deficiencies of language components will have to be overcome to continue their progression towards one day playing in the major leagues. Teams have acknowledged the importance of the language component. Given the percentage of Latino players coming through the MLB system, it is increasingly important to address this. On the opening day of 2022, 28.5% of MLB players were Latino (Gentile, 2022).

Various degrees of effort are being employed to educate young Dominican players in their language within the MLB club academy systems. These efforts are necessary to establish a foundation of the components critical to language acquisition. There are efforts to introduce and encourage English language acquisition through English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Several initiatives from MLB Headquarters in New York encourage and support these efforts.

However, the execution of these and other programs reside at the club level, where they are evaluated from a business perspective, as individual clubs absorb the cost of teachers at every level of development. Though these programs support the players' best interests, the approach often introduces concepts in a new language. The bottom line is that these players have difficulty grasping concepts in English because they do not understand them in their own language.

Several researchers (Acce, 2020; Arth & Billings, 2019; Battochio et al., 2013; Chirnov, 2009; Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Butler, 2019; Ferrucci et al., 2016; Gentile, 2022; Gentile & Buzzelli, 2021; Gentile, 2022; Guardado, 2022; Lapchick, 2022; McGovern, 2017; Otto, 2013; Rueckert, 2008) have underscored the need for conducting further studies on the effects of culture and language and their impact on the transition of players through the MLB developmental system. Although there have been some gains in curtailing recruiting abuses in Latin America and, more specifically, within the DR through the development of an MLB Code of Conduct, the baseball culture in the DR and other international market venues will require much more work (Cho & Smith, 2015; Moorad, 2015; Williamson, 2013). Dominican players are challenged to understand the complexity and difficulties of navigating two worldviews. In the case of the Toronto Blue Jays, perhaps three worldviews as they transition at some point in their development experience through a Canadian affiliate in Vancouver, Canada. Those collaborating with the Blue Jays at the major league level of play based in Toronto, Canada, must regularly straddle the American and Canadian cultural nuances during their cross-border travels to compete in the US for half of their 162 games schedule (Chirkov, 2009; Rudmin, 2009). These factors add to the frustration of Latin players, most acutely with native Dominican players who often lack the foundational aspects of language. The day-to-day frustrations in interacting with their local and team environment are experienced anew at every level of transition throughout the

developmental system. Therefore, this research focused on identifying aspects of cultural assimilation during the different phases of transition through the MLB developmental system and the parallel language development (i.e., ESL education). This research will provide a model of best practices that have made a difference in the career development of successful major league native Dominican players. Research will assist not only future native Dominican players but also other players with similar challenges from the major league's international market. Additionally, the results of further research into the culture and language issues of Latin American players and, more specifically, native Dominican players will offer further insights to enhance the development of supportive relationships with their American counterparts. This can go a long way in countering the prevalent stereotypes that are also at times associated with their African American counterparts as lacking intelligence and, therefore, their inability to keep up with instructions or being characterized as being lazy and less credible than their white peers (Ferrucci et al., 2016).

Educational Levels Impact on Progression

The journey of native Dominican baseball players into the MLB developmental system with an expectation of a successful major league career begins with signing a contract and entering one of the 30 MLB club's Dominican academies. Here they are provided with lodging and food, and depending on the club's educational investment, they will start their education on American culture and begin their English language training. Throughout this phase, they will play in the Dominican Summer League (DSL), competing against other players entering the system and beginning their on-and-off-field development. Within each club, there is an informal and, in some cases, formal assessment process that identifies educational deficiencies to connect the player with the appropriate level of available support. The level of support ranges from

informal English language training to more formal plans provided by a certified teacher or college graduate, in some cases with postgraduate education, to conduct English language training. Some of the club's educational support also includes a program, in collaboration with the DR Ministry of Education, to help Dominican players complete their high school education. This aspect is situationally dependent and requires that they remain in the DR long enough to receive their high school diploma before transitioning to the US. (Gentile, 2022; McKenna, 2017).

Frank and Cook (2020) reflected on the reality of a parent's expectations of having a son with enough athletic ability to assist the family out of poverty. They reported that of the thousands of child athletes recruited to the local Dominican academies, 97% will return home without a contract facilitating their entry into MLB's developmental system. The gamble taken by the parents, and by extension, the child leaves the majority of those that enter the local academies annually with a truncated education since the academies focus strictly on baseball with very little time and effort invested in academics. Three percent of native Dominican baseball players that come out of the local academies to enter the MLB Dominican academies find that although their baseball skills and talent got them to this initial part of their journey, their educational deficiencies become a factor in their progression. Now, identifying a player's level of education is imperative to formulate a plan to address deficiencies. These efforts are critical to both the player and the clubs who have made an initial investment in the player.

Education has been a problem for decades and continues to be an issue of concern in the development of Dominican players because of the impact it has on their ability to learn new concepts and ultimately on their overall development, with implications on the overall timing of their journey through the MLB developmental system (Chetty, 2019; Franz & Cook, 2020;

Ottenson, 2022). The absence of formal education is a significant factor in their educational journey through the MLB system. At the same time, the Dominican local academies lead to a lack of self-efficacy and belief in themselves and/or their capacity to achieve academically, which adds to their already stressful environment. Although hope is a complex variable, given the situations most of the native Dominican players come from, it offers a pathway of thinking that can positively affect self-efficacy (Høigaard et al., 2015; Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

Compared to their American white counterparts, the pathway into MLB for the Dominican baseball player is seeking a better life for themselves and their family. The requirement of adequate education and training is not just for playing successfully in the major leagues but, more importantly, for helping them live a productive and meaningful life after baseball. There is a blind and inherent trust with the accompanying expectation on the part of the parents and the player that when an MLB club recruits him, they will take care of him and his needs in the same way as his American counterparts. This concept is understood in the American market. Provisions are made for players coming in through the draft by the educational packages made a requirement for many of those signings from high school and evident in incentives for those who have not completed college. Although there have been numerous attempts to address inequities in the treatment of players acquired through the international market, there continues to be a chasm between not only the signing bonus and benefits that American-born players can negotiate but also the support they receive toward their ongoing education, in some cases during, and for many once their playing days are done. This is not the case afforded to most Latin American players and certainly not to the Dominican player who leaves family and home and foregoes a formal education for an opportunity to contract with an MLB club on the DR. The plight of desperation on the part of the Dominican talent due to their circumstances through no

fault of their own, within their families and country, and the lack of proportional compensation towards the acquisition of talent on the part of MLB clubs have been documented throughout the history of MLB baseball on the Island. The level of compensation in the initial contracts and overall investment of the MLB clubs towards the Dominican baseball talent personal development relative to the utility they serve to the business lacks equity. This is especially significant because Dominican players are, by American definition, children of a labor force that should have some inherent protection against any abuse through the commission or omission of the expected legal, fair child labor practices. Identifying the educational protocols in place throughout MLB in the club's MLB academies and throughout the affiliate developmental system and what is and is not working for the Dominican players is critical to holistic future change of the Dominican baseball player experience (Gentile, 2022; Rascher & DeSchriver, 2012; Roach, 2021; Wasch, 2009; White, 2017).

Tomás et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study using 614 Dominican middle school students using scales of disproportional hope, academic self-efficacy, academic self-concept, and engagement. According to the outcome of this research, hope and self-efficacy significantly affected engagement. Behavioral engagement was the best predictor of academic success. This study was informative as we sought to gain knowledge of the Dominican baseball players through a qualitative approach and examination of their lived experience. The variable of self-efficacy and hope are important to players' ability to embrace educational support as both a benefit and, more importantly, a critical component to their successful professional development. This study explored components of the educational support provided to Dominican players in their journey. Identifying critical components positively influencing player success and the gaps

in the existing support that could be addressed to enhance player developmental experience were sought.

The experiences of players participating in the study led to an examination of existing support systems and possibly to some degree of identification of best practices leading to standardization at the club level and across MLB (Anon, 2007; Anon, 2010; Burgos et al., 2010; Franz & Cook, 2020; Gentile, 2022; Urciuoli, 2004; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). This study examined its participants' lived experiences, providing context and feedback to the various attempts by clubs and MLB to address the education gap. Through their individual experiences, players who have successfully navigated the MLB developmental journey have provided insights that will make their countrymen's journey a better one than their own.

Psychological and Mental Health Wellbeing Effect on Transition

Although much has been written about native Dominican players' struggle to make it to the major leagues, there has been little attention to the psychological and mental health wellbeing aspect of the adolescents whose parents sign contracts every year as they enter the MLB Dominican academies. The evident mental health challenges that players face have been a part of their lives since they can remember, beginning with their impoverished upbringing and departure from home to join a local academy. In many cases, although adolescents may be only a couple of hours from their homes to the academies, their mobility is hindered by a lack of reliable transportation and resources. In contrast, in most of their American counterparts, their parents do not have the resources to drive to them. For the most part, families are in survival mode. Therefore, when players enter the MLB developmental system, they often have been away from their family structure for extended periods and behave like children missing their mothers. A degree of complexity is inherent to the psychology of Dominican players entering the MLB

developmental system. It has critical elements of culture, race, and trauma inherent to impoverishment and feelings of abandonment. Many have attachment issues that affect them in dysfunctional ways when dealing with peers and staff throughout their journey (Fourment et al., 2022; Gentile, 2022; Klopper, 2016).

Many faces of spirituality can be seen as positive when struggling with oneself and the many setbacks through MLB's developmental journey (Barnett, 2020). As to the connection between the game of baseball and religion, more specifically to Catholicism, it attempts to examine the theological explanation of the word loneliness as it relates to the Christian tradition of spending time alone. This can be seen as a good thing in the context of spiritual growth and greater understanding. This explanation leads to looking at the nature of Christian life as possibly being able to shed light on baseball as a lonely game played as a team sport. Barnett goes on to quote Yogi Berra "Baseball is ninety percent mental. The other half is physical." The same spiritual discipline required of the Christian journey is required of an athlete, in this case, a baseball player, to discipline their bodies to perform at the highest levels and, more importantly, the spiritual discipline required of a baseball player.

Spirituality, also referred to as *espiritismo* and/or *santeria*, can also be associated with the practices of Voodoo in neighboring Haiti. It is a form of religious practice throughout the Caribbean basin among the decedents of the Taino Indians. It has been cited as significant in native Dominican players' support system. However, the spirituality component of the Dominican player is a combination of Catholic traditions and aspects of *espiritismo* associated with their Taino spirituality (Bettelheim, 2005; Ferber, 1997; Mora, 2009). This practice is a compellation of Catholic traditions, native Taino religious practices, and African religious rituals imported into the Caribbean basin along with the African slave trade. Aspects of each can be

seen in the makeshift alters created by those that follow a religion. Spirituality has been cited as a means of warding off bad luck and, for some players, traditions that include rituals composed of alters to different deities to address specific concerns (i.e., batting percentages, pitching outings, and relationships). Dominican players' spiritual practices must be recognized in addressing their mental health and well-being. The research of spirituality as it relates to Dominican players and their journey through the MLB developmental system corresponds with Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory which asserts that an individual's religious beliefs and values influence their adaptation to transition and support the individual's ability to endure periods of stress. Their religious belief system also lends to an individual purpose or understanding of the purpose within the struggle. It helps an individual cope with challenges in each process stage through transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

When programs are developed to support acculturation and as they are discussed with players, there is commonly a degree of pushback and resistance. These players, adolescents without the benefit of a fully developed frontal lobe and the logic and decision-making that goes with it, identify acculturation as a 'code' for selling out to the dominant culture of the US. When this translates to marginalizing their culture and traditions, many are resistant. This feeling of being attacked on values and culture is expressed by players at the different levels of play when the team's nutritionist and the first food casualty are pushing 'healthy eating' is the player's traditional meals of bandera dominicana, Dominican rice, mofongo, sancocho, and mangu. The significance of the food to the player is not a nutritional issue. Rather it is the association of these traditional foods with the comfort of mother and home. Researchers indicated a gap in the available information (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2016; Fourment et al., 2022; Gentile, 2022; Klopper, 2016; Ressler et al., 2011).

Therefore, further research is necessary to explore the deeper individual and collective trauma associated with the Dominican baseball trade, and Dominican player transitions during critical mental and emotional development stages. Although most native players come from the interior and have a life of poverty and hardship with inherent childhood trauma, they have a strong emotional connection to family. In that connection, there is some sense of security. As parents look to provide a better life for their children, some who show a natural talent that will be recruited by the agents that troll the DR and eventually find their way to an academy, where they will be trained and observed for years before being considered for an MLB tryout and potential contract. This process of leaving home as children and attaching to a caretaker in the local academy, the MLB academy, and throughout the transition has inherent trauma (Fourment et al., 2022). In attachment theory, core parenting variables of sensitivity and responsiveness point to parents' ability, or in the case of Dominican players' caregivers, to notice and interpret children's signals accurately and respond promptly. When these variables are present, and the response is appropriate, the child feels secure and safe. In the case of Dominican children and adolescents, they are. Therefore, the attention they get is generally gauged according to their assessed talent and potential productivity for the caretakers.

Support

What does the existing support look like for a native Dominican Baseball going through the MLB developmental system, and what is considered important and necessary for their success? There is a limited perspective when looking at aspects of the lived experience of Dominican players and the support available to the individual player in relationship to language and culture, their educational levels as they enter the MLB developmental system, and the psychology involved, mental health wellbeing. It appears that primarily these efforts have not

focused on the problem set from the perspective of the Dominican baseball player. The player, whose sole concern is navigating the MLB developmental environment, intends to attain the financial rewards awaiting him and for the family and those considered *familia* who also have similar expectations. For those researching and writing about the Dominican, whether individuals entering baseball and migrating to the US through that venue or those simply struggling to have a better life is defined by making it to the US and its opportunities from an academic perspective. This perspective fails to address the very nature of the struggle that Dominican baseball players need to overcome inherent to their cultural, linguistic, educational, and psychological challenges (Bergos, 2007; Klein, 1991; Rudolph, 2010).

In many cases, the focus is on scrutinizing specific players once they have made it to the major leagues, their upbringings, their personal failures, and making judgments on their loyalties to the nation, club, or family and their places in baseball history. Cultural and language background is important to understanding the specific Dominican player. Individuals, when they arrive at the MLB Dominican academies with similar experiences associated with rural life in the DR, have a unique history which is how meaning is created for the individual and therefore requires specific support (Battochio et al., 2013; Stambulova et al., 2009). This problem set is through a cultural psychology lens. The Dominican culture and language impacted by education and the psychology of trauma lead to the acceptance of stereotypical cultural behavior models as appropriate in assessing the initial support needed during entry into the MLB Dominican academies. Yet, Stambulova and Alfermann (2009) reported that cross-cultural studies are still rudimentary. They reported that the findings suggest that as immigrant players progress through a developmental system, they will face additional stressors associated with immersing themselves in the new country's culture. As they work towards growing their baseball skills, they

must also develop the English language skills required to transverse this new environment. They must learn rudimentary life skills (i.e., learning to use financial services, transportation systems) (Battochio et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2001; Klein, 1989; Stambulova et al., 2009; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009).

Battochio et al. (2013) suggested that when transitioning, elite athletes' adaption suggested that a support network has been shown to help manage overall additional stress associated with the transition and performance expectations that present as performance anxiety. In many cases, these can be a combination of depression and anxiety. The stress is compounded when the elite athlete also has to manage and assimilate to a new culture and language, as in the case of Dominican players transitioning from the Dominican academies to their first US club baseball camp. In the case of Dominican baseball players who begin their entry into the MLB Dominican academies at age 16, having already been out of their home environments in some cases for years, a support network is not just a good idea but a wise investment.

Adolescent development, which is characterized by significant hormonal and physical changes, often fails to see as readily the changes (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006) are taking place in an adolescent's cognitive development, executive function, and social cognition, affecting aspects of their ability to control and coordinate thoughts and behavior. These issues impact numerous aspects of life transitions and influence the ability to engage effectively and meet expectations at each level specific to skill development. A support system that recognizes the emotional component associated with the insecurity of navigating a new culture and the added hardship of acquiring a new language, particularly when their mental and emotional foundation is not fully developed, is needed. A holistic network of individuals who recognize the neuroscience behind the behavior or lack thereof and work collaboratively to address educational

gaps, assist in culture and language assimilation, and incorporate psychological training and services can be instrumental (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Ogilvie, 1979; Potter et al., 2021).

Baseball is a sport of individuals competing with one another. Yet, as a team, it requires dealing with complex relationships and managing levels of trust. The average Dominican adolescent is challenged in adapting and assimilating to his new environment with real or perceived ethnic and racial discrimination. These very teammates they rely on for companionship and must work for success on game day are also competitors in a high-pressure environment. Yip et al. (2022) utilized 350 participants, of which 22% were Latin Americans and 24% were Dominicans. They investigated ethnic/racial discrimination stress implications on adolescent mental health and its impact on sleep, a critical factor in adolescents' mental health. Azza et al. (2020) found a significant issue of ethnicity/race discrimination or even the perception of this type of discrimination has a notable effect on sleep and overall mental health. What is often dismissed as an inconvenient issue to address with native Dominican players can, according to the research, also give rise to anxiety and depression.

What can be dismissed as adolescent inappropriateness, roughhousing, or truth-in-gest type behavior between teammates may have significant mental health implications for players, who already have navigated a complex, fragmented personal journey at a young age. The support that presently exists throughout the MLB developmental system for the international market player is determined by the level of investment each club is willing and able to provide. In many cases, these efforts serve a significant percentage of the adolescent baseball player population in the MLB development system. To address the deficiencies, present in the system in servicing the Dominican MLB developmental system population, the experiences of those players that have been successful as it relates to their experiences with and processing of cultural and linguistic

challenges, and their experience with the educational infrastructure. Its efficacy has been captured. Information has been gathered to determine how these factors affected their mental health and well-being.

When it comes to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness that MLB has publicly taken on, it is appropriate to examine the standardization of resources provided to individuals. MLB and its thirty teams must commit to developing the requisite educational infrastructure to support cultural and linguistic necessities and standardization beyond an individual club's culture to support equity of opportunity. (Choi et al., 2019; Dicesare, 2021).

For this study, the focus is confined to the entry into the MLB Dominican Academies, transition through the MLB developmental system in the US, and eventual exit into a major league club. Future studies could also benefit the baseball industry and Dominican major league baseball players by examining the lived experiences of those players transitioning from successful major league careers to successful post-player careers in or out of baseball (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Chapter Three: Methods

Summary

The review of the existing literature related to the lived experiences of native-born Dominican baseball players entering from the MLB DR academies, transitioning through MLB's developmental system, and exiting the developmental system into a successful major-league career covered several interconnected concepts through history and experience of players entering the MLB system. Previous emphasis has been on the local scouting-related processes and treatment of players prior to entry into the academies that feed the MLB System on the DR, the inequities in pay, and the need for policy change towards the international market. Although the issues of culture and language skills are known issues that have received varying degrees of attention before and through the MLB developmental system, there is no specific research on the impact of language and culture on Dominican players as it relates to their trajectory or professional achievement.

A similar situation exists with the measures of educational experience and attainment being an indicator of future failure or success and, specifically, how it has impacted on the journey. Lastly, although the search for an exit from their impoverished existence is identified as one of the main motivators for Dominican baseball players, there is a major gap in the literature on mental health well-being. The focus of this research study was to add to the literature related to the impacts of culture and language, education, and psychological and mental health well-being effects on Dominican players' ability to successfully navigate the MLB developmental system. Chapter 3 will discuss this study's methods.

Overview

This chapter delineates the study's methods, research design, questions, environment, participants, procedures, researchers' role, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this transitional phenomenology is to describe the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball prospects entering the MLB Dominican camps. Attrition is first experienced due to deficiencies in educational levels, cultural and language adjustments, and the associated impact on mental health well-being (Mitchel, 2020; Ruiz et al., 2020). Those that progress and continue to transition through the MLB developmental system in the US will provide a greater understanding of their lived experiences. The five to seven-year process is arduous, with difficulties inherent to assimilation and the challenges in developing personally and professionally (Campisi, 2013; Franz & Cook, 2020). Throughout this process, they remain subject to an abruptly ending progression to the major leagues at any one of the developmental phases. The capacity to process new information increases their acculturational process and ability to make appropriate mental health and well-being adjustments. This capacity supports each individual's potential to successfully navigate their exit into a successful major league career (Anderson, 2016; Bouchet et al., 2013; Lihosit, 2016). The study's research design is logically connected to the study's problem and will be described in the next section.

Design

This qualitative study utilized Schlossberg's (1981) transitional phenomenological approach. It used semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players entering the MLB camps in the DR and transitioning to and through the MLB developmental system in the US with their eventual exit into a successful career in MLB. In selecting the transitional phenomenological approach, consideration was given to using

quantitative inquiry versus qualitative methods before selecting qualitative as most appropriate. Upon selecting the qualitative approach, the transitional phenomenological tradition was most appropriate to the study's goal of understanding the challenges and meaning of the lived experiences while entering, transitioning, and exiting the major league's developmental system to a successful major league career (Patton, 2014). The next section will discuss the significance of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research traditions.

Qualitative Versus Quantitative

Significant differences exist between the inherent scholarly presuppositions of qualitative and quantitative research, which impact the study problem and shape how research questions are mapped out, leading to the selection of methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative studies focus on generating numbers to predict or explain outcomes and determine relationships or casualty and/or correlations. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, generate a narrative that allows the researcher to investigate a single phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research is also distinguished by its ability to give the participants voice. It provides flexibility to the researcher in their ability to contextualize the participant's narrative within the social, cultural, and historical framework of their experiences. The study problem provides depth and complexity, patterns, and themes. Categories arise from data analysis, and a comprehensive picture of the study is presented (Archibald et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). In qualitative research, subjects are recognized as call researchers given that they are experts in their narrative and lived experience within the phenomenon being investigated (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher's relationship with the participant is of impartiality, is distinguished by trust and empathy, and is regularly impassioned (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Additionally, qualitative research often occurs in a natural setting, facilitating the

researchers' ability to study participants within their social structures and environments (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, the research must consider the context of the paranormal experience in guiding policy change (Hays & Singh). For these reasons, qualitative research methods are more appropriate for exploring the lived experiences in human behavior exploration. The phenomenological approach will be explained next in general terms.

Phenomenology

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research is to understand the nature of the lived experience and investigate the study's research problem by tracing the phenomenon's common meaning, experience, and framework for the subject group (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2014). Individual members lived experiences within the phenomenon being studied will be transformed into a common reality (Creswell & Poth). Researchers engage in self-bracketing to eliminate personal biases related to the phenomenon and to maintain the focus on the experiences documented by the subjects within the group (Creswell & Poth). Within phenomenological research, traditional baseball settings have been utilized to better understand the experiences of prospects and players (Mitchel, 2020). Within the types of phenomenological research inquiry, the most appropriate approach for this study resided within the transcendental methodology, previously applied to education and counseling. Two of the three research topics examined lived experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). The transcendental phenomenological approach to understanding the meaning of the lived experiences of a group of participants who have experience within the same phenomenon and whose collective experiences are captured as the outcome of the study (Patton, 2014).

Transcendental Approach

The study's qualitative research design was modeled after Moustakas' (1994)

transcendental phenomenological approach. The transcendental phenomenological approach is the most useful qualitative inquiry method for exploring the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning into the MLB Dominican training camps through MLB's minor league developmental system in the US and exiting into a successful major league career. The transcendental approach utilized the following established procedures. It began by identifying a phenomenon to study and then bracketing oneself as a researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The next step was to collect data from each participant who has lived experiences of the phenomenon under observation. The data analysis focused on reducing the data to use quotes or statements from a study subject (i.e., horizontalization) to synthesize it into themes (i.e., clusters of the meaning). The data analysis flowed to create a textual description (i.e., what was experienced by the subjects) and a structural description (i.e., imaginative variation; how participants experience the phenomenon in terms of its context, situation, and conditions). This was brought together by synthesizing a composite of structure and textural data to capture the aggregate of the experience (i.e., its essence or essential variance structure). The final step in this process was to present in writing the phenomenon's essence that represented the subject group's shared experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Further details will be discussed in this chapter's data collection and analysis section.

Research Questions

The study focused on the central research question as it pertained to the overall experience and adaptation through entry, transition, and exit from the MLB developmental system, starting in the DR and ending in the US with a major league club in a successful major league career was, "What were they lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning from MLB Dominican academies through minor league affiliate level play into a

successful US major league career?” The three sub-questions pertain to aspects of language and culture, education, and psychological/mental health well-being as experienced in each of the three phases (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out) taken from Schlossberg’s (1981) theoretical framework.

Central Research Question

What were the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning from MLB Dominican academies through minor league affiliate level play into a successful US major league career? This study was also guided by the following three research questions:

RQ1

Describe the impact of culture and language in their transition to a successful major league career?

RQ2

Describe the impact of educational level in their transition to a successful major league career?

RQ3

Describe the psychological/mental health wellness impact in their transition to a successful major league career?

The study's setting will be discussed in the next section.

Setting

The study explored the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players entering the MLB Dominican camps to commence their journey in the MLB developmental system when transitioning through the MLB developmental system in the US. This included their successful exit from the developmental system into a major league club and career. The study encompassed

a timeline from signing in the DR to at least two years of consistent major league play. This setting was appropriate for studying culture and language, educational, psychological/mental health, and well-being factors associated with the transitional phases and perseverance of Dominican baseball players actively playing in the major leagues. Additionally, the study timeline was appropriate in capturing these factors in the subjects' lived experiences regardless of individual timelines through the system. The study participants will be described next.

Participants

Participants recruited for the study included Dominican players, regardless of their timeline from entry into the MLB Dominican camps, with two to five years of consistent major league club play as of season end, October 2022. The study explored the lived experiences of these native Dominican baseball players from entry to the MLB Dominican camps to commence their journey in the MLB developmental system, their transition through the MLB developmental system in the US, and their exit from the developmental system and into a major league club and successful major league career. The study used nine participants, six in individual interviews and three in a focus group in a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The fewer numbers are intentional to achieve a greater depth of study. Sampling will be addressed in the next section.

Sampling

This study used purposive and snowball sampling to obtain appropriate samples for this research design. Purposive sampling was used to select subjects who could provide meaningful and accurate information about the phenomenon under study (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2014). Snowball sampling, network, or chain sampling was used to further identify additional players that had some connection with the already established sample pool due to their mutual

experience with the phenomenon being investigated (Hays & Singh). Snowball sampling identified other participants not previously known to the researcher, enriching the study (Hays & Singh).

The study subject criteria were:

- 1) Subject was a native Dominican player.
- 2) Subject entered the MLB developmental system through a DR MLB camp.
- 3) Subject entered and transitioned through an exited MLB developmental system.
- 4) Subject has a minimum of two consecutive years of major league-level play with an MLB major-league club.
- 5) Subject was willing to participate in the study.

The rationale for selecting the first criterion was to select individuals who have come from the same culture, language, and for the most part, similar experiences within their homeland. The rationale for selecting the second criterion was to select subjects who followed the same entry path into MLB's developmental system. The third criterion ensured a collective experience transitioning every step of the developmental system. The fourth criterion established a successful major league career as a minimum of two successful consecutive years of play at the major league level, which was critical to the study in identifying cultural and language, educational, and psychological well-being factors common to subjects' experiences. The last criterion required subject participation in individual interviews and a focus group requiring a commitment by the subjects to the necessary time to address detailed questions and agreement to participate with other players in a focus group. The study's procedures will be explained in the next section.

Procedures

Procedures for this study were designed to explore the lived experiences of native Dominican players entering the MLB Dominican Camps, transitioning through the developmental system in the US, and exiting into a major league successful career delineated as follows:

- 1) Attaining Internal Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A)
- 2) Recruit subjects via electronic distribution of recruitment letters (see Appendix B) to individual players meeting criteria via MLB club-specific email systems.
- 3) Screen subjects via electronic distribution of screening questionnaires (see Appendix C)
- 4) Send informed consent documents via email and schedule subjects for individual interviews or participation in the focus group, both of which will be conducted via video conference call (see Appendix D).
- 5) Meet via video conference and conduct interviews and interview guide (see Appendix E). Interviews and focus groups were recorded for audio–video.

Specific data collection procedures will be described in detail in the data collection section as per Moustakas (1994).

- 6) Continue interviewing participants until saturation was reached with interview questions (see Appendix F).
- 7) Transcribed audio–video recordings and analyzed data, contact summary sheet (see Appendix G).
- 8) Specific data analysis procedures for a transcendental phenomenological approach were described in greater detail in the data analysis section (Moustakas).
- 9) Bracketing by maintaining a reflective research journal (see Appendix H) throughout

data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth).

The researcher's role will be explained in the following section.

The Researcher's Role

According to Moustakas' (1994), a transcendental phenomenological approach was the role of the researcher. As such, it is important to describe the role of the researcher because of the potential influence on the study and data collection. The history with the subject in the researcher's current professional roles within the different settings of the study, past and present interaction with subject participants in a current professional relationship with organizations and players, and how these relationships could influence data collection. Major league players often move from organization to organization at different levels of development as well as once established at the major league level. Therefore, there is a likelihood that some of the subjects who made the study's criterion will be players the researcher had, at some juncture during their development, had some level of interaction.

Steps have been taken to establish appropriate research. The subject working relationships included the use of epoché and bracketing. Epoché and bracketing call attention to researchers setting aside their personal experiences and points of view from the process and examining the subject's lived experiences through a new perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher made every effort to become the instrument and used bracketing by keeping a reflective researcher journal (see Appendix E) that reflected the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes pertaining to subject interviews and a focus group. The study's data collection will be discussed in the next section.

Data Collection

This study explored the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players entering the MLB Dominican camps to commence their journey in the MLB developmental system, transitioning through the MLB developmental system in the US, and their successful exit out of the developmental system and into a major league club with a successful major league career. Data collection began in November 2022 and was completed in March 2023. Data collection methods focused on semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group through a secure video conferencing platform. The semi-structured individual interviews and the focus group were conducted to acquire responses to the interview questions developed to address study questions and aligned with the transcendental phenomenological research methods (Moustakas, 1994). The date, time, duration, and audio/video of each interview and the focus group were recorded. The study's data analysis will be discussed in the next session (Archibald et al., 2019; Tracy, 2013)

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study which explored the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players entering the MLB Dominican camps through the MLB developmental system and a successful exit out of the developmental system and into a major league career followed Moustakas' (1994) four-step process. This process constructed knowledge, including epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings. Data analysis included an objective review of the audit trail by a qualitative data auditor to evaluate the study's rigour (Hays & Singh, 2012). The audio and video recordings of the subjects' interviews and the focus group were transcribed. The data was formatted into a narrative text that was subsequently coded into themes and categories, organized, and displayed in a table. The first core process for that analysis, e, will follow.

Epoché

As mentioned previously, the transcendental phenomenological approach focuses on epoché, which is synonymous with bracketing, a concept drawn from ancient skepticism calling for this due to the penchant for judgment. In this case, the researcher suspended personal experiences, prior judgment, preconceived ideas, biases, prejudice, values, and views to focus on the examination of the subjects' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). Epoché is not just the initial step but, more importantly, is a continual process in the data analysis for a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). Others have described epoché/bracketing as a researcher's intentional and thoughtful exclusion of their previous experiences and understanding. This was maintained unless a purposeful decision was made to include such in the research (Creswell & Poth). The second data analysis step, phenomenological reduction, will be addressed next.

Phenomenological Reduction

Following the first step of epoché, the phenomenological reduction was conducted to bracket the data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). Data bracketing puts the phenomenon being studied through a five-step process (Patton). The first step focused on generating statements or phrases key to firsthand discerning the phenomenon. The second step was to transliterate the meaning of the identified statement of phrases. The third step was to canvas feedback from the study subjects to further understand the developed statements or phrases. The fourth step was to scrutinize the meanings to identify the key aspects of the phenomenon. The fifth and final step for phenomenological reduction was to craft a statement that characterizes the phenomenon in terms of its crucial features (Patton). The third core process, imaginative variation, will be addressed next.

Imaginative Variation

Upon completion of epoché and phenomenological reduction and having had the data bracketed, imaginative variation, the third step in data analysis became the focus to ascertain crucial attributes of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). This process began by horizontalizing the data, in other words, scrutinizing each feature or component of the data as analogous to one another (Patton). The data was scrutinized and clustered by their meaning, and unnecessary or irrelevant data was removed. The uniform themes in the data were put through the imaginative variation process. The researcher scrutinized each theme as appraised from several viewpoints, further enriching the previously generated themes (Patton). The next section will explain the fourth core process for that analysis, where meaning is synthesized.

Synthesis of Meanings

After completing imaginative variation, the synthesizing meaning became the focus of the researcher as the fourth core process in data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). The researcher began by using textural descriptions to depict the content of an experience. From these textural descriptions, structural descriptions were developed by synthesizing how the group of subjects experienced the phenomenon and the implicit meanings of the shared experience. The last step was to merge the combined textural and structural descriptions into a synthesis of the collective meaning or the nature of the lived experience for the group of subjects (Patton). The study's trustworthiness will be addressed in the next section.

Trustworthiness

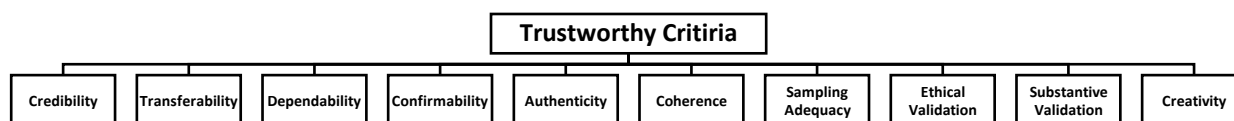
This transcendental phenomenological study which explored the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players entering the MLB Dominican camps through the MLB developmental system and a successful exit out of the developmental system and into a major

league career used appropriate qualitative methods and procedures to address the study's trustworthiness and academic rigor. A similar concept of validity and quantitative design was conducted in qualitative research traditions by the study's trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012). Trustworthiness stipulates that the qualitative study's findings thoroughly consider subjects' voices concerning their experiences in context with appropriate conclusions (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The following section starts with a discussion of criteria for trustworthiness with subcategories of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, coherence, simply adequacy, ethical validation, substantive validation, and creativity. Following the criteria section, the studies' methods for ensuring trustworthiness are. They include the researcher's reflexive research journal, triangulation of data and investigators, member checking, thick description, and an audit trail. The credibility criteria will be explained next.

Figure 2

Trustworthiness Criteria



Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative study delivers its general believability (Hays & Singh, 2012). Credibility is to a qualitative study what internal validity is to a quantitative study helping the researcher establish whether the findings are reasonable. Credibility is one of the most critical criteria for determining if a qualitative study is trustworthy (Hays & Singh).

Transferability will be covered next.

Transferability

Transferability of a qualitative study is referred to as naturalistic generalizability and points to the study's level of generalizability to two other groups of individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012). Transferability is akin to external validity or generalizability in quantitative studies. It is not the intent of a qualitative study to generalize the results to other groups but to provide the reader or intended audience to ascertain if, and to what extent, the study's results can be applied to other settings or groups. This is a key reason the researcher must accurately describe subjects, settings, methods, and procedures with sufficient details to allow consumers of the research to make educated decisions about the study's transferability (Hays & Singh). Dependability will be addressed next.

Dependability

Quantitative research evaluates a study's reliability. In qualitative research terminology, this idea is communicated in terms of the study's dependability and the consistency of acquiring similar outcomes across researchers and over time (Hays & Singh, 2012). Dependability sets an expectation for a researcher to display the use of procedures so that similar findings can be applied to comparable studies. Additionally, all co-researchers must have a consensus on the accuracy of the study's findings (Hays & Singh). Confirmability will be addressed next.

Confirmability

For qualitative research, the researcher's impartiality and objectivity are represented in the study's verifiable proficiency of its methods (Hays & Singh, 2012). Verifiable proficiency speaks to the researcher's ability to conduct the study without personal bias or interference and to accurately describe the data and correctly represent subjects' experiences as precisely as possible. One way to achieve this mandate in a study is to let the data speak by going back to the

subjects' specific accounts revealing their specific experiences of the phenomenon (Hays & Singh). Authenticity will be addressed next.

Authenticity

In qualitative research, authenticity speaks to the researcher's honest, accurate portrayal of subjects' comprehension and experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012). Authenticity is like confirmability, yet it is different because it denotes theoretical rather than methodological criteria (Hays & Singh). Coherence will be addressed next.

Coherence

Qualitative research must ensure the concept of coherence or congruence, which refers to the consistent use of the qualitative tradition having been appropriately selected for studies design, purpose, and research questions (Hays & Singh, 2012). The research tradition must suitably address the research question, and the selected approach must be consistent across the research process. Additionally, there needs to be uniformity between the research tradition's methods and the study's purpose, design, data collection, data analysis, and conclusions throughout the research reporting (Hays & Singh). Sampling adequacy will be addressed next.

Sampling Adequacy

Another criterion for trustworthiness in the qualitative research process is sampling adequacy. Obtaining a sample suitable in size and composition is important for the study's aim and selected qualitative research tradition (Hays & Singh, 2012). The sampling method must suit the selective qualitative research tradition and enlist enough subjects to produce the targeted data for the study's design. For this study's phenomenological approach, the goal was to recruit between seven and ten subjects adhering to the typical range of three to fifteen subjects for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical validation will be addressed next.

Ethical Validation

Another criterion for trustworthiness in qualitative research is ethical validation which correlates with the degree that researchers comply with ethical and moral duty and accepted practices throughout the research process (Hays & Singh, 2012). Adherence to this ethical responsibility begins with the commitment to choose study topics that will lead to consequential contributions to theory, practice, or the greater good of society that will inspire a continuation of research efforts. In the case of this study, the researcher placed careful consideration on the socio-cultural contexts within the lived experiences of the inquiry. One example is the requirement to obtain informed consent from each subject to maintain ethical compliance in the study (Hays & Singh). Substantive validation will be addressed next.

Substantive Validation

Substantive validation, also known as relevance criterion, calls attention to the level of substance, meaningfulness, or relevance of the study's findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). This criterion represents the significance of the study's contribution to the knowledge base or practice. The end state for the substantive validation of the trustworthiness criterion is to provide a research process with sufficient transparency for others to review and evaluate its methods, procedures, and findings (Hays & Singh). Creativity is the last criterion for trustworthiness and will be addressed next.

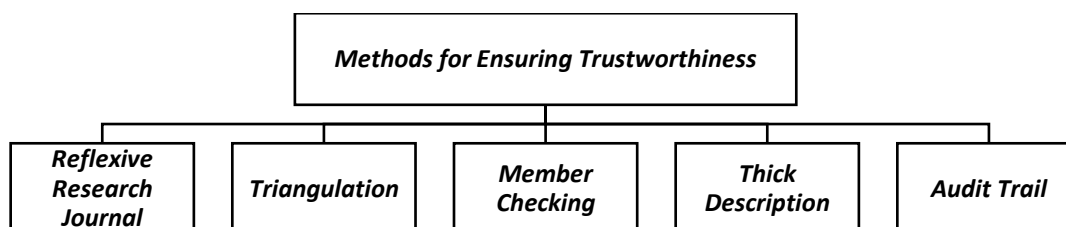
Creativity

Creativity and flexibility as part of the qualitative design and overall research process facilitate the study's trustworthiness and accuracy (Hays & Singh, 2012). Examples of creativity can be found in the type of techniques utilized in analyzing, organizing, and in the presentation

of the data (Hays & Singh). The following section will address study methods for ensuring trustworthiness.

Figure 3

Methods for Ensuring Trustworthiness



It is wise to employ numerous methods to maximize a qualitative study's trustworthiness, ensuring that the strategies used are congruent with the study's distinct tradition (Hays & Singh, 2012). This transcendental phenomenological study used the following strategies to ensure trustworthiness: a reflexive research journal was kept, triangulation of data and investigators, member checking, thick description, and an audit trail were employed. Next, Strategies will be addressed with the researcher's reflexive research journal.

Reflexive Research Journal

The researcher's role is a key component of transcendental phenomenological study. Therefore, the researcher must record adequate notes and personal reflections throughout the process through a reflexive journal that supports the creation of an audit trail (Hays & Singh, 2012). The reflexive research journal is intended to capture the researcher's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and reactions to the research and participants and how the research (Hays & Singh) affects them. The reflexive research journal for this study is in Appendix E. Triangulation will be addressed next.

Triangulation

The following three triangulation strategies were employed to ensure the study's trustworthiness: triangulation of data sources, investigators, and data methods. Triangulation of data sources guarantees trustworthiness by incorporating several sources of evidence to support, strengthen, and accurately delineate the study's findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). For this transcendental phenomenological study, diverse subjects' perspectives will be covered in the data. In the triangulation process, the study's findings were gauged regarding inconsistencies versus completeness (Hays & Singh). Triangulation of investigators (stepwise replication) crucially strengthened the research design. It was achieved by employing multiple researchers in data collection, data analysis, report generation, and during the presentation of the study's findings.

Additionally, triangulation of data methods involves using various methods to depict themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). This study used individual and focus group interviews on achieving triangulation of data methods. The next section will address member checking.

Member Checking

One of the most important strategies for ensuring the study's trustworthiness is member checking, also known as respondent validation or interpretive validity, which involves continual consultation with subjects as co-researchers to corroborate the study's findings throughout the process (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary objective for member checking is to attain the most accurate description of the meaning of the subject's experiences. This process includes clarifying the subject's statement during the data collection, review of transcriptions, and canvassing feedback to refine the degree of data analysis indicative of the experiences of the phenomenon

under investigation (Hays & Singh). This study used both member-checking activities. A thick description and a strategy to strengthen the study will be addressed next.

Thick Description

Thick description, also known as vividness, is another strategy for ensuring trustworthiness. As it sounds, thick description involves using adequate details to surmise meaning and inherent messages regarding observations, events, actions, facts, and the subject's feelings. There are four essential components of thick description: the context of the action; the meanings and intentions of the actions; the genesis and evolution of the action; and the organization of the action's thick description in narrative form. The research process, context, and findings are vividly portrayed through thick descriptions, empowering the reader to draw conclusions (Hays & Singh, 2012). The next session will address the audit trail.

Audit Trail

Audit trails are utilized by researchers as a means of verifying the soundness of the research process, including comprehensive step-by-step procedures for data collection and analysis. Audit trails also help the researcher satisfy ethical requirements for recordkeeping in the research. Pertinent examples of record keeping within the audit trail include the following: research timeline; subject contacts; informed consent document; demographic records; data collection records; interview guides; reflexive research journals; codebooks drafts; transcriptions; and video and audio recordings (Hays & Singh, 2012). This study maintained an audit trail in keeping with the previously mentioned research records. Ethical considerations will be addressed next.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to anticipate any ethical issues that may emerge during the study and how to address them. The following methods were employed to guarantee the ethical protection of subjects participating in the study. Approval was obtained from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board before conducting the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All study subjects participating in the study were provided with informed consent. Informed consent included the study's purpose and assurance that participation is voluntary.

Additionally, assurance was given that personal or institutional identifying information would be protected and would not be disclosed in the dissertation. Aliases were assigned to subjects to protect their identity and ensure they were not associated with the data. All data collection and storage methods adhered to appropriate security protocols. All study findings were ethically reported. The cultural component of this study demanded a high degree of sensitivity related to subjects as part of a vulnerable population and cultural differences in the course of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The next section will summarize this chapter and introduce Chapter 4 Findings.

Summary

This chapter addressed the study's methods, including research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The history of Dominican baseball and its relationship to US major league baseball is complicated and controversial. However, the reality for most families from the DR's rural areas is grounded in the fact that there are few to no other real opportunities to escape their situations. Though if there is a real, perceived, or manufactured opportunity, those scouting the DR for talent sell hope to families with generational poverty and

little to no hope. There will be Dominican boys heading to the MLB academies on the DR. This study explored the lived experiences of Dominican baseball players entering the MLB Dominican camps to commence their journey in the MLB developmental system, transitioning through the MLB developmental system in the US and their successful exit out of the developmental system and into a major league club and a successful major league career. Based on the stated research problem, the study's purpose was to identify educational levels, culture and language, and psychological/mental health well-being factors impacting their transition. A transcendental phenomenological approach was utilized for the study's research design (Moustakas, 1994). Chapter 4 will address the study's findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the many challenges faced by Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system, beginning with their entry into the MLB Dominican camps, through their transition to the United States to the Florida Complex League (FCL) and Arizona Complex League (ACL) and their further movement through the minor league system (MiLB) to a successful major league career. The study explored Dominican players' unique challenges from a social-cultural, educational, and well-being (mental health) perspective. By focusing on these aspects, light was shed on elements aside from evident athletic prowess or potential that differentiate those who make it to a successful major league career and those who cannot navigate the process successfully.

Descriptive Statistics

A review of the relevant literature suggested that while research has been conducted on many aspects of the Dominican academies, there has been limited research on Dominican players transitioning through the MLB developmental system (Bouchet et al., 2013; Bowman et al., 2021; Campisi, 2013; Lihosit, 2016; Osmer, 2011) that focused on the unique challenges from a social-cultural, educational, and well-being (mental health) perspective. This study contributed specifically to linguistics and culture by examining the challenges and triumphs of Dominican players that have overcome these barriers to succeed in a highly competitive and hostile environment. Identifying the psychological and mental health wellness factors significantly impacting mental well-being allows stakeholders to affect outcomes positively. This study identified the impact of these specific domains on developing the resilience necessary to successfully navigate both physical and mental transitions in professional baseball. The data and

understanding garnered through this study provide a basis for developing new approaches and support the refinement of existing efforts of MLB, individual clubs, and other entities involved in the development and support of Dominican athletes. Additionally, this study significantly contributes to the broader arena of international player development in professional sports.

Participants

The following briefly describes each of the nine participants interviewed for this research. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. In addition, other details that may have disclosed the individual's identity have been changed to ensure the privacy of individual athletes and their families. The cyclical nature of seasonal player engagement and the dispersion of players to their various home locals during the off-season (Nov – Feb) drove the timing of the data collection. The screening process was conducted during the off-season; however, several players were not open to conducting the interviews until they returned to the United States at the beginning of spring training. This was an important indicator of successful players' awareness of the necessity of setting boundaries to ensure that they dedicate time to their families, who they will be away from for almost eight months during the season.

Although one participant, Rafael, disclosed during the interview that he was born in the DR and played there in different leagues growing up. He was drafted while living in Puerto Rico, where he moved due to his father's work-related relocation. Rafael's lived experience added value to the study, except for lacking experience in a Dominican minor league camp. He had been through the MLB developmental system and had a lengthy career in the major leagues before retiring. An additional interview was conducted to maintain the integrity of the study.

Chart 1

Individual Participant Overview

Individual Interviews Pseudonym	Age/Years in ML	Hometown DR	Educational Level	English Language/ proficiency at signing	Retired/in MLB System
Marcos	20-29/2	Azuay, DR	H.S.	No English proficiency	Current
Pablo	20-29/3	Mao, DR	H.S.	No English proficiency	Current
Alberto	30-39/7	Cotui, DR	H.S.	No English proficiency	Current
Juan	20-29/4	Puerto Plata, DR	H.S.	No English proficiency	Current
Rafael	40-49/17	La Romana, DR	H.S.	Intermediate Level of English proficiency	Retired
Mario	30-39/10	Santo Domingo, DR	Some H.S.	No English proficiency	Current

Chart 2

Focus Group Interviews

Felipe	20-29/2	Santo Domingo, DR	H. S.	Advanced Level of English proficiency	Current
Jose	20-29/2	Boca Chica, DR	H.S.	No English proficiency	Current
Lionel	30-39/9	Moca, DR	Elementary	No English proficiency	Current

Participant Descriptions

Marcos

Marcos identifies as a Hispanic/Dominican male between the ages of 20-29. He is of upper-middle class professional class parents. He is single and originates from Azua, DR, where he began his career, signing at 18 in the summer of 2014 after finishing his high school equivalent education in the DR. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in the

Dominican camps at 18. He was in the DR for one season before transitioning to the US at the beginning of the 2015 season. After he transitioned to the US, he remained in the minor league developmental system for five years prior to making his major league debut in 2019 and playing in the major leagues for two seasons.

Pablo

Pablo identifies as a Hispanic/Dominican male between 20-29 and is of upper-middle class professional class parents. He is single and originates from Mao, DR. He began his career signing a month shy of his 19th birthday in 2012 after completing his high school equivalent education in the DR. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps at 19. He was in the DR for the length of one season. His transition to the US took place in 2013, and he remained in the minor league developmental system for almost six years prior to making his major league debut in 2018. He has played three seasons in the major leagues.

Alberto

Alberto identifies as a white/Dominican male between 30-39. He originates from Cotui, one of the oldest cities of the new world in the center of the country. He comes from a middle-class Dominican family. He began his career signing at 18 in February 2011 after finishing his bachelier high school equivalent education in the DR. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps at 18 and remained there for one year. His transition to the US took place in 2012. He remained in the minor league's developmental system for seven years before debuting in August 2016. He played seven seasons in the major leagues. He has been married for close to a decade to a native Dominican woman, and they have three children.

Juan

Juan identifies as a Hispanic/Dominican male between 20-29 and is of middle-class Dominican parents. He is single and originates from Puerto Plata, DR, where he began his career signing at 17 in 2015 after finishing his bachelier high school equivalent education in the DR. He followed his older brother's path into major league baseball and credited him with guiding his career. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps at 17. He was in the DR for the length of one season. His transition to the US took place in 2016. He remained in the minor league system for five years prior to making his major league debut in 2019 and playing four seasons in the major leagues.

Rafael

Rafael identifies as a Hispanic/Dominican male between 40-49 and is of middle-class Dominican parents. He originates from La Ramona, DR, and began his career selected in the ninth round in the 2000 major league draft. Although he was born and played in the Dominican during his childhood, he signed while living in Puerto Rico in 2000 due to a work-related move from his father. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in 'rookie ball.' He, therefore, did not go through the typical Dominican camp experience. He remained in the minor league system for five years prior to making his major league debut in 2005. He retired after 17 seasons in the major leagues. He is married and has a young son who is also playing baseball. He is now living back in the DR, running a baseball camp to support disadvantaged Dominican youth.

Mario

Mario identifies as a Black Hispanic/Dominican male between 30-39. He is of working-class Dominican parents from Santo Domingo, DR. He began his career signing at 17, almost

eighteen, in January of 2008, having finished some of his high school equivalent education in the DR but did not graduate. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps at 18. He was in the DR for a length of almost one season. His transition to the US took place in 2008. He remained in the minor league system for five years before making his major league debut in 2013. He played in the major leagues for almost 10 years. He is currently married and has three children.

Focus Group Participants

Felipe

Felipe identifies as a Hispanic/Dominican male between the ages of 20-29. He is of middle-class Dominican parents presently living in the United States. He is married without children and originates from Santo Domingo, DR. He began his career singing at 17 in 2014. He was born in the DR, signed and entered the system from the DR, had lived in the US for almost 11 years, and unlike the other participants, had completed high school in the US. He has a good understanding and conversational ability in English. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps at 17. He was in the Dominican camp for less than two months before his promotion. His transition to the US took place in 2014. He remained in the minor league system for five years prior to making his major league debut in 2019. He has been playing in the major leagues for two years.

Jose

Jose identifies as a white-Hispanic/Dominican male between 20-29. He is of middle-class Dominican parents from Boca Chica, DR. He began his career signing at 18 in 2013, finishing his bachelier high school equivalent education in the DR. His transition to the US took place in 2015. It remained in the minor league system for seven years before making its major league day

debut in 2021. It has played for two years in the major leagues. He is single and intensely focused on his career.

Lionel

Lionel identifies as a Mix-Hispanic/Dominican male between 30-39 and comes from working-class Dominican parents from Boca Chica, DR. He began his career singing at 18 in 2009, having some elementary education. He began his journey in the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps at the age of eighteen. He was in the DR for almost a season before transitioning to the US in 2010. He remained in the minor league system for five years prior to making his major league debut in 2014 and has played eight years in the major leagues. He is married and has three young children he enjoys spending time with during the off-season.

Composite Analysis

In addition to individual descriptions, there was more to be learned through a composite analysis. Participants repeatedly pointed to their culture as a major component channeled through the family and family supporters as a significant factor in providing a significant part of the necessary encouragement throughout the MLB developmental journey. The cultural structure that creates family as a vital aspect of individual family member development also characterizes the family, not necessarily a construct of exclusively biological members, as a support mechanism in time of need. A significant aspect of the support provided by family comes from a spiritual component that, as articulated by Felipe, “as you know for us Dominican God is important, but we only go looking for him when things are not going well,” can be circumstantial, however, no less important, or significant. In the DR and the Caribbean generally, faith can be a fluid concept of the Catholic God and tradition woven into the fabric of a type of spiritism known by many as Santeria (Bettelheim, 2005).

Regarding education level and the cognition necessary to function in the highly competitive MLB developmental environment, there appears to be a correlation between educational attainment and success through the developmental system and maintaining longevity in the major leagues. The general feeling expressed. The consensus during the interviews indicated that the participants believed that the level of education was not necessarily a key issue. However, the fact that many of these successful players interviewed have a high school education challenges that general belief.

The overall mentality of Dominican baseball players, and Dominicans in general, towards mental performance and mental health are seen through the lens of *psicología* or a form of or associated with psychology which culturally translates to some form of pathology or *estar loco* being crazy. The consensus of the participants was that it was due to the existing negative cultural lens. According to some comments, it will take significant education and a degree of indoctrination for young Dominican players to break the stigma they grow up with their family of origin.

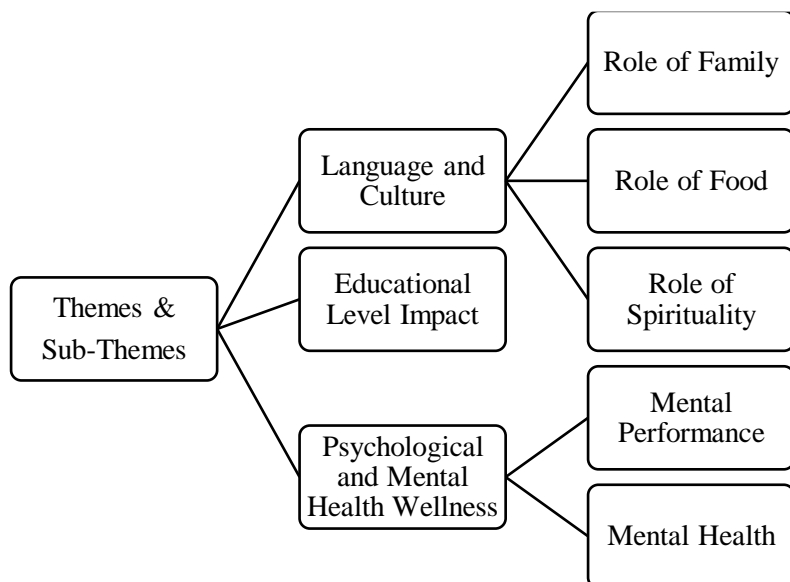
Results

The results of the research were organized by three major themes: United States cultural competency and English language acquisition, the impact of education, and issues related to mental health well-being with five sub-themes: 1) role of family, 2) nutrition, 3) spirituality, 4) concept and value of mental performance and mental health stigmatized, and 5) limited access to mental health resources.

Theme Development

Figure 4

Themes and Sub-Theme



Theme One: Cultural Competency and English Language Acquisition and Cultural Influences

There is a lack of overall understanding of the United States culture on the part of young Dominican players entering the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps. This is exacerbated by a reticence to address biases associated with cultural differences. This lack of willingness to engage can be due to a lack of maturity because of the age of players entering the system in the Dominican camps. As Pablo puts it, “It’s like separating a small child from their parents and having to live and work with basically people that you don’t know.” Oscar added the perspective of what could be one of many young players starting their journey. “When I first started, they were giving us English classes, but to be honest with you, I was really young, and I was not really paying attention most of the classes because I really didn’t think I would need that at the time.”

Most of the information and perspectives provided to players in the Dominican camp on the culture they will face in the US come from personal experiences of former players and staff that have been in the US and are now working in some coaching or staff capacity at the Dominican camps. An overall lack of standardization regarding US cultural training in the DR camps makes it difficult for players to understand expectations upon arriving in the US training facilities and adjusting to the environment. As articulated by Mario, “There was no real preparation culturally. It all revolved around trying to get you to learn certain basic English, and we had two days a week when we attended classes.” Although there are some programs in the Dominican camps that address aspects of culture, there is no requirement by MLB and no standardization across the various organizations in the DR when it comes to educating players on the aspects of the culture, they will have to navigate to be successful in their journey.

English Language Challenges

For most of the homegrown young talent signed in the DR, language is a challenge not only in a foreign tongue but, in some cases, in their own language. Many of the young signees have left their homes and have cut short their academic education, such is the case with Lionel. “When I first signed and entered the Dominican camp, I had a grammar school education,” He joined a local academy with the sole aspiration of one day having the opportunity to sign a major league baseball contract. This dream carries much responsibility, as the player is not only focused on personal achievement but also, and at times more importantly, driven by what they will be able to do for their families. The ability to understand the guidance coaches provide once players transition to the US has been identified as a critical component to support the transition to the US. Therefore, all the clubs have made English language training at some level mandatory. The challenge at the Dominican academies is two-fold. First, the individual’s education level

directly impacts their ability to absorb new knowledge. Therefore, they need to be assessed to understand the approach required to provide useful and effective language training. Unlike Lionel, and like the others, Oscar noted, “I graduated bacheller or the equivalent of a high school education and chose to leave college and pursue it after my baseball career.” Second, ensuring adequate engagement in the training curriculum is challenging. This is greatly influenced by the adolescent’s lack of maturity and inability to understand the significance of language training as it relates to an unknown future. This was the case with Mario, who signed at 17 without finishing his high school equivalent education and reflected on his time at the Dominican academy. “They will give us some English classes, but there were a lot of us in at times, and unless you’re ready to absorb the information, you really don’t get much out of it.”

The consensus throughout the interviews was that these efforts were of only minimal benefit to them in the format provided at this juncture of their development. For most young players, learning to speak English was an inconvenience because, at this point in their short journey, they did not understand the importance of the impending requirement of communicating with coaches and staff after transitioning from the Dominican camps. Not unlike their American counterparts, it also interferes with their ability to play video games during their time off. However, at some point during their Dominican camp experience and during their first visit to the US, it becomes apparent that if they hope to make it in an increasingly complex and competitive environment, they will need to have some degree of functional English. Those that can adjust and succeed in this transition, as in the case of Marcos, not only became serious about learning the English language but also, “... I made a point of starting a relationship with gringos who I asked to help me with the language and correct me if I was saying anything wrong and got along with them very well.”

Throughout the journey of each of the study's participants, some coaches helped with the language. However, the responsibilities and workload of coaches did not afford them the flexibility to support themselves aside from what was necessary to function on the field. They each realized they had to communicate in English to succeed at the major league level. This was true for Mario, who found ways to create learning opportunities with his peers. "We drove together and had appointments. I knew enough English to get by then. I continue to learn by listening to music in English and still continue to learn." In the case of Pablo, a system of host families found at some of the lower levels significantly impacted his journey when he was in Low A ball. "... I lived with a host family who were practically elderly. The lady that I stayed with knew a little bit of Spanish, and she went out of her way to help me practice my English." Host families help support assimilation into the culture by introducing different situations (i.e., local site visits, church attendance) and exposure to American food but also provide an opportunity for the player to practice the language in a less intimidating environment.

Role of Family

The information collected strongly indicated that family is the core of motivation and effort toward a major league career. Each player shared the following sentiment, as articulated by Marcos, "Participating in the summer league in the Dominican camp, I was very happy because I was here close to family." The family network is also one of the greatest supports for Dominican players throughout their MLB developmental journey. As stated by Alberto, "Family was also critical with the advice they gave me on a daily basis." The family was never far from players, especially once they made it to the major leagues and could financially afford to support travel accommodations for family members. Rafael explained that he could have his family close by once you made it to the major leagues. "Everything changes from an economics perspective and

level of comfort professionally and personally. I would say that is a change as different as the sky is from the ground.” The ability to afford to have their families in proximity allows them to also the ability to remain relevant in the major leagues.

Nutrition (Latino Food)

Another significant aspect of the impact of culture comes in the form of issues with adapting to the non-traditional foods provided by the clubs and what is available in the local economy. There was a universal sentiment that traditional Dominican foods address nutritional requirements and function as comfort foods, particularly when things are not going well for a young Dominican prospect. These aspects of culture can be significantly useful in maintaining overall physical and psychological well-being.

Role of Spirituality

To a person, spiritually or their belief and reliance on God or some semblance of a God was connected to their struggle. Felipe best put this. “There was a senior member of the team that when the younger members were having difficulties they would also appeal to their faith, and sometimes they would sit down and read the Bible with them, and they used that time to help them learn and to help them become more confident in themselves, and I felt that it also helped in general with life issues.” They often pointed to faith being foundational within the family support system, a touchstone they could rely on when wrestling with difficulties and uncertainties in their journey. Jose made a point that faith often played a part, whether it be a struggle with injury, peers, coaches, or other related issues and, for most, the perception of or the reality of being discriminated against due to culture, race, or level of financial bonus. “We also have a lot of support through the system of chaplains throughout the league.” He added, “The Dominican player is that way. As long as things are going well, you do not really care about

anything. But, if things are not going well, they are looking for anything that can give them a way out for a solution.” For the Dominican player, faith which can sometimes be confused with superstition, is a vital support along with family and the reliance on each other’s encouragement, counsel, and prayer.

Theme Two: Impact of Education

Much has been written about the DR baseball academies, which feed the thirty existing MLB developmental system academies in the DR (Campisi, 2013). It is also well known that many local academies utilize *buscones*, or agents, internal to the DR to scout baseball talent early in their development process as possible. In many cases, children are relocated to academies where their academic educational process is dwarfed and, in some cases, together terminated in exchange for an education in the sport of baseball (Bouchet et al., 2013; Bouchet et al., 2015). Once these children tryout with a professional baseball organization in DR, the ones lucky enough to sign a contract find themselves needing the education the adults in their lives chose to bypass for an opportunity to not only sign with a major league team in the DR but more importantly, to successfully transition to the US. Mario’s observations on the impact of education were similar to the majority of the participants “... I do think that there are different levels of education that affect the outcome.”

The impact of the level of educational attainment of players coming through the Dominican system is often reflected in the length of time a player with less than a bachelors, a high school equivalent education, spends in the Dominican Camp before transitioning to the United States. This point was made by participant Lionel during his contribution to the focus group where, unlike his counterparts, he only had an early elementary education which he credits with the difficulty assimilating concepts and aspects of culture and with difficulty and still has

speaking the language after more than 14 years in the United States. Nine of these have been in the major leagues. During his interview, he shared that part of his struggle with language led to the extended length of time it took him to make it to the major leagues. “It took me over five years to get to the major leagues.”

Mandatory English classes are required across the minor league developmental system; however, it is difficult to maintain interest on the part of players when they lack any foundational language and grammar skills in their own language. Some, like Oscar, had the educational foundation to transition to a new language but did not take full advantage of the resources and opportunities provided. “...I will tell myself to give 100% to learning to speak English. That is my one regret from my time in the Dominican camp.” Although some organizations have partnered with the DR Ministry of Education in providing formal high school continuing education while players attend the Dominican camps, this is not a standardized practice across MLB. It relies on individual clubs to facilitate educational resources. Some clubs opt to provide vocational training through the National Institute of Professional Technical Training, providing players with training for potential employment in fields such as barbershops and residential electrical technicians. This aspect of vocational training is intended to help the large majority of players that will not progress successfully through the MLB developmental system to reintegrate into the workforce (Franz & Cook, 2020). Dominican club camp staff desiring to support their players' education are also hindered by business decisions to move players to the US before completing their formal studies. In the case of some participants, there was no opportunity to take advantage of training or education opportunities, even if they were available. Felipe, fluent in English and had a US high school education because of his time in the US before signing in the DR, expressed a different understanding of the situation and environment. “There are many

kids who come from the interior of the country who have little to no education, and once they sign and get money, they basically go crazy and have no ability to manage the situation.” These young players are also subject to being exploited by adults in their lives throughout the extent of their baseball careers.

For many of the participants of this study, it was evident that access to information and education, both formal and informal, was a significant contributing aspect of their ability to navigate the MLB developmental system. For the participants, though learning English was a basic requirement identified at the beginning of their journey, there was little support or understanding on their part of the need. Ultimately to a person, each recognized soon after their initial relocation to the US the importance of communicating in functional English. As expressed by Oscar during his interview, “... one of my greatest mistakes because being so young, I figured I eventually will learn the language, I didn’t understand how much I needed it.” Although Lionel has been in the system for 14 years, his experience did not differ greatly from the rest of the participants regarding any standardization of educational resources available across MLB to players entering the system in the Dominican camps. For those that education was a challenge, the peer-to-peer and bilingual coaching support available at the different levels of the MLB developmental system was critical to their eventual success. Whether factual or not, and regardless of when the study participants went through the Dominican camps, all participants believed that resources at the MLB developmental camps in the DR are presently much better than during their transition. Many of the participants echoed Felipe and Jose’s beliefs that “... now I think that many if not all of the MLB academies in the Dominican have some type of support, they have hired mental performing coaches, professors to teach English, and in some cases, they can finish their high school starting at the camps. They also have better beds and

other support.” Although these statements have some truth, MLB has no standardization on educational resources. Most of the information shared was secondhand at best. There was also a general agreement on the part of the participants that was best stated by Rafael about the general need for education starting at the beginning of a player’s career in the Dominican camps. “... it is important to educate new players on how to train and prepare for the season. They need to understand that it takes a team of support like nutritionist, strength and conditioning coaches, and others to help them prepare.” The language acculturation process needs to begin in the Dominican camps. It has some semblance of standardization across MLB’s developmental system. This is where some language literacy can begin, which will be built upon as players transition to the US and through the developmental system for most participants ending as they enter the AA level of play. As Oscar moved through the developmental system, he made the following observation. “Every time that I got promoted, it felt like thanks for getting a little bit more difficult, and this is what I started to realize and put a lot more value on the English classes.” He added, “When I got the AA, my need for understanding English was critical since I didn’t have any Spanish-speaking coaches in the bullpen.” The sense of maturity and evolving understanding of the necessity for the language was articulated by every one of the participants.

Theme Three: Issues Related to Mental Health Well-being

There is a common thread across all participant’s perceptions of anything associated with mental health or the use of the word psychology. To them and most of their Dominican teammates, these concepts carry a major stigma within the construct of the Dominican culture associated with pathology or ‘being crazy.’ Therefore, each participant reported utilizing their family network to offload their concerns and frustrations and as a resource for guidance and advice during difficulties in their MLB developmental journey. Mario expressed a reliance on

family throughout his tenure, "...support encouragement from my mother and father and for my person that I consider being like a father..." "Nothing at the club level except, of course, for the coach who became everything to us, he was a psychologist, he was a coach, he was basically everything to us, everything to us while we were there." This cultural stigma undermines the usefulness and benefits associated with mental performance and mental health resources and indirectly provides a benefit or advantage to those who understand and use the resources. Every participant had a similar experience throughout their MLB developmental transition attributing cultural stigma and lack of education to their lack of exposure early in their journey to the benefits of mental performance and mental health resources. Because of this reality for most participants, as expressed by Alberto, "I have practically been my own mental performance coach throughout my career..."

Throughout their journey, participants indicated that the mental performance coaches and mental health resources had positive results for their American counterparts. Rafael echoed the experience of most participants. "I watched how the American players will use that resource. I watch them get help and how to manage themselves during the game, which helps with everything else," added, "I used to tell myself I have never used this. I do not know how to use it. Why would I use it now because I was never exposed to it when I was younger?" Given the lack of knowledge about the utility and experience with those resources, they report not seeking or looking to incorporate that support into their processes. They each believed that they would have used the resources more likely if they had been educated on the utility of these mental performance and mental health resources from their introduction to professional baseball at the Dominican camp. Jose explained that it is about developing relationships with the resources. "Mental performance and mental health practitioners should speak to them until they develop the

relationship with all of them to open up, but it needs to be an intentional approach.” The key point made by many participants was that there were many times when no mental performance coaches or mental health professionals were visibly available to them during different transition levels. This may have been because they either had not had a relationship with the practitioner and/or the practitioner was not bilingual/bicultural. In the case of Marcos, his club had a bilingual mental performance coach who made rounds throughout the organization, spending a couple of weeks at a time visiting affiliates, including the Dominican camp. Marcos stated, “I was fortunate enough that a bilingual mental performance coach who I have work with starting in Dominican camp also made rounds throughout the affiliates and periodically visited the Major League club, who helped me quite a bit.” Marcos’ experience was similar to all participants except Oscar, who stated, “I do not remember any mental performing coaches or any support in that area. However, we relied on the Spanish coaches for our information and support.” Rafael played much longer before some of the existing resources were available. “No, not from a professional perspective did we have any support when it came to mental performance of mental health. However, we did have support from our families.” There was a significant emphasis on periods of rehabilitation as key periods requiring the need for bilingual and bicultural mental performance and mental resources. Jose best articulated this need. “For me, it was a very different situation because I only played a year and a half and then spent three years in rehab. It was probably the greatest challenge I had. I remember wanting to get out of baseball and retire.” Felipe also faced a rehab period, adding, “This is the most critical time that I feel mental performance and mental health personnel should be engaging players even if they are not asking for help.” Injury and time spent in rehabilitation are part of the journey for most players in the MLB developmental system and the major leagues.

Concept and Value of Mental Performance and Mental Health Stigmatized

Although some participants interacted with mental performance coaches and mental health practitioners, their interactions were ad hoc at best and not always with a bilingual or bicultural resource. Most study participants had no significant education or exposure to mental performance or mental health resources while in the Dominican camps. This was particularly true for those in the system several years ago. Alberto was adamant that when it came to overall education for Dominican players. “I think this is a systemic change needed across all Dominican camps.”

The absence of a formal and standardized educational plan across the MLB developmental system creates a vacuum of knowledge and understanding of available resources. The Dominican player’s lack of knowledge of resources is reportedly further hindered by the unintentional indoctrination by coaches and staff in the Dominican camps, where players are instructed not to question their American coaches once they transition to the United States camps and to comply. “We were told to just say yes or to acknowledge with a head nod, gesturing yes” to what they were being told.” This rejection of resources is a combination of unintentional actions and stigma associated with cultural norms from a Dominican upbringing and culture in the United States-affiliated training facilities. Participants also pointed out that most of them, as it is with most Dominican players signing between 16 to 18, lack the education, maturity, and life experience to make considered decisions and/or to question those they see in positions of authority. Felipe pointed out that the lack of language skills complicates players' daily existence. “... even dealing with simple tasks like reading a schedule as well as getting things done on the field and off the field.” They have significant challenges just focusing on their baseball activities, so they do not have the education from the mental performance and mental health perspective.

They have no thoughts of reaching for those resources. Because of this lack of understanding of the mental performance and mental health space, most participants felt that there was an inherent bias or discrimination against Latin players by American coaches "... American players have many more opportunities than Latin players do, and I believe that we feel it." There is a business side of baseball dealing with the international player market that presents a lack of fairness to the Dominican prospect, who, with few exceptions, sign for very little bonus money and therefore come to believe that they are not valued like their American counterparts. Speaking of players in general, Felipe shared that "the reason they say that is because they feel they are less than the others," referring to their American counterparts. Jose chimed in, "There is a lack of equality." During the discussion, the point was made that when it came to using mental health resources, coaches would go out of the way to ensure their Anglo counterparts had access and time to use available resources, which was seen as a good thing by coaches. However, Latino players were often branded as lacking the initiative to seek the resources they did not understand. They would be characterized as lazy and walking away from other baseball work when seeking support. Rafael pointed out that to change attitudes and behavior, "This needs to be started early on when they first come into the system to impress upon them the significance of mental performance and mental health support." Lionel further summarized the challenges faced by Latino players by stating, "To me, it has been understanding the type of mentality that is needed" when referring to achieving success through the MLB developmental system and performing in the major leagues.

Limited Mental Health Resources

Although mental health resources are available in the DR coordinated through the MLB EAP, those resources must be paid for by the individual clubs. Additionally, because of the prevalent stigma regarding mental health, individuals are reticent to disclose situations that may

lead to a referral to a mental health professional and may potentially impact their budding career. Alberto made a general statement pointing to the young players' lack of education when seeking assistance “If you’re a really young kid with little to no education or if you have a very low academic level and unable to understand many things because of it, do you lack the confidence to be able to ask or go to another person and ask for assistance.” Because of the general stigma associated with mental health in the DR, and more specifically, those pursuing baseball opportunities, very little attention is paid to mental health and actual mental health assessments during their formative years (elementary and secondary education). Therefore, any deficits associated with learning are not identified and/or treated (Caplan et al., 2018).

For their American counterparts, mental health awareness and a system that supports early diagnosis and treatment of issues that affect learning are generally identified during their elementary school experience. Therefore, individuals that need additional support have a record of treatment and, if stimulant medications are prescribed, have had a period of medication management to optimize efficacy. Access to medication to enhance brain and attention-focusing capabilities affords appropriately medicated athletes a significant competitive advantage over their Dominican teammates (DuPaul & Stoner, 2014; Owens, 2020; Picha et al., 2021). Because of the cultural differences and inadequate resourcing, Dominican players who have issues associated with learning and who may be identified as requiring assessment for symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) will not have the detailed history required to substantiate issue of a waiver to allow the use of medication while under contract with an MLB organization. As per MLB, therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs) require “sufficient records to support a long-standing and appropriately treated diagnosis of ADHD” (December 20, 2023, Sub: Minor League TUEs Applications for ADHD stimulant medications) of assessment and

treatment or the benefits of using the appropriate medication. An individual that does not have this documented history is required to undergo a neuropsychological evaluation which involves a battery of tests set forth every year through an MLB memorandum. The cost is prohibitive for a Dominican player at an entry level of the MLB developmental system, which is making minimum pay. Generally, the athlete must pay upfront \$2500-\$2800 (geographically and clinician dependent) to an MLB-approved psychologist with an MLB club insurance reimbursement of approximately \$800. Regardless of the outcome of the evaluation, the upfront payment is not recoverable. In these cases, as much as a Dominican player may want and need a TUE, for most of them, it would take away resources, primarily food, from the family they are expected to support. Therefore, they opt to forgo the assessment. The other issue with the required assessment is the difficulty of finding an MLB-approved psychologist that is geographically available to do the assessment in Spanish.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed version of the findings from the participant interviews gathered to understand the experiences of Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system, beginning with their entry into the MLB Dominican camps, through their transition to the United States to the Florida Complex Leagues (FCL) and Arizona Complex League (ACL) and their further movement through the minor league system, to a successful major league career. Three main themes were identified: United States cultural competency and English language acquisition, education's impact, and mental health well-being issues. From the participant's experiences, it is clear that culture matters greatly, and functional English language acquisition is a key component to developing within MLB's highly competitive developmental process. Within this greater theme, the powerful influence of family and faith are

interwoven and, in some cases, were utilized in place of mental health resources available to their competition because of their exposure and education through their culture and language ability. In Chapter 5, conclusions and recommendations that will hopefully provide a catalyst for change will be discussed.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations Overview

This study explored the lived experiences of nine major league baseball players who began their journey in the DR with one of the MLB clubs, transitioning through the MLB developmental system in the United States and eventually making a successful exit into a major league career. Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was selected for this research design based on the nature of the data required to address the stated research problem and the purpose of the study. This described the challenges faced by Dominican prospects from a cultural and language perspective, considering the impact of their educational levels on their transition and exploring the awareness of and usefulness of mental health resources. The participants described their lived experiences moving through the process. Six subjects participated in individual semi-structured interviews, and three additional participated in a focus group, answering questions based on the research questions. The study focused on a central research question about general adaptation to transition and three sub-questions pertaining to adaptation to transition within each transition phase (moving in, moving through, and moving out) from Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework. The central research question was: "What were they lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning from MLB Dominican academies through minor league affiliate level play into a successful US major league career?" The three sub-questions included: RQ1: Describe the impact of culture and language in their transition to a successful major league career? RQ2: Describe the impact of education in their transition to a successful major league career? RQ3: Describe the psychological/mental health wellness impact in their transition to a successful major league career?

The participants answered the interview questions based on the research questions. The findings were presented as a composite of the narratives from the participants' individual semi-structured interviews and the focus group interview. Themes were developed by coding, re-coding, and clustering meanings from the data collected in participants' verbal descriptions and transcriptions of the individual and focus group interviews. Data analysis uncovered three primary themes: social-cultural and linguistic, educational, and mental health well-being. All three themes were connected to all three research sub-questions: culture and language, education, and mental health well-being and examined across all four phases of the MLB developmental system transition (moving in (entry into the MLB Dominican Camps), moving through (transitioning to the US and through MiLB), and moving out, (MLB developmental system into a major league career).

This Chapter contains the interpretation of findings about the research question addressed, discussion regarding confirmation and expansion of previous empirical and theoretical literature, implications for MLB developmental system change, recommendations for action to be taken at the MLB level as well as club level, limitations of the findings, and recommendation for future study. Discussion is included for the three primary themes: 1) United States cultural competency and English language acquisition (role of family, spirituality, and food), 2) education, and 3) issues related to mental health well-being (concepts and value of mental performance and mental health stigmatized and limited access to mental health resources) that emerged among the groups of participants across the three phases of MLB developmental system in major league career transition. A research statement reflecting the researcher's personal experience as a researcher is also included. Chapter 5 closes with a chapter summary

and an overall conclusion to the study. The next section will address the study's interpretation of findings.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question Addressed

The study was focused on an essential research question: What were the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning from MLB Dominican academies through minor league affiliate level play into a successful US major league career? from Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework. The next section will discuss the confirmation and expansion of previous empirical and theoretical literature.

Central Research Question

What were the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning from MLB Dominican academies through minor league affiliate level play into a successful US major league career?

Additional Research Questions

This study was also guided by the following three research questions:

RQ1

Describe the impact of culture and language in their transition to a successful major league career?

RQ2

Describe the impact of educational level in their transition to a successful major league career?

RQ3

Describe the psychological/mental health wellness impact in their transition to a successful major league career?

Discussion

As discussed previously in Chapter 4, each of the three primary themes; 1) culture and language, 2) education, and 3) mental health well-being perspective emerged among the group of participants across the areas of transition through the MLB developmental system and into a successful major-league career (moving in, moving through, and moving out). Each primary theme was linked to each of the three research sub-questions. In addition, the phases of the players' transition through the MLB developmental system and the major leagues, characterized as follows, were based on Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. Phase 1 was characterized by the participant's entry into the MLB development system and as it related to the culture and language impact associated with their initial transition entry into the Dominican camps, transition out of and into the United States-based camps, and through minor league developmental programs, and out into a successful major league career. Phase 2 was characterized by the impact of the educational levels of impact on Dominican players during their transition in their initial entry into the Dominican camps, transition out of and into United States-based camps, and through minor league developmental programs and out into a successful major league career. Finally, Phase 3 was characterized by the impact of psychological and mental well-being affecting Dominican players (with an emphasis on mental performance and mental health resources and competency) during their initial entry into the Dominican Camps, transition out of and into the camps in the United States, and through the developmental programs, and out into a successful major league career. Consequently, the three primary themes

were interconnected to the four transitions through the MLB developmental system and major leagues. Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework will analyze the impact on and participant's adaptation to the MLB developmental system and major league transition and interpret the findings (themes and sub-themes).

The discussion below addresses each primary theme, and the findings confirm the conceptual framework. This framework was comprised of the challenges faced by native Dominican prospects from a cultural and linguistic perspective, considering the impact of their education on their journey and exploring the awareness and usefulness of mental performance and mental health resources in achieving overall mental health-wellness as they describe their lived experiences as it related to the impact on their transition as well as Schlossberg's (1981) transition model provided for examination of the participants' capacities to adapt to change across the three MLB developmental and major league phases (moving in, moving through, and moving out) while considering six sets of variable: 1) role of family, 2) role of Spirituality, 3) role of Language, 4) self-efficacy, 5) mental performance and mental health awareness, and 6) mental health accessibility. Discussion for each primary theme and identified variables included authentication and expansion of the previous empirical on theoretical literature as appropriate to the study.

Theme One: Cultural Competency and English Language Acquisition Culture and Language

As discussed in Chapter 4, Theme One, the participants' cultural and linguistic adaptability was influential. It included three sub-themes: the role of family, the role of spirituality, and the role of food. The primary theme of participants' cultural and linguistic impact was subjoined to all three research sub-questions. The ability to assimilate culturally and to develop functional English language skills were major elements across all three phases of the

journey through the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues. The lived experiences of Dominican baseball participants were intimately interwoven with their cultural foundations and associated stigmas. The emergence of this first theme was supported by the literature on the cultural and linguistic challenges faced by Dominican baseball prospects entering the MLB developmental system through the Dominican camps, who are in danger of not making the cut if they fail to assimilate culturally and academically in their language training (Battochio et al., 2013; Campisi, 2013; Cuellar, 2014; Gentile, 2022; Klein, 1989; Klein, 2014; Lihosit, 2016; Mitchel, 2020; Nagy et al., 2019; Ruiz et al., 2020; Stambulova et al., 2009; Zirin, 2005). Pablo's statement represented eight participants (Marcos, Pablo, Alberto, Oscar, Mario, Felipe, Jose, and Lionel). Their experience assimilating to the Dominican camps and the MLB developmental system "... in the Dominican Republic, you sign with a club it's like separating a small child from their parent, and you were having to live and work basically people you don't know."

The Dominican camp experience continued for seven of the study's participants (Marcos, Pablo, Alberto, Oscar, Mario, Jose, and Lionel) struggled with their assimilation into the culture and language through the MLB developmental system in the United States, where culture and language support were characterized by Mario as "... basically, got by through my interaction with the gringos. So, when you were in rookie ball, you had to go and take English classes with the professor that came in for an hour at the Hilton Hotel where we were staying. At this point, it was mandatory to take the classes, and it was Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. When it came to culture or the American culture, I basically learned what you can say on the street or interacting with my gringo teammate." Unlike Rafael and Felipe, when it came to player movement through MLB developmental system levels in the United States, the same seven

players (Marcos, Pablo, Alberto, Oscar, Mario, Jose, Lionel) who did not have the benefit of fluency in the English language and no previous exposure to the American culture continued to struggle with the lack resources and/or the academic foundation to be able to take advantage of what was available. Alberto best expressed these difficulties. “.... If you are a really young kid with little to no education or if you have a very low academic level and unable to understand many things and because of it, you lack the confidence to be able to ask how to go to another person and ask for assistance.” As players mature in the MLB developmental system, they eventually understand the importance of the language to their success, as expressed by Oscar, “Every time that I was promoted, I felt like things were getting a little more difficult, and this is where I started to realize and pour a lot more value on the English classes.”

The movement out of the MLB developmental system to a major league career can usually occur after several formative years in the minor leagues within the customary seven-year contract. However, for a few exceptional players, it could happen earlier. For most players, it is a trajectory of four to seven years with a move out of the MLB developmental system from AAA level ball (Gentile, 2022; McKenna, 2017; Roach, 2022). At the point of exiting the MLB developmental system, the cultural concerns are less important because the players have the finances to meet their needs by this point in their career. They have achieved some functional English and/or have a translator provided by every major league-level club (Gentile, 2022; Parent & Slack, 2007). When speaking about his transition out of the MLB developmental system, Rafael stated, “... everything changes from an economics perspective and level of comfort professionally as well as personally.” He added, “From a cultural perspective, I’m at a level where I don’t have to worry about what food I’m going to eat because I can buy the Latin food I want. Basically, you have a different level of comfort and access.”

Although basic English language training is provided and mandated at the lower levels of the MLB developmental system starting in the Dominican camps, there are factors associated with culture, formative education, cognition deficits, and maturity level that impact the outcome (Calzada et al., 2017; Parent & Slack, 2007).

At the beginning of the 2022 baseball season, 28.5% of major league players were Latinos, and approximately 11% were Dominican players (Lapchick, 2022). The role of language is considered the most significant factor in the success of Latin American players. For this study, seven participants (Marcos, Pablo, Alberto, Oscar, Mario, Jose, and Lionel) had no English language proficiency when entering the Dominican camps and transitioning through the MLB developmental system and major league. There is no question that every participant, including Rafael and Felipe, who had a working knowledge of the English language when they first started their journey into the MLB developmental system, identified English language proficiency as critical to traversing each level successfully. This epiphany did not come for some until they had spent several years struggling to understand their coaches, schedules, and teammates. Some levels of English classes have been made available to players throughout the MLB system, beginning at the Dominican camps. Yet due to issues of education and maturity, as expressed by Oscar, many threw those opportunities away. “When I first started, they were giving us English classes, but to be honest with you, I was really young, and I was not really paying attention most of the classes because I really didn’t think I would need that at the time.” He added, “I think it was one of my greatest mistakes because, being so young, I figured I eventually will learn the language. I didn’t understand how much I needed it.” Unfortunately, given the critical nature of assimilating the English language, which is the one thing that will get a player ahead, so many young prospects failed to take advantage of the resources provided.

Participants expressed a need for standardization across the MLB development with targeted education utilizing successful Dominican major league players as guest speakers starting in the Dominican camps (Gentile, 2022).

As discussed in Chapter 4, Theme One, Participants' Cultural Competency and English Language Acquisition Impact included the three sub-themes: the role of family, the role of spirituality, and the role of food. The primary theme of participants' cultural and linguistic impact was connected to all three research sub-questions. Each was a significant factor across all three phases of the MLB developmental system and major league transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). Culture and language were significant factors transitioning through the MLB developmental system. Family, spirituality, and food are critical to adapting and overcoming transitional challenges. All nine participants described the role of and importance of family, spirituality, and access to traditional food in coping with the challenges of transitioning to the three phases of the MLB developmental system and major leagues.

Chart 3

Theme 1: Culture and Language Categories Within Theme

Informal Cultural Information (5/9)

Alberto: Referencing coaches and staff in the DR camps shared that, "Information that was shared about American Culture was helpful during my transition to the US."

Formal Cultural Training (2/9)

Oscar: "There was no class or instruction pertaining to culture...However, cultural information was shared during the mandatory English classes."

Challenges within the American Cultural Landscape (9/9)

Rafael: "The movement through affiliates and its different cultures throughout the US. I went to AA that was in Chattanooga, Tennessee which was another culture with a population of mostly white people."

Mandatory English Language classes (9/9)

Alberto: “.... Mandatory attendance for English classes.....we have to attend an hour before we get to the field for any baseball activities.”

Mario: “...English classes but there were a lot of us that unless you’re ready to absorb the information you really don’t get much out of it.”

Oscar: “Again, I can’t emphasize enough the need for Learning how to speak English as early as possible.”

Host Family Support (2/9)

Jose, referring to an MLB program throughout the affiliates where American families host players and assist in the acculturation process. “The host family helped me very much and even went as far as to hire a young lady to help me learn English.”

Use of Social Networks to Develop Fluency in English (9/9)

Mario discussed the utility of using coaches and teammates to develop English language fluency. “... I made a point of starting a relationship with “gringos” who I asked to help me with the language.”

Sub-Themes

Role of Family. Schlossberg’s (1981) theoretical framework was used to consider the participants’ conformity at each of the three phases as they transitioned through the MLB developmental system. Within each Dominican player interview, there was universal agreement as to the significance of the family as a foundational support mechanism. This support allowed them to make the necessary adjustments to overcome the challenges they faced during their transitions within the MLB developmental system and major league journey. In every interview, the importance of family (not always strictly based on biology) was emphasized as a key component within the framework of Dominican culture. (Flores, 2019; Franz & Cook, 2020; Shimshi, 2022). Several statements helped articulate the significance and impact of the family for a Dominican player.

Alberto expressed the following with a lot of emotion. “I also think that my family was also critical with the advice they gave me on a daily basis...” The presence or absence of available familial support was noted as equally influential. In the case of Oscar, his family had the resources to visit him in the States during his first year. However, he expressed the following when they could not repeat the trip the following year. “It was missing the family in terms of the extended family since we are pretty tired as a family. This was very impactful for me.” For all of our participants, moving up through the levels came with the challenge of leaving family, extended family, and those involved in their baseball development behind and trusting others. Marcos had a lot to say about transitioning to the United States and best encapsulated the participants feeling on the issue of transition within the MLB developmental system “I went to the United States where you move up or do you have to leave your family and your support system behind.” As players transition through the MLB developmental system, they stay in touch with family.” However, there are also new connections made with their bilingual coaches, support staff, and teammates (Battochio et al., 2013; Campisi, 2013; France & Petitpas, 2020; Gentile, 2022; Klein, 2014; Nagy et al., 2019; Stambulova et al., 2009; Zirin, 2005). As Felipe expressed, not unlike several other participants, “.... I had some struggles when I was in AA level, I was living with a group of Latin players, so I felt less pressure. We were taking care of each other, we cooked for each other, and there were a handful of them that spoke English, so they always looked out for us and helped us.”

Role of Spirituality. Along with family, and in many cases integral to the family structure and psyche is the role of spirituality, phrases like *si Dios quiera* (if God wills) or *esta en las manos de Dios* (It’s in God’s hands) are common phrases that are often repeated by players in their interactions with parents or extended family when trying to process difficulties

faced throughout the MLB developmental system transition, especially, when confronted with injury and the process of rehabilitation (Barnett, 2020). Pablo best expressed this when discussing his struggle during one of his injuries. “At this point, you are basically leaving everything in the hands of God because you really don’t know whether you’ll be able to play again or not. I am basically doing all the work you can to rehab.” Although Christianity is the most widely professed religion in the DR and at one point Catholicism was the dominant branch of Christianity in the DR, in modern times, Protestants and other non-Christian groups, as well as Afro-Caribbean religion syncretized with Catholicism, have experienced a level of acceptance and popularity (Davis, 2012; Schaffler et al., 2016). Spiritual practices may differ from player to player, some following an organized religious format and others a set of superstitions that bring luck. Dominican players regularly refer to their spiritual practices and concept of God in developing resilience to the end of playing in the major leagues. Alberto reflected on this concept when giving advice to young players beginning their journey, “... it really comes down to an individual’s commitment to focus on their work and learning all they can, and I would say that most importantly is relying on their faith in God who is the only one that could give wisdom for those that don’t have it, worth to those that don’t have it, and rewards those that put forth effort and not just look for the easy way out.” Throughout the participant’s interviews, there was an interwoven theme of spirituality and/or faith as a motivational and sustaining instrument for Dominican players throughout the MLB developmental system and major leagues. This is regardless of the diversity of beliefs foundational to the player and family. When discussing difficult junctures in their MLB developmental journey where faith-based peer-to-peer support was utilized amongst Dominican players, Felipe best explained it. “I had an experience with a senior member of the team that when the younger members were having difficulties, they would

also appeal to their faith, and sometimes it will sit down and read the Bible with them, and they use that time to help them learn and to help them become more confident in themselves, and I felt that it also helped in general with life issues.” Because spirituality is an integral part of the fabric of Dominican society, it acts as a source of comfort and hope when there are no other explanations for the difficulties faced in the MLB developmental journey (Barnett, 2020; Davis, 2012; Schaffler et al., 2016).

Role of Food. A significant component of culture that acts as a soothing agent and, at times, an anti-depressant by way of helping players feel close to home, even if they are 1,000 miles (Florida) or almost 3,000 miles (Arizona) from home, culture food becomes a significant aspect of their ability to cope. Pablo best expressed this cultural component. “As you know, the food in the US is very different than our food, and most of the food has very little flavoring, which is very different from the seasoning on the food that we’re accustomed to eating.” Lionel expressed the most significant aspect of his transition as “I would say for me, it was the food – my nutrition.” He later said, “So, when you get to the US, and you go to the dining room instead of a regular cultural specific food, we’re eating these little salads.” He then expressed thoughts on preparing the way from a cultural nutrition perspective for Dominican players before transitioning into the US. “I think that if we had been at least eating the American type of food once or twice a week when we were in the Dominican camp, we would have had some adjustment to that type of food.” All study participants identified a significant cultural connection between the Dominican family and their traditional Dominican cuisine as it related to the factors affecting all aspects of player transition MLB developmental system and the major league (Albala, 2023; Lapchick, 2015; Mărginean, 2019; Parsons et al., 2011).

Theme Two: Impact of Education

There were mixed opinions on the part of the study's participants regarding the impact that level of education had on their own and others' progression through the MLB developmental system and major league. Seven participants (Marcos, Pablo, Alberto, Oscar, Mario, Jose, and Rafael) had completed Bachelor or the equivalent of a high school education. One of the participants had begun but did not finish his bachelor high school equivalent education, and one had an elementary education. Those who had not completed their high school education (Mario and Lionel) believed their lack of education significantly impacted their progression. Yet, those who had completed their high school level of education felt that it was less likely to impact the progression of Dominican players transitioning the MLB developmental system and the major league (Klein, 2009). Although there was no consensus on the impact of academic education on progression through the MLB developmental system in major leagues, there was consensus on the role of upbringing and family education and its impact on Dominican player success. This non-academic aspect of education was where self-efficacy was mostly found to be foundational and a function of will and necessity on the part of each player and their confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles in their education throughout the MLB developmental systems.

Regarding non-academic education and upbringing, Felipe and Jose agreed, "... It's not just a function of academic education but more importantly of education and upbringing at home." Therefore, understanding Dominican baseball prospects' background, education, and motivation is key to delivering educational services throughout players' MLB developmental and major league transitions (Longley & Wong, 2011). Throughout participants' interviews, an underlying aspect of education and/or learning was directly associated with its benefits towards accomplishing the end state of making it to the major leagues. Alberto said that when drafted in

2011, “I felt that this particular club had a very concerted effort to help the Latin players not only in their baseball career but also as a person as well and our daily lives.” What made a difference in the effort put forth by players when he came through their education throughout the MLB developmental system and major leagues was the fact that the club or the face of the club, being coaches or other staff members, cared about them as individuals and their eventual success towards a major league career (Bouchet et al., 2013; Chambers, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Cuellar, 2014; Franz & Cook, 2020; Hanna, 2016; Hays & Singh, 2012; Bowman et al., 2021).

Chart 4

Theme 2: Educational Impact-Categories Within Theme

Different Levels of Education (9/9)

Mario: “I do think that there are different levels of education that affect the outcome.”

Rafael had some English language understanding: “The academic level and basic English was something that I was familiar with, which help me manage things better when I arrived in the United States.”

Formal Academic Education (7/9)

Seven participants had completed bachiller, the US high school equivalent education in the DR, and one had a year left before completing his education.

Alberto: “I was 18 years old when I first reported to the Dominican Camp after completing my bachiller...my parents were very instrumental in making sure that I completed my education...So that if someday I decide to continue my college education, I can go back to school...if you have a very low academic level and unable to understand many things and because of it you lack the confidence to be able to ask or go to another person and ask for assistance.”

Education and Up-bringing (9/9)

When addressing the importance of home life and education at home.

Felipe and Jose, in unison, “... it’s not just a function of academic education but more importantly of education of upbringing.”

Alberto added, “I think that a lot of what help me was my early education from my own parents and how that helped me to keep myself from being distracted.”

Jose referenced the kids that go into local academies “Many kids who come from the interior of the country have little to no education.”

Theme Three: Psychological and Mental Health Wellness

As discussed in Chapter 4, Theme 3, participants' Mental Health Well-Being included two sub-themes: Concepts And Value of Mental Performance and Mental Health Stigmatized And Limited Access to Mental Health Resources. The primary theme of participants' mental health well-being was connected to all three research sub-questions: mental performance and mental health, the stigma associated with it, and the awareness and willingness to access these resources. These were a major theme across all transitional phases throughout the MLB developmental system and major league, beginning at the Dominican camps, transitioning to the United States baseball camps in Florida and Arizona, through the minor league US developmental levels of play, and out of the MLB developmental system to a major league career. The lived experiences of Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system and major league were characterized by increased awareness of the use of mental performance and mental health resources. However, the lack of consistency in education and/or availability of bilingual and bicultural resources created a lack of trust, making its utility questionable. These participants confirmed that mental performance and mental health awareness as components of the mental health well-being theme, with all nine describing some level of increasing awareness throughout their journey. Two describe an increased awareness of mental health and mental performance resources throughout their careers to the extent that they could realize and appreciate the benefits (Mario and Lionel). Rafael described that only after he retired from the game and with many years in the US culture was, he able to capture the value of mental well-being resources he did not fully understand or trust when playing. Although the majority of the study's participants who have been in the major leagues for only a couple of years are becoming more familiar with mental well-being resources, they are still working towards fully

trusting and accepting its value (Marcos, Pablo, Alberto, Oscar, Felipe, and Jose). Throughout the participant's interviews, particularly during the focus group session, there was a consensus that greater emphasis should be placed on educating Dominican players on mental performance and mental health resources. Illustrating and demonstrating the value of these resources to support their overall success should occur as soon as they step into the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps and continue through the transitional levels and major leagues.

Chart 5

Theme 3: Psychological and Mental Health Wellness-Categories Within Theme

Mental Performance (MP) (5/9)

Oscar: "I would also say that the understanding of the importance of mental performance and mental health and getting that information from the very beginning would be very helpful to many."

Marcos: "...maintain a mental focus on what they're doing and to set their goal as getting to the major leagues."

Availability and/or Access to MP Resources (4/9)

Rafael: "No, during that period of time, we had no resources. We had no support when it came to mental performing or mental health."

Jose: "...mental performance Coach who spoke Spanish that would rotate a couple of weeks in the Dominican camp and make his way around to the different affiliates for 10 to 20 days at each."

Marcos: "I was fortunate enough that a bilingual mental performance coach who I had worked with starting in the Dominican camp also made rounds throughout the affiliates and periodically visited the major league club, who helped me quite a bit."

Mental Health (MH) (9/9)

Rafael: "I believe that mental health will lead to mental performance and therefore is very important to instruct players early in their process, and I think that the Dominican player will be able to utilize it..."

Felipe, Jose, and Lionel had a consensus in the response, agreeing with the impact of relationships on performance and mental health "I would say that that is one of the greatest issues that I've seen affect players."

Associated Cultural Stigma (9/9)

Rafael: “Honestly, I really only had those conversations with my parents, and professionally I never really used the mental performance or mental health resources.”

Availability and/or access to MH Resources (5/9)

Mario: “There was no support from a mental health perspective....”

Schlossberg’s (1981) theoretical framework can be used to consider the participants' adaptation to the MLB developmental system and major league transition into interpreting and defining mental health well-being within its components of mental performance and mental health awareness and resource use.

The first phase was characterized by the culture shock of participants moving into the Dominican camps within the MLB developmental system. Contributing to the instability of the participants was their lack of awareness and understanding of mental performance and/or mental health, and more significantly impactful was the stigma they carry toward all things associated with psychology or mental health as being negative and associated with pathology. The initial confrontation between the stigmatized view of mental performance and mental health confronts basic training of new strategies and coping skills that, for most, will need to be revisited at every level of transition for it to take hold.

Phase 2 of the transition was moving to the US for the first time, depending on the time in the Dominican camps. The degree of educational engagement on the part of the club presented them with new challenges as they began to prepare for their transition through the MLB minor leagues developmental system levels of play. For most, the initial arrival to the US reemphasized the mental performance and mental health information provided at the Dominican camps. However, here too, the resources are rarely sufficient and, in many cases, provided by individuals who are not fully bilingual and/or bicultural.

Phase 3 of their transition into the US minor-league system consists of regular movement between levels, sometimes skipping or being sent back levels. This is a very troubling time where constant re-enforcing of mental performance and mental health ideas and support takes place. However, the number of players' resources is not always readily available. The situation is further exacerbated due to the cultural, educational, and based on individual's ability to seek assistance.

Finally, Phase 4, moving out of the MLB developmental system to a major league club on the active roster presents different challenges however, resources are no longer an issue.

Implications for System Structural Change

The significance of this study can be understood in terms of its applications to the challenges faced by Dominican baseball prospects entering the MLB Dominican baseball academies and transitioning through the MLB developmental system and major league. As previously discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Culture and language, Educational Level, Mental Performance, and Mental Health impact Dominican prospects coming through the MLB developmental and major league system. Although there has been some improvement over the last decade, there continues to be a problem for Dominican baseball prospects to achieve equality in comparison to their American counterparts (Juckett, 2013; Klein, 1989; Klein, 2009; Klein, 2007; Kusterman, 2013; Leonard, 2013; Lihosit, 2016; McKenna, 2017; Mitchel, 2020; Nagy, Osmer, 2011; Wandrey, Vargas & Cahill, 2019). Additionally, Dominican youth coming from the interior of the DR, not having finished their bachelior education and having less exposure to an international community, will find even less of an opportunity to compete on a level playing field. As discussed in Chapter 4, this study's findings have implications for research and scholarship based on its contributions to the research base in response to the problem of native

Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system and major league.

Additionally, the study has theoretical implications for further expansion of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and its application to other marginalized groups across the array of international players seeking contracts with MLB. Moreover, the study demonstrated the importance of a broader examination of MLB policies as the overseer of the MLB developmental system and its relationships with each club system. Lastly, this study has significant and far-reaching implications for positive social and policy change by promoting equality by providing appropriate resources (bilingual and bicultural educators, mental performance coaches, and clinical mental health counselors) at every MLB developmental system and major league level.

Theoretical Implications

Exploring the lived experiences of Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system in MLB through the lens of Schlossberg's (1981) transitional theory has theoretical implications for social and structural change to the present MLB and club system as this study has further explained the theory's application to Dominican baseball prospects transition through the traditional MLB developmental system. Additionally, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory might undergo further development and be utilized as a framework to study other populations of underrepresented groups or cultures within the MLB system (i.e., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Venezuelan, and other Latin American cultures) as a result. The next section addresses the study's empirical implications for change.

Empirical Implications

Exploring the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system has empirical significance due to its implications for the literature on the successful entry and transition of Dominican baseball players through the MLB Developmental system and major league. To include their ability to overcome cultural and linguistic challenges and educational deficiencies, and incorporate and assimilate mental performance coaches, while addressing and overcoming culturally based mental health stigma. Issues that disproportionately impact the Dominican baseball prospect population from the interior of the DR and other underrepresented populations. The contribution to the literature based on each of the areas covered, as well as their intersectionality, could inspire future qualitative and quantitative studies. This study's findings highlighted the intersectionality between Dominican baseball prospects from marginalized and underrepresented groups within the Dominican national fabric (e.g., Black, Creole Black, Hispanic) who often face additional barriers within their national culture and subcultures. Success must navigate a new culture and language, all with a limited foundation in their own system. They then face a support system that offers resources they cannot understand or assimilate without patience, education, and formal guidance. The prospect of focusing on various other marginalized or underrepresented populations within the MLB Developmental system offers opportunities for further contribution to the empirical research on underserved and underrepresented baseball prospects entering the MLB developmental system. The next section addresses the study's practical social and structural change implications.

Practical Implications

This study's findings about the lived experience of Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system in the major league have practical implications for social and structural change. The findings offer vectors for tangible improvement requiring the engagement of all stakeholders: the prospective Dominican baseball players; club Dominican camp leaders and decision makers; MLB leaders and MLB EAP representatives and support system in the DR; club-specific educational programs directors; Heads of International Scouting and Player Development at each club level; club and MLB Latin American Directors/Coordinators; and club's Directors of Player Development.

As stated in Chapter 1, a lack of information has existed in the research to identify effective intervention strategies to mitigate the premature attrition of Dominican talent. Due to a lack of initial screening at the MLB Dominican camps, some fail to progress and make the transition to the US developmental system where, although not at desired levels, enhanced resources are available (Franz & Cook, 2020; Klein, 2007). The findings contributed by this study must be widely distributed across MLB and non-MLB entities within the greater international baseball community to support increased awareness and more informed decision-making availability. Allowing that tangible benefits may be derived not only to individuals and their families dreaming of major league baseball careers but as important to the bottom line of the MLB industry (Gentile & Buzzelli, 2021).

This study fills a gap in the existing literature that fails to identify the cultural and language acquisition issues critical to success through the MLB developmental system. Although less significant, the educational level may be a determinant of success when considered with other factors. Additionally, the study identified psychological elements integral to the

employment of mental performance strategies and mental health support, which may be inhibited due to stigmatization by the Dominican culture. This research provided the foundation for future work to develop screening and early intervention strategies. The research focused on a population sample of nine successful Dominican major league baseball players that entered the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps and transitioned into a major league career playing at least two years in the major leagues. The increase in awareness brought about by this study will shape not only the resources that will become available starting at the MLB developmental camps in the DR and continue along the trajectory that each Dominican and non-English-speaking player will take in their journey toward a major league career.

There needs to be a pragmatic approach based on the information provided by the study participants to provide the appropriate and requisite education upon entry into an MLB Dominican camp to a Dominican or non-English-speaking prospect on the importance of language acquisition and its significance to their success. This may require club and/or MLB resources to provide basic foundational education before or alongside their English acquisition efforts. Additionally, a major effort must be made to destigmatize mental health and the associated mental performance aspect of mental well-being. This can potentially normalize mental health wellness and level the psychological playing field.

Finally, the greatest challenge will be for MLB and each of the clubs with a camp in the DR to make the commitment to provide the financial resources necessary to bring about the structural changes required to prioritize the standardization of the development of English language proficiency and US cultural competence. All of this depends on the calculus of the industry as a profession and/or organizations as to the benefits of allocating resources to initial screenings, mental health education to combat the cultural stigmas associated with seeking help,

making bilingual and bicultural resources available, and visible beginning in the DR and throughout the MLB developmental system.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the applications of the study's findings, recommendations for action are provided for the following stakeholders and influencers: Major League Baseball Department of Drug, Health, and Safety; Major League Club Executive Leadership; Directors of Education; Directors of Mental and Physical Development; Employee Assistance Professionals contracted to support clubs; and Directors of Latin American Operations.

First, the study's findings call for increased awareness for each of the aforementioned groups regarding the challenges faced and unique needs of Dominican baseball players. Characteristics common of international youth athletes and immaturity as reflected in their educational deficiencies, cultural challenges, lack of English language proficiency, and a lack of knowledge and/or awareness of resources associated with mental health well-being. How these issues impact their ability to transition successfully through the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues is important.

Next, this study's findings demand a concerted and intentional educational effort beyond mandatory English classes. An effort focused on developing the requisite foundation to influence the disproportionate impact experienced by Dominican and other Latin American non-English speaking prospects during their MLB developmental formative years. Further, this study's findings call for researchers to include family, spirituality, and mental health within the concept of Dominican culture, effectively presenting a more accurate conceptualization of Dominican culture and therefore receiving the attention it deserves.

Each of the stakeholders mentioned above and influencers must be called upon to develop increased awareness and understanding regarding the importance of education, English language proficiency, mental health well-being (i.e., mental performance and mental health) beginning with Dominican prospect entry point to the MLB developmental system in the Dominican camps. They are also called to standardized support a robust educational program with a bilingual and cultural academic support structure. Dominican youth must be allowed to complete their education up through high school and increase their cultural knowledge of the US and the MLB system. Efforts to destigmatize mental performance and mental health while allowing equal access to resources and introducing the intention development of coping strategies throughout their MLB developmental system journey, will lessen premature attrition from the sport.

Finally, all the groups mentioned above and any other individual or member of organizations providing resources within the MLB developmental system concerning education, culture, language, or mental health well-being are urged to take an active role in seeking opportunities to contribute to any and all efforts to advocate for any initiative that would contribute to improving knowledge, awareness, and access to resources for Dominican prospects and/or other non-English speaking players transitioning through the MLB developmental system and major leagues. For the purposes described above, this study's findings should be widely disseminated via professional presentations, focus publications, and professional sports journals. The next section will present the limitation of the study's findings.

Limitations of the Findings

This study had the following limitations, indicating its weakness and may negatively impact the findings. The study was conducted with Dominican players who have successfully

transitioned through the MLB developmental system and to a successful major league career. Therefore, the study did not consider former Dominican baseball prospects that were unsuccessful in their journey through the MLB developmental system or the level/s and specific challenges that most significantly affected their ability to successfully overcome their individual or collective challenges. The study did not consider any unique characteristics or baseball-specific statistics which might have contributed to the findings or differentiated amongst the Dominican participants except for having had to transition through the MLB developmental system and successfully played a minimum of two years in a major league club. The study did not specify the age upon entry into the MLB developmental system via a Dominican MLB camp. However, this information was collected during the participants' interviews.

Additionally, although the study identified the hometown of each of the participants, the study did not specify certain demographic characteristics or family of origin that make up for participants' inclusion, such as parents' marital status, financial status, number of siblings, or religion, nor did it identify team(s) association. These demographic characteristics may uniquely influence the study's findings or affect player anonymity. Lastly, the study did not examine specific programs or resources that may be available at this time throughout the MLB developmental system yet was not experienced or reported by participants during their interviews. The next section will offer recommendations for further study.

Implications for Counselor Educators and Supervisors

The study's findings have significant implications within the competencies of counselor educators and supervisors working to integrate mental health support into diverse competitive industries, as in the case of MLB. Ethical and culturally relevant counseling and meaningful advisement to organizational leadership require time, attention, and financial resources to

thoroughly parse out the specific attributes that an individual and/or community of individuals bring to the environment (i.e., mental, physical, emotional, and historical experience). In the case of the DR and the greater Latin American cultural framework in many respects, there is a significant need to understand the existing and inherent mental health stigma embedded in these societies. Notwithstanding the cultural issues, all professional athletes work in a high-pressure, high-visibility environment with heightened personal and corporate equities. International sports environs only make it more of an imperative to appropriately adhere to legal and ethical boundaries and be attentive to privacy and confidentiality issues. As a clinical supervisor in a diverse organization, it is particularly important to be attentive to and intimate with practicing clinicians' experience, biases, talents, and knowledge of professional standards.

In private practice, I collaborate extensively with athletes, veterans, other first responders, and their families. My success in those venues is directly related to my ability to connect. I can do that because I have solid academic credentials and important diverse life experience. I believe that it is through maintaining high professional standards as educators and supervisors while fostering meaningful diversity that we can provide services that truly benefit individuals, families, communities, and industries.

My final thought is that in most venues, particularly competitive industries such as professional sports, it is imperative to influence the stakeholders who control resources. In the case of this study, professional baseball is a business that requires a cost-benefit approach, and the measure of effective advocacy is the dedication of resources that result in beneficial outcomes. This study has sought to isolate areas where resources may best be invested. This research identified knowledge gaps in how to best support the successful matriculation of individuals with athletic potential. It is foundational for establishing further touchpoints for

influence. It identifies areas where quantitative research can be employed to establish metrics to seek greater organizational support.

Recommendations for Future Study

There are several recommendations for further study of Dominican baseball prospects' advancement through the MLB developmental system and into major league careers as it relates to their educational level, awareness and education of US culture, English language proficiency, and ability to assimilate mental health resources (Alexander, 2006; Anderson, 2016; Bermudez & Mancini, 2013; Bouchet et al., 2013; Bullock et al., 2018; Campisi, 2013; Carteret, 2011; Chambers, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Cuellar, 2014; Franz & Cook, 2020). Additional studies should examine specific programs throughout MLB clubs' organizations to ascertain the present level of support from an educational, cultural, linguistic, and mental performance and mental health perspective. Whether provided by MLB or individual clubs, these programs should be identified at each level of the MLB developmental system. The level of support and/or resources available at each level, level of use (i.e., possible duplication/lacking progression), the cost-effectiveness of available resources, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of those resources should be assessed (Domino Rudolph, 2010; Gentile, 2022; Klein, 2009).

Future studies should examine the viability of providing additional support to the prospects in the Dominican camps through MLB's education department. Core subjects such as developing healthy relationships, domestic violence awareness, substance abuse, safe driving, mental well-being, social media, and basic financial management should be considered. Other initiatives have been developed, pursued, and resourced by individual clubs in coordination with the Dominican Republic Ministry of Education that may be standardized across all the MLB clubs. Some programs have been emplaced in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior,

which has resulted in players being able to graduate from bachelors, a key indicator of success in assimilating knowledge and developing resiliency skills. These and any other initiatives in progress need to be investigated in collaboration with the MLB Education Department to reinforce and/or enhance the individual work being done by clubs. This may benefit MLB by allowing the consolidation of resources and lead to meeting some of the impediments identified in this study (Campisi, 2013; Klein, 2009; Klein, 2007; Kusterman, 2013; Walden, 2019). The next section includes a researcher statement reflecting on my experience with the research process.

Researcher Statement

Reflecting on my personal experiences as a researcher in the research process considers possible personal bias or preconceived ideas and values. The possible effects of myself as a researcher on the participants in my changes in thinking resulting from the study. I chose to use Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach for this study because, as a researcher, my role would be one of an instrument. My bias as the study's researcher involved my personal experiences with Dominican baseball prospects throughout my doctoral work. Over this time, I have worked as the EAP Director and clinical mental health counselor providing services for two MLB organizations. From their introduction into the MLB developmental system at two major league Dominican camps, I have had the privilege of observing, supporting, and advocating for Dominican baseball players. This involved supporting them and, at times, their families in different aspects of life throughout their MLB developmental journey. Throughout my doctoral work, I have been blessed to continue to support and as part of my role advocate.

Due to my personal experience described above, I related the study's participants and their described situations in many ways. I connected with each of the players I sat and interviewed, some of whom I had previously interacted with during their MLB developmental journey. I was now able to hear in their own voices their personal narratives. I would be misstating the facts if I stated that some feelings of perceived injustice and struggles along their journey were not impactful. This work reminded me of how important it is to minister to the individual we encounter daily as mental health professionals regardless of their struggle.

As for the possible effects of myself as the researcher on the participants, I had previous contact with several participants and knew them in terms of having supported their MLB developmental journey during some of their transition levels and had not seen them since. A few were first-time interactions. In the case of one, I had a professional counseling relationship in past years during a difficult family event. To a person, they each expressed appreciation for the study. They were grateful that I had chosen Dominican players to study and explore areas they wished they had understood and resources they would have been comfortable utilizing. Throughout each interview, I felt engaged and included in the discussions. The participants each presented themselves as relaxed and open. I experienced a sense of connection.

Additionally, they felt that participating in the study gave them a voice to express some of the frustrations regarding inequalities they had encountered throughout their journey – and for some, feelings of inequality still at the highest level of professional play. My interaction with all types of players in the MLB developmental system and major leagues throughout the last eight years of my association with MLB led me to choose the plight of the Dominican baseball players. I see these players as often misunderstood and regularly lacking knowledge and awareness of resources. However, through pure determination, I successfully journeyed to the

major leagues. I honor their struggle by committing to raise further awareness on their behalf and of their countryman who will follow. I will advocate for educating and providing requisite resources to facilitate their cultural assimilation and language acquisition to destigmatize their mental health and well-being. I hope and pray that this manuscript has accurately depicted the narrative of the lived experiences of our participants and that it will make a difference to those that will follow in their footsteps.

I look forward to sharing personal insights, knowledge, and experiences I have gained through the research process with my professional communities in the counselor education space and with my Employee Assistant Program professional colleagues.

Summary

This final chapter contained an interpretation of the study's findings, whose themes were initially presented in Chapter 4, about the research questions addressed, discussion regarding confirmation and expansion of previous empirical and theoretical literature, implications for system structural change, recommendations for action, limitations of the findings and recommendations for further study. Three primary themes of US cultural competency, English language proficiency, education, and mental health well-being awareness emerged among the participants across all the phases of the MLB developmental system and major league transition. A research statement and reflection on my research experiences were also included. The next section will conclude the study.

Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of nine native Dominican professional baseball players (pseudonyms: Marcos, Pablo, Alberto, Oscar, Rafael, Mario, Felipe, Jose, and Lionel) spanning two decades of collective experiences. These individuals entered the MLB

developmental system through the MLB Dominican baseball camps. They transitioned through the MLB Developmental system in the US and out of the Developmental system to a successful major league career for at least two playing years at the major league level. Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was selected for the study's research design based on the quality of the data needed to address the stated research problem and the purpose of the study. The stated purpose was to describe how native Dominican prospects were affected in their transition through the MLB developmental system as it relates to their awareness and access to resources to facilitate cultural assimilation, language acquisition, and mental health well-being describing their lived experiences in transitioning through the levels of the MLB Developmental System and major league. Six participants participated in individual semi-structured interviews, and three participated in a focus group interview, answering interview questions based on the research questions. The study focused on a central research question about their adaptation to transition through the MLB Developmental system and major leagues within each (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out) of the transitions from Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework. The central research question was How do native Dominican baseball players transitioning from MLB Dominican academies through minor league affiliate level transition into a successful US major league career? The three sub-questions included: How do participants describe the impact of culture and language in their transition to a successful major league career? How do participants describe the impact of educational level in their transition to a successful major league career? How do participants describe the psychological/mental health wellness impact in transitioning to a successful major league career?

The conceptual framework comprised of native Dominican baseball prospects' perseverance and adaptability; integration into dominant American culture; acquisition of and

assimilation of the English language; educational level impact on Dominican baseball prospects; psychological and mental health well-being impact on Dominican baseball prospects in comparison to their American counterparts fueled the current study. The MLB developmental system and major league transition posed additional challenges in the inconsistencies across MLB clubs in providing education and awareness on United States cultural expectations. Additionally, the importance of functional English language to their successful transitions, and to a great degree, the de-stigmatization of mental health and mental health resources are necessary for the increased understanding of the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system and major leagues.

The study's findings were presented as a synthesis of the narratives from the participants' individual semi-structured interviews and the focus group. Themes were developed by coding, re-coding, and clustering meanings from the data collected in the participants' descriptions and transcriptions of individual and focus group interviews. Data analysis revealed three primary themes; culture and language (i.e., the role of family, spirituality, and food), education, mental health well-being (i.e., mental performance and mental health), which were connected to all three sub-questions which were connected to all three research sub-questions (i.e., the impact of culture and language, impact of education, the impact of psychological/mental health wellness) across all phases of the MLB developmental system and major leagues transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). The study's interpretation of findings consisting of three themes of culture and language, education, and mental health well-being were combined and summarized to address the central research question (How do participants describe the impact of culture and language, educational level, and mental health well-being throughout the levels of the MLB developmental system and their transition to a successful major league career?) as

follows: The lived experiences of native Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the levels of the MLB developmental system are characterized as baseball prospects which require both institutional MLB and club's traditional baseball resources and an investment its Dominican human capital beyond the existing resources, marked by the development of standardized education and awareness training across MLB.

The application of the study's findings include a call for the following: an increased understanding of the barriers and unique needs of native Dominican baseball prospects characteristic of their cultural, linguistic, and mental health well-being challenges which have a disproportionate impact on their ability to compete during the different levels of transition through the MLB developmental system and major leagues; a significant effort made by MLB in collaboration with major league clubs to identify and correct deficiencies starting at the introduction of native Dominican prospects into the MLB developmental system in the DR; develop a robust support structure beginning at each of the MLB Dominican camps focused on educating native Dominican talent in US culture, English language training and its importance to their success through the MLB developmental system; invest in bilingual and bicultural resources in the mental performance and mental health well-being space through the MLB developmental system and major leagues starting with a player's initial introduction at each clubs at the MLB Dominican camps. This concludes the current transcendental phenomenological study, which explored the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball prospects transitioning through the MLB developmental system and the major leagues.

As I conclude this study, I have realized the significance of the struggle and personal sacrifice that each native Dominican baseball player faces in their journey and the innocence

taken along the way on the road full of compromise. I close with a quote by author F. Scott Fitzgerald:

“He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away, and he could never go back anymore. The gates were closed, the sun was down, and there was no beauty left but the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time. Even the grief he could have born was left behind in the country of youth, illusion, and richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.”

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Appendices

Appendix A

Internal Review Board (IRB) Application/Letter

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-318 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF DOMINICAN BASEBALL PLAYERS TRANSITIONING FROM THE DOMINICAN MINOR LEAGUE CAMPS TO A SUCCESSFUL MAJOR LEAGUE CAREER

Dear Samuel Lima, Jose Maldonado,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data-safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants' research is exempt from the policy outlined in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter in English

Dear [Recipient]

Recruitment Letter

My name is Samuel Lima, and I am a Ph.D. student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Liberty University. I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning into the major league baseball (MLB) Dominican Camps and through the developmental system and out into a successful major-league career. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

To be eligible, participants must be 18 years of age or older, self-identify as native Dominican baseball players, have been through the MLB developmental system beginning at the MLB Dominican camps, and have had a minimum of two consecutive successful years playing in the major leagues. Participants should be currently playing in the major leagues or having retired after a successful major league career and presently working in some capacity within MLB or its developmental system. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview (approximately 60 minutes) or a focus group interview (approximately 90 minutes), as well as member checking via email (approximately 15 minutes).

I will e-mail participants their transcripts to obtain their feedback. Names and another identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. Participant or respondent validation is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. Data or Member checking, also known as results, are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the screening survey provided at one of the following links: (English) <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6TSKM67> or (Spanish) <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6H7CWN3>. A consent document will be provided to you once you complete the screening survey via your preferred contact method. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate after the screening, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Samuel Lima
Counselor Education and Supervision, Ph.D. student

Slima1@liberty.edu

**Recruitment Letter in Spanish
(Carta de Reclutamiento)**

Estimado, [Destinatario]

Mi nombre es Samuel Lima y soy un estudiante de doctorado (Ph.D.) en el programa de Educación y Supervisión de Consejeros en la Universidad de Liberty. Estoy realizando una investigación como parte de los requisitos para mi doctorado. El propósito de mi investigación es explorar las experiencias vividas de los jugadores de beisbol dominicanos nativos que hacen la transición a los campamentos dominicanos de las ligas mayores de béisbol (MLB) y, a través del sistema de desarrollo, a una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores. Le escribo para invitar a los participantes elegibles a unirse a mi estudio.

Para ser elegible, los participantes deben tener 18 años de edad o más, identificarse a sí mismos como jugadores de béisbol dominicanos nativos que hayan pasado por el sistema de desarrollo de la MLB comenzando en los campamentos dominicanos de la MLB y que hayan tenido un mínimo de dos años consecutivos exitosos jugando en las ligas mayores. Los participantes deben estar jugando actualmente en las ligas mayores o haberse retirado después de una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores y actualmente trabajando en alguna capacidad dentro de MLB o su sistema de desarrollo.

Se les pedirá a los participantes que participen en una entrevista semiestructurada grabada, una entrevista individual de aproximadamente 60 minutos o una entrevista de grupo focal de aproximadamente 90 minutos y la verificación de miembros por correo electrónico, lo que tomará aproximadamente 15 minutos. La verificación de miembros, también conocida como validación de participantes o encuestados, es una técnica para explorar la credibilidad de los resultados. Los datos o resultados se devuelven a los participantes para verificar la precisión y la resonancia con sus experiencias. Enviaré por correo electrónico a los participantes sus transcripciones para obtener sus comentarios. Se solicitarán nombres y otra información de identificación como parte del estudio, pero la información permanecerá confidencial.

Si está interesado en participar en el estudio, complete la encuesta de selección para los siguientes enlaces, en inglés. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6TSKM67> o en español: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6H7CWN3> Se le proporcionará un documento de consentimiento una vez que complete la encuesta de selección vía su método de contacto preferido. El documento de consentimiento contiene información adicional sobre mi investigación. Si aún elige participar después de la revisión de la encuesta de selección, deberá firmar el documento de consentimiento y devolvérmelo en el momento de la entrevista.

Sinceramente,

Samuel Lima

Consejero de Educación y Supervisión, Ph.D. alumno

Appendix C

Screening Questionnaire in English

1. What is your age *range*?
 - a. 18-20
 - b. 21-29
 - c. 30-39
 - d. 40-49
 - e. 50 Or Older
2. Do you identify as a native Dominican baseball player?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
3. Did you enter the MLB developmental system through one of the MLB club academies in the DR?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
4. Are you currently playing in a major league club for more than two consecutive seasons?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
5. Have you played with a major league club for more than two consecutive years and are now retired and still working in some capacity for MLB or with a club in the MLB developmental system?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. What is your preferred interview format?
 - a. Individual interview only
 - b. Focus group
 - c. Either
7. Please provide your full name and email address.

**Screening Questionnaire in Spanish
(Preguntas de Encuesta de Selección)**

1. ¿Cuál es tu rango de edad?

- f. 18-20
- g. 21-29
- h. 30-39
- i. 40-49
- j. 50 O mayor

2. ¿Te identificas como jugador de béisbol dominicano nativo?

- c) Sí
- d) No

3. ¿Ingresó al sistema de desarrollo de la MLB a través de una de las academias de clubes de la MLB en la República Dominicana?

- a) Sí
- b) No

4. ¿Juega actualmente en un club de las Grandes Ligas durante más de dos temporadas consecutivas?

- a) Sí
- b) No

5. ¿Ha jugado con un club de las Grandes Ligas durante más de dos años consecutivos y ahora está retirado y sigue trabajando en alguna capacidad para la MLB o con un club en el sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?

- a) Sí
- b) No

6. ¿Cuál es tu formato de entrevista preferido?

- d. Solo entrevista individual
- e. Grupo de enfoque
- f. no me importa que método

7. Por favor proporcione su nombre completo y dirección de correo electrónico.

Appendix D

Inform Consent Document in English

Title of the Project: A phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of native Dominican players transitioning into the major league baseball (MLB) Dominican minor league camps through the MLB developmental system to a successful major-league career.

Principal Investigator: Samuel Lima, LMHC-S, LPC, NCC, CCMHC, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be eighteen years of age, self-identify as a native Dominican baseball player who began his baseball journey through the MLB's Dominican Baseball camps and transition through and out of the developmental system to a successful major league career. For the purpose of this study, a successful major league career consists of two consecutive years playing in a major league club. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of native-born Dominican baseball players entering the MLB DR (DR) academies, transitioning through MLB's developmental system, and exiting the developmental system into a successful major-league career. This study seeks to answer the following research questions: a) What social, cultural, and language challenges are experienced by Dominican players during their transition through the major league developmental system; b) What impact do educational levels have on the experience of Dominican players during their transition through the MLB's developmental system; c) What psychological and mental health challenges are experienced by Dominican players during their transition through the MLB's developmental system. The study is being conducted to understand the challenges faced by native Dominican players and the possible strategies for future players to facilitate their transition through the MLB developmental system. Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research project. By signing this form, participants consent to take part in the study.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to be involved in the following procedures.

1. You will be asked to participate in some interviews, either a semi-structured individual interview or a focus group. The individual interview will be approximately 60 minutes, and the focus groups will be approximately 90 minutes.
2. You will be asked to participate in member checking via email, which allows the researcher to communicate to you what information they gathered from your interview. It is an opportunity for you to ask any questions or correct the information the researcher shares. The member check will last approximately 10-15 minutes.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The potential risk is a change in emotion or passionate response.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Benefits: Participants should not expect a direct benefit from this study. Benefits to society include providing data to benefit other countrymen transitioning through a similar journey within the MLB developmental system.

How will personal information be protected?

Confidentiality: The record of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Data collected from you will be stored on a password-locked computer. Additionally, data collected may be shared for use in future research studies; however, participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms.
- If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you will be removed before the data is shared. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with MLB, your present or past Major League Club, Liberty University, or, if applicable, your Employee Assistance Program or your Dedicated Mental Health Clinician. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw, please get in touch with the researcher at the email address in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and not included

in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Samuel Lima, Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral student at Liberty University. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at slima1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jose M. Maldonado, at jmmaldonado1@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Participants Name _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

**Consent Document in Spanish
(Consentimiento informado)**

Título del Proyecto: Un estudio fenomenológico que explora las experiencias vividas de los jugadores dominicanos nativos desde su entrada a los campamentos de la Ligas Mayor de Béisbol o “Major League Baseball” (MLB) en la Republica Dominicana y su transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB hacia una carrera exitosa en las Grandes Ligas.

Investigador principal: Samuel Lima, LMHC-S, LPC, NCC, CCMHC, Liberty University

Invitación a ser parte de un estudio de investigación

Usted está invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación. Para participar, debe tener dieciocho años, identificarse a sí mismo como un jugador de béisbol dominicano nativo, que comenzó su carrera profesional de béisbol a través de los campamentos de béisbol dominicano de MLB y la transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de MLB y fuera del sistema de desarrollo para una exitosa carrera en las Grandes Ligas. A los fines de este estudio, una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores consta de dos años consecutivos jugando en un club de las Grandes Ligas. La participación en este proyecto de investigación es voluntaria.

Por favor, tómese el tiempo para leer todo este formulario y hacer preguntas antes de decidir si desea participar en esta investigación.

¿De qué trata el estudio y por qué se realiza?

El propósito de este estudio es comprender las experiencias vividas de los jugadores de béisbol dominicanos nacidos en el país que ingresan a las academias de la MLB en la República Dominicana (RD), hacen la transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB y salen del sistema de desarrollo hacia una exitosa carrera en las Grandes Ligas.

Este estudio busca responder las siguientes preguntas de investigación: a) ¿Qué desafíos sociales, culturales y lingüísticos experimentan los jugadores dominicanos durante su transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de las Grandes Ligas? b) ¿Qué impacto tienen los niveles educativos en la experiencia de los jugadores dominicanos durante su transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB; c) ¿Qué desafíos psicológicos y de salud mental experimentan los jugadores dominicanos durante su transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?

El estudio se lleva a cabo para desarrollar una comprensión de los desafíos que enfrentan los jugadores dominicanos nativos y las posibles estrategias que podrían emplearse con futuros jugadores para facilitar su transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB. Tómese el tiempo para leer este formulario completo y hacer preguntas antes de decidir si desea participar en este proyecto de investigación. Al firmar este formulario, los participantes aceptan participar en el estudio.

¿Qué sucederá si participa en este estudio?

Procedimientos: Si acepta participar en este estudio, se le pedirá que participe en los siguientes procedimientos.

1. Se le pedirá que participe en algún tipo de entrevista, ya sea una entrevista individual semiestructurada o un grupo focal. La entrevista individual será de aproximadamente 60 minutos y los grupos focales de aproximadamente 90 minutos.
2. Se le pedirá que participe en la verificación de miembros por correo electrónico, lo que le permite al investigador comunicarle la información que recopiló de su entrevista. Es una oportunidad para que usted haga cualquier pregunta o haga correcciones a la información compartida por el investigador. La verificación del miembro durará aproximadamente 10-15 minutos.

¿Qué riesgos podría experimentar al participar en este estudio?

Riesgos: Los riesgos involucrados en este estudio son mínimos, lo que significa que son iguales a los riesgos que encontraría en la vida cotidiana. El riesgo potencial es un cambio en la emoción o una respuesta apasionada.

¿Cómo podría usted u otros beneficiarse de este estudio?

Beneficios: Los participantes no deben esperar recibir un beneficio directo de este estudio. Los beneficios para la sociedad incluyen proporcionar datos que beneficiarán a otros compatriotas que transitan por una carrera profesional similar dentro del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB.

¿Cómo se protegerá la información personal?

Confidencialidad: El registro de este estudio se mantendrá privado. Los registros de investigación se almacenarán de forma segura y solo el investigador tendrá acceso a los registros.

- Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en un lugar donde los demás no puedan escuchar fácilmente la conversación. Las entrevistas/grupos focales serán grabadas y transcritas.
- Las grabaciones se almacenarán en una computadora bloqueada con contraseña durante tres años y luego se borrarán. Los datos recopilados de usted se almacenarán en una computadora bloqueada con contraseña. Además, los datos recopilados pueden compartirse para su uso en futuros estudios de investigación, sin embargo, las respuestas de los participantes se mantendrán confidenciales utilizando seudónimos.
- Si se comparten los datos recopilados de usted, cualquier información que pueda identificarlo se eliminará antes de que se compartan los datos.
- Los informes publicados no incluirán ninguna información que permita identificar a un participante.

¿Cómo se le compensará por ser parte del estudio?

Los participantes no serán compensados por participar en este estudio.

¿La participación en el estudio es voluntaria?

Naturaleza voluntaria del estudio: La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su decisión de participar no afectará sus relaciones actuales o futuras con MLB, su organización de las Grandes Ligas, La Universidad de Liberty, y si corresponde, ni su Programa de Asistencia al Empleado o el terapeuta clínico de Salud Mental de su organización. Si decide participar, es libre de no responder ninguna pregunta o retirarse en cualquier momento sin afectar esas relaciones.

¿Qué debe hacer si decide retirarse del estudio?

Cómo retirarse del estudio: Si decide retirarse del estudio, comuníquese con el investigador a la dirección de correo electrónico que se incluye en el siguiente párrafo. Si decide retirarse, los datos recopilados sobre usted, además de los datos de los grupos focales, se destruirán de inmediato y no se incluirán en este estudio. Los datos del grupo de enfoque no se destruirán, pero sus contribuciones al grupo de enfoque no se incluirán en el estudio si decide retirarse.

¿Con quién se comunica si tiene preguntas o inquietudes sobre el estudio?

Preguntas: El investigador que realiza este estudio es Samuel Lima, estudiante de doctorado en Educación y Supervisión de consejero en Liberty University. Puede hacer cualquier pregunta que tenga ahora. Si tiene preguntas más adelante, le recomendamos que se comunique con él por medio de correo electrónico slima1@liberty.edu. También puede comunicarse con el patrocinador de la facultad del investigador, el Dr. José M. Maldonado en jmmaldonado1@liberty.edu.

¿Con quién se comunica si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante de la investigación?

Si tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud con respecto a este estudio y le gustaría hablar con alguien que no sea el investigador, le recomendamos que se comunique con la Junta de Revisión Institucional, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 o envíe un correo electrónico a irb@liberty.edu.

Descargo de responsabilidad: La Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB, por sus siglas en inglés) tiene la tarea de garantizar que la investigación con seres humanos se lleve a cabo de manera ética, tal como lo definen y exigen las reglamentaciones federales. Los temas cubiertos y los puntos de vista expresados o aludidos por los estudiantes y profesores investigadores son los de los investigadores y no reflejan necesariamente las políticas o posiciones oficiales de Liberty University.

Su Consentimiento

Al firmar este documento, acepta participar en este estudio. Asegúrese de entender de qué se trata el estudio antes de firmar. Se le entregará una copia de este documento para sus registros. El investigador conservará una copia con los registros del estudio. Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre el estudio después de firmar este documento, puede comunicarse con el equipo del estudio utilizando la información proporcionada anteriormente.

He leído y comprendido la información anterior. He hecho preguntas y he recibido respuestas. Acepto participar en el estudio.

☐ El investigador tiene mi permiso para grabarme en video como parte de mi participación en este estudio.

Imprimir el Nombre del Participante: _____

Firma: _____

Fecha: _____

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Focus Group Interview Questions in English

1. Describe your experiences, including the similarities and differences throughout the transition process as you moved into MLB Camps in the DR, through the MLB developmental system in the US, and out of the system into a successful major league career?
2. What challenges were associated with culture and language, you experienced as you transitioned into, through, and out of the MLB developmental system?
3. Describe the challenges associated with your educational level during your transition into, through, and out of the MLB developmental system?
4. Describe the psychological/mental health well-being challenges you experienced while transitioning into, through, and out of the MLB developmental system?
5. What challenges did you face transitioning through the MLB developmental system in contrast to maintaining a major league career?
6. How have these experiences impacted your relationships, training progression, and outcome?

Focus Group Interview Questions in Spanish
(Preguntas de la Entrevista de Grupo Focal)

1. ¿Describa sus experiencias, incluidas las similitudes y diferencias a lo largo del proceso de transición a medida que ingresaba a los campamentos de la MLB en la República Dominicana, a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB en los EE. UU., y fuera del sistema hacia una exitosa carrera en las ligas mayores?
2. ¿Cuáles fueron los desafíos asociados con la cultura y el idioma que experimentó a medida que hizo la transición hacia, a través y fuera del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?
3. ¿Describa los desafíos asociados con su nivel educativo durante su transición hacia, a través y fuera del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?
4. ¿Describa los desafíos de bienestar psicológico/salud mental que experimentó durante su transición hacia, a través y fuera del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?
5. ¿Cuáles fueron los desafíos que enfrentó en la transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB en contraste con los que enfrentó al mantener una carrera en las ligas mayores?
6. ¿Cómo han impactado estas experiencias en sus relaciones, la progresión del entrenamiento y el resultado?

Individual Interview Questions in English

Research Questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of native Dominican baseball players transitioning from the Dominican minor-league MLB Camps to a successful majorly career?
 - a. What social, cultural, and language challenges did you experience in your journey through the MLB developmental system?
 - b. How did your educational level impact your transition through the MLB developmental system?
 - c. What psychological, mental health, or well-being challenges did you face while transitioning through the MLB developmental system?

Interview Questions:

1. Introduction~ Please tell me about yourself and your journey into the MLB developmental system.
2. What was the move into and through the MLB Camps in the DR like for you (i.e., feelings, sources of stress/transition, degree of stress experienced, timing/duration of the transition, interpersonal supports pre- and post-transition environments, personal coping style)?
 - a. How would you describe the challenges of culture and Language transitioning into and through the MLB Dominican Camps and developmental system?
 - b. How would you describe the challenges associated with your educational level transitioning into and through the MLB Dominican Camps and developmental system?
 - c. How would you describe the challenges associated with your psychological and mental health well-being transitioning into and through the MLB Dominican Camps and developmental system?
3. What stands out to you most, and what did you learn about yourself entering and transitioning through the MLB Dominican Camps and developmental system?
4. What was the move into and through the MLB developmental system in the US like for you (i.e., feelings, sources of stress/transition, degree of stress experienced, timing/duration of the transition, interpersonal supports pre- and post-transition environments, personal coping style)?
 - a. How would you describe the challenges of culture and Language transitioning into and through the MLB developmental system in the US?
 - b. How would you describe the challenges associated with your educational level transitioning into and through the MLB developmental system in the US?
 - c. How would you describe the challenges associated with your psychological and mental health well-being transitioning into and through the MLB developmental system in the US?
5. What stands out to you most, and what did you learn about yourself moving into and through the MLB developmental system in the US?
6. What was moving out of the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues like for you (i.e., feelings, sources of stress/transition, degree of stress experienced,

timing/duration of the transition, interpersonal supports pre- and post-transition environments, personal coping style)?

- A. How would you describe the challenges of culture and Language transitioning out of the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues?
 - B. How would you describe the challenges associated with your educational level transitioning out of the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues?
 - C. How would you describe the challenges associated with your psychological and mental health well-being transitioning out of the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues?
7. What stands out to you most, and what did you learn about yourself transitioning out of the MLB developmental system and into the major leagues?
 8. What are and/or were your day-to-day challenges in maintaining a successful major league career (i.e., feelings, sources of stress/transition, degree of stress experienced, timing/duration of the transition, interpersonal supports pre- and post-transition environments, personal coping style)?
 - A. How would you describe the challenges of culture and Language in maintaining a successful major league career?
 - B. How would you describe the challenges associated with your educational level in maintaining a successful major league career?
 - C. How would you describe the challenges associated with your psychological and mental health well-being in maintaining a successful major league career?
 9. What stands out to you most, and what did you learn about yourself from your experiences in your major league career?
 10. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this study. I greatly appreciate your sharing of your experiences with me. I have one final question: Is there anything else you would like to add to ensure I have a complete picture of your experiences as a professional baseball player transitioning through the MLB developmental system into a successful major league career?

Individual Interview Questions in Spanish (Preguntas de Entrevista Individual)

Preguntas de la investigación:

2. ¿Cuáles son las experiencias en vivo de los jugadores de béisbol dominicanos nativos que hacen la transición de los campamentos de MLB de ligas menores en la República Dominicana a una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores?
 - a. ¿Qué desafíos sociales, culturales y lingüísticos experimentó en su recorrido por el sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?
 - b. ¿Qué impacto tuvo su nivel educativo en su transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?
 - c. ¿Qué desafíos psicológicos, de salud mental, o de bienestar enfrentó durante la transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de MLB?

Preguntas de entrevista:

11. Introducción~ ¿Cuénteme sobre usted y su viaje a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB?
12. ¿Cómo fue para ti la entrada y los campamentos de la MLB en la República Dominicana (es decir, sentimientos, fuentes de estrés/transición, grado de estrés experimentado, momento/ duración de la transición, apoyos interpersonales, entornos previos y posteriores a la transición, estilo de afrontamiento personal)?
 - a. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos de la transición de la cultura y el idioma hacia y a través de los campamentos dominicanos de la MLB y el sistema de desarrollo?
 - b. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con la transición de su nivel educativo hacia y a través de los campamentos dominicanos de la MLB y el sistema de desarrollo?
 - c. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con su bienestar psicológico y de salud mental durante la transición hacia y a través de los campamentos dominicanos de MLB y el sistema de desarrollo?
13. ¿Qué es lo que más te llama la atención y qué aprendiste acerca de ti mismo al ingresar y hacer la transición a través de los campamentos dominicanos de MLB y el sistema de desarrollo?
14. ¿Cómo fue para ti la entrada y a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB en los EE. UU. (es decir, sentimientos, fuentes de estrés/transición, grado de estrés experimentado, momento/ duración de la transición, apoyos interpersonales, entornos previos y posteriores a la transición, estilo de afrontamiento personal)?
 - a. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos de la transición de la cultura y el idioma hacia y a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB en los EE. UU.?
 - b. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con la transición de su nivel educativo hacia y a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB en los EE. UU.?
 - c. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con su bienestar psicológico y de salud mental en la transición hacia y a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB en los EE. UU.?
15. ¿Qué es lo que más le llama la atención y qué aprendió sobre su paso por el sistema de desarrollo de la MLB en los EE. UU.?

16. ¿Cómo fue para ti salir del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB y entrar en las ligas mayores (es decir, sentimientos, fuentes de estrés/transición, grado de estrés experimentado, momento/ duración de la transición, apoyos interpersonales, entornos previos y posteriores a la transición, estilo de afrontamiento personal)?
 - a. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos de la transición de la cultura y el idioma fuera del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB hacia las ligas mayores?
 - b. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con su nivel educativo al pasar del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB a las ligas mayores?
 - c. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con su bienestar psicológico y de salud mental en la transición del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB a las ligas mayores?
 17. ¿Qué es lo que más le llama la atención y qué aprendió sobre su transición del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB a las ligas mayores?
 18. ¿Cuáles son y/o cuáles fueron sus desafíos diarios para mantener una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores (es decir, sentimientos, fuentes de estrés/transición, grado de estrés experimentado, momento/ duración de la transición, apoyos interpersonales, entornos previos y posteriores a la transición, estilo de afrontamiento personal)?
 - a. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos de la cultura y el idioma para mantener una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores?
 - b. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con su nivel educativo para mantener una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores?
 - c. ¿Cómo describiría los desafíos asociados con su bienestar psicológico y de salud mental para mantener una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores?
 19. ¿Qué es lo que más te llama la atención y qué aprendiste sobre ti mismo de tus experiencias en tu carrera en las ligas mayores?
- Muchas gracias por su disposición a participar en este estudio. Aprecio mucho que compartas tus experiencias conmigo. Tengo una última pregunta: ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría agregar para asegurarse de tener una imagen completa de sus experiencias como jugador de béisbol profesional en transición a través del sistema de desarrollo de la MLB y hacia una carrera exitosa en las ligas mayores?

Appendix F

Reflective Research Journal Excerpts

1/5/2023 I communicated with Dr. Mwendwa and discussed why having to wait on the interviews until players arrived from their international locations –DR.

On 1/18/2023, I communicated with Dr. Mwendwa and Dr. Maldonado to report that I was doing my first interview today at 1 PM and the second one scheduled for Saturday at 4 PM.

1/18/2023

During a discussion with Participant 1, after the recording had ended, he went into an explanation of the difference between those that have attended formal education (which for him is completing “Bachinger ”~the equivalent of High School) and his counterparts who come from the interior of the country and go through the process of being recruited by a “buskin” and wind up at a local Academy at a very early age with little to no education. He then began by saying that he did not want to disparage anyone but referred to them as being illiterate and lacking family upbringing as a reason why there is so much conflict at times when they come to the States, not only with the American players but also with the more educated Dominican players like himself.

1/21/2023

Before the discussion with Participant 2, he wanted to share that his process through the system had a lot of rehabilitation periods because of his injury. I wanted to make sure that it was OK for him to mention that during our recording. He also wanted to know if, after our interview, he remembered something. I wanted to add something if that would be possible. I reiterated that I would send him the transcript of our conversation for him to review and that he was welcome to send me any information he wanted.

1/22/2023

Discussion with Participant 3 after the recording was completed. Upon completion of the recording, the participant I wanted to address an issue he was uncomfortable discussing while being recorded. He wanted to introduce his concern for a level of favoritism or would he later have described as possible racism from his point of view. He reports that he experienced several situations where specific American players were favored by coaches, and the perception was that they were getting preferential treatment looking into their promotion, delaying the progress of Latin players. He stated that he did not want to make a big deal but thought that it should be at least mentioned in the study as a potential concern.

2/3/2023

There were no significant issues brought up by participant number 4 other than his similar expression of the importance of family as a support network during the transition.

2/4/2023

During my interview with Participant 5, he did report that he grew up playing baseball in the DR. However, at age 12, his father took on a job in Puerto Rico, and he continued to play baseball

there before entering the MLB developmental system through Rocky ball. Although this is very valuable information because he was in the system for almost 20 years before retiring in 2020, I will interview an additional player to ensure the integrity of the study. Still, we also use the information provided for all other aspects of his lived experience except the Dominican camp.

2/5/2023

I informed Dr. Mwendwa that after part of the fifth interview, the participant discloses that although he had been through the entire MLB developmental system, he did not start out from the Dominican camp.

2/16/2023

I gave them the player's schedules. The focus group started at 12:30, and only two of the three participants had shown up at the time. When the third participant arrived, I reviewed the questions we had already done with the other two participants. Informed Dr. Mwendwa of the completion of the focus group interview.

2/21/2023

There is an * during the interview when the player shared some specifics about who he was staying with, which she asked me to remove from the transcript. However, the essence of his lived experience was captured without details.

3/11/2023

I checked in with Dr. Mwendwa to discuss aspects of data analysis.

3/27/23

Meeting with Dr. Mwendwa and Dr. Maldonado, and Dr. Davila. Went over the data analysis and discussed the way forward.

3/28/2023

Communication with Dr. Mwendwa on a misunderstanding of when I would be required to defend or whether the defense would come before my summer semester.

3/28/2023

Made changes to protect participants' privacy by removing references to the team they are playing with and adding a column reflecting English language proficiency at signing in the DR. In the case of Rafael, English language proficiency was obtained during his education in the Puerto Rican system, which requires English language training. In the case of Felipe, although he was born in the DR and returned to train before signing, "I lived in the United States for almost 11 years before going back to the Megan to sign" He had an advanced level of English proficiency when he signed and entered the MLB developmental system through a Dominican camp.

4/19/2023

I reached out to Dr. Maldonado to check in on the particulars of the update we were scheduled to have on Thursday, the 20th. He told me he would have his feedback on my chapters 1-5 by the end of the day. I also told him I was looking forward to the update because I had questions about the

ongoing process into the summer. Later in the morning, he texted me and suggested we reschedule the update because Dr. Davila could not attend the meeting. I asked him to please let me know when the committee would be able to reschedule the meeting so that I can block the date and time.