

ROUNDING THE CULTURAL BASES: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE  
ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES OF LATIN AMERICAN-BORN  
MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL (MiLB) PLAYERS

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to understand how Latino Minor League Baseball (MiLB) players acculturate to life in the United States (US) while playing in the US South. To better understand how they acculturate and what their transitions were like, 24 current MiLB players and one coach, who was also a former player, were interviewed. Questions were asked about their knowledge of English, when they began learning English, how they communicate with players and coaches from the US, and their cultural transitions. I found that knowing English is the most important way for players to acculturate to this new cultural environment. This dissertation also uncovered that their cultural transitions were overwhelmingly positive, mainly because they are in the midst of pursuing a lifelong dream. Lastly, this dissertation aimed to understand how the Latino players identify themselves while playing in the US. I found that these players embraced their Latino heritage and do not alter their identities to conform to the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches. Rather, the perceived dominant group in this sporting context are players who are English-proficient.

## DEDICATION

To my wife, Madeline, and my daughter, Blair.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ATP	Professional tennis tour (men's)
Double-A	Two levels beneath Major League Baseball
High-A	Three levels beneath Major League Baseball
Low-A	Four levels beneath Major League Baseball
LPGA	Professional golf tour (women's)
MiLB	Minor League Baseball
MLB	Major League Baseball
NHL	National Hockey League
NBA	National Basketball Association
PGA	Professional golf tour (men's)
Triple-A	One level beneath Major League Baseball
US	United States

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

North American baseball has always been portrayed as an inherently American pursuit. From its label as “America’s pastime” to the championship being coined the “World Series,” implying that the winner of the championship is the greatest in the world, U.S. media has framed the game as something more national rather than international. Former Major League Baseball (MLB) player, manager, executive, and sporting goods mogul Albert Spalding once claimed that,

Base Ball is the American Game par excellence because its playing demands Brain and Brawn, and American manhood supplies these ingredients in quantity sufficient to spread over the entire continent (Spalding, 1911, p. 12).

While baseball has long been coined “America’s pastime,” baseball is not inherently from the US. Historians believe that baseball’s origins actually derive from England, where sports like rounders and cricket eventually evolved into baseball when colonists arrived in the United States (US) in the 18th Century (History of Baseball, n.d.). Even though this is the most logical way in which baseball came to the US, it contradicts the myth that baseball was invented by Civil War general Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown, NY in 1839. The Doubleday myth began in 1903, when a journalist named Henry Chadwick wrote an article about how baseball was originated in England and evolved from cricket and rounders. Albert Spalding, the aforementioned sporting goods entrepreneur, wrote an article himself in response that baseball

was created by Doubleday, all in an effort to demonstrate US exceptionalism and that the US should be credited for creating “America’s pastime.” Historians claim the Doubleday legend to be inaccurate, mainly because Doubleday never wrote about creating baseball in any of the 67 diaries that he owned (Vannozzi, 2018). Even though baseball is synonymous with the US, this story demonstrates that its origins lie in England. However, the US is responsible for spreading baseball to Latin American countries, mainly in the Caribbean (Regalado, 1998; Ruck, 2011).

The US brought baseball to the Caribbean in a few ways. First, a Cuban student and baseball player at Spring Hill College in Mobile, AL named Nemisio Guilló returned to Cuba in 1864 with his baseball equipment (Ruck, 2011). Burgos (2007) believes that Guilló should be credited by being the first to bring baseball to Cuba. However, baseball spread to Cuba in other ways, as well. In 1867, US sailors were stationed near Havana and were playing baseball in their free time. The US sailors created a baseball diamond near the harbor where they would play on and would even invite locals to play with them, which sparked Cuban participation. Around this time as well was the Ten Years’ War that lasted from 1868-1878, where Cuba was fighting Spain for its independence. This war caused many Cubans to flee to other Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic. The Cuban diaspora during the war is one way that baseball was spread to the Dominican Republic (Regalado, 1998).

Moreover, capitalistic interests by US investors in the Dominican Republic is another way that baseball became popular in the Dominican Republic. In 1870, American investors began investing in sugar cane, and even built railroads across the island to transport sugar. Many acres of land were purchased to create refineries, as well. The investors played baseball on the island, and the game spread to the Dominican sugar cane workers who played on field that the investors created. During work breaks, many workers would play baseball and the investors

would even play games against their employees (Bretón & Villegas, 1999). The US military was also frequently present in the Dominican Republic beginning in 1916, and the Dominicans would play baseball and they viewed the sport to show defiance against US imperialism (Regalado, 1998). While baseball became popular in the Dominican Republic via Cuba, Cuba (specifically Havana) became the world's baseball hub by World War I (Ruck, 2011). Even though the Spanish from the Galicia and Asturias regions brought soccer with them to Cuba, baseball was still popular because it was an avenue for "becoming Cuban" (Ruck, 2011, p. 9) rather than relying on other sports synonymous with Spanish heritage.

In contrast with how the US brought baseball to the Caribbean, Cuba was responsible for spreading baseball to Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico. Cuban expatriates first organized a league in Caracas, Venezuela after an expatriate named Emilio Cramer opened a cigarette factory there in the 1890s. Cramer created a team of all-stars that he named after Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who was a planter who freed the slaves that he owned and ordered the rebellion that first started the Ten Years' War in Cuba in 1868 (Ruck, 2011). Essentially, the Cubans fleeing from the Ten Years' War spread baseball across the Caribbean and Mexico, eventually continuing to spread across Central American countries (Ruck, 2011).

Even though Cuba was mainly responsible for spreading baseball, the US still played a role in bringing baseball to Mexico. In northern Mexican cities like Monterrey and Chihuahua, Mexican workers came in frequent contact with American railroad workers during Porfirio Díaz's presidential rule (Regalado, 1998). Díaz wished to modernize the country and he did so by creating railroads, as railroad construction was a sign of economic progress after the Mexican Revolution. Construction on railroads in the country happened between 1884-1885 (The Mexican Revolution, n.d.), so this is when the Americans brought baseball to Mexico.

The colonization of baseball across Latin America is visibly seen today in MLB. As of Opening Day 2020, 28.1% of MLB players were internationally born (Lapchick, 2020), 10.7% of the league deriving from the Dominican Republic. There were 75 Venezuelans, 22 Cubans, and 20 players from Puerto Rico (Record 109 Dominican Players, 2020). Many of the league's most talented and entertaining players derive from Latin America. Fernando Tatís Jr. of the San Diego Padres, who hails from San Pedro de Macorís, Dominican Republic, won the Silver Slugger award in 2020 at age 21 (Acee, 2020), which is awarded to the best hitters in the game. Ronald Acuña Jr., a Venezuelan native and Atlanta Braves star, is only 23 years old. He was National League (NL) Rookie of the Year in 2018, won two Silver Slugger awards, made an All-Star team, and was the stolen base leader in 2019 (Ronald Acuña Jr., n.d.). Albert Pujols, a Dominican native and current player for the Los Angeles Dodgers, has almost 700 home runs and is currently tied for 5<sup>th</sup> all-time in the category (Albert Pujols, n.d.). While the Latin American star-power and influence in MLB is abundant, there are countless other Minor League Baseball (MiLB) Latino players who have the same aspirations but never rise to the MLB level. Rather, the majority of professional players never stay at luxury hotels, make millions of dollars, and take private jets for away games. Instead, there are long bus rides, sub-par food, and minimum wages. Even though MLB raised MiLB pay between 38 and 72 percent, they still are not livable wages, as players earn anywhere from \$4,800 for a three-month short-season league to \$14,000 for a five-month season for A, AA, and AAA players. (Baer, 2020).

In order for a player to reach MLB, they must go through many levels of MiLB. Most international players are first eligible to sign when they are 16 (Sanchez, 2021) and they then report to their teams' respective Dominican academy. However, this method of entering the MLB pipeline does not apply to Puerto Rican or Cuban players. Since it is a territory of the

United States, Puerto Rican players enter professional baseball via the MLB Draft. Meanwhile, Cuban players have two options they can enter the MLB pipeline. They can either defect and make residency in a country aside from the US before allowing MLB scouts to attend their tryouts. MLB is avoiding this option because it is unsafe, while also subjects the players to human trafficking (Waldstein & Rogers, 2018). The other option allows Cuban players over 25, who played in the Cuban league for six years, to leave Cuba and sign with an MLB team without defecting (Cuban Baseball Players Allowed, 2018). For all other international players, they report to the teams' academy, where they house, train, feed, and educate players with the aspirations that they are promoted to play professionally in the US. If a player is good enough, they will make it to play in MiLB in the United States. However, only 2% of all signed players actually make it all the way through the minor leagues and play in MLB.

Since 98% of the players remain in the minor leagues, often playing in small to moderately-sized cities like Hickory, NC, Montgomery, AL, Rome, GA, and Jackson, TN, it is important to understand how they acculturate in a new country, culture, and language, while trying to navigate professional baseball with the aspirations of playing in MLB. This topic is important to study because there may not be much aid from professional baseball when it comes to preparing players to acculturate to a new environment in the US. Understanding ways in which players acculturate can demonstrate how sport itself is a way to find common ground with teammates and coaches, and thus using sport as an acculturation tool. Moreover, if players are more comfortable in their surroundings in the US, they may also perform better on the field, which benefits MiLB and MLB. Not only are these athletes playing in cities in which they are most likely unfamiliar, but there are also no guarantees that they will stay in that city for the entire season. They may get promoted, demoted, traded, or even released. There are also

pressures on them from many angles: trying to chase a dream, earning money for their families back home, learning English, and adjusting to a new country. These players are also extremely young, as the average age of an MiLB player is approximately 22 years old, and any player of 25 is considered too old to make it to MLB (Isaacs, 2012).

This dissertation also seeks to understand how these players view themselves in relation to the perceived dominant group of Americans and whether they alter their identities to align with this dominant group. All of this must take a toll on them mentally, which can impact their performance on the field. Therefore, studying acculturation and sport at the minor league level is vital to the well-being of the athletes who oftentimes do not have access to many resources, including financial and institutional support. The implications of this topic extend beyond the realm of sport, as it speaks to larger acculturation processes in the United States, specifically in the US South. While sport may be a vehicle for acculturation and finding common ground with the perceived dominant group for this study, other mediums of acculturation may be used to find comfort in a new country and culture.

Athlete acculturation and sport in the discipline of communication has not been extensively researched. Kontos (2009) claims that athletes bring their traditions and norms to a new country while pursuing sport. Moreover, athletes have to encounter stressors from many directions, including a new cultural environment and facing pressure from the competition within sport (Schinke et al., 2016). Schinke et al (2016) conducted interviews with athletes who migrated to Canada to pursue sport during their teenage years and encountered four themes: a lack of support for international athletes, challenges of approaching new sport programs and training approaches, facing differences in mindsets of Canadian athletes, and searching for

balance in their lives. The athletes who were interviewed pursued sports other than baseball, including karate, badminton, swimming, and bobsleigh.

Athletes typically are not warned of the cultural differences before they move to pursue the sport (Schinke & McGannon, 2014) and there is also the challenge of learning a new language (Schinke et al., 2013). Additionally, Battochio et al. (2013) sought to understand how National Hockey League (NHL) and MLB international players have discussed their personal experiences with adapting to a new culture while playing sport at the highest level. The authors conducted a textual analysis using quotes from players on the teams' websites and found that English was vitally important to success, increasing confidence while interacting with teammates and coaches, having a sense of community within the team, and trust in the teammates and coaches. Although there has been research conducted on athlete acculturation, there are no known studies that interview MiLB players with the intentions of understanding how they acculturate to life in the US while navigating MiLB. There are also no known studies in sport communication that adopt the framework of social identity theory to better understand how players alter their identities to communicate with the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches. Thus, this dissertation aims to fill these gaps in sport communication and social identity literature.

For this dissertation, I interviewed these players to gain insight as to how they adjust, how they communicate, and whether they alter their identities while communicating with the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches. Because the goal is to describe more than generalize, as well as to let the athletes determine the terms of their acculturation experiences, qualitative inquiry in the form of in-depth interviews were the ideal method for this dissertation. I chose to interview players rather than using other forms of data collection mainly

because their perspectives are unique and I want to obtain their expert insight about their experiences, specifically in the US South. I am interested specifically how the MiLB players acculturate within the Southern US culture, as their strategies and experiences may vary in other regions of the US. I was able to explore in detail about their behaviors, attitudes, experiences, opinions and knowledge on this subject that would be extremely difficult to gather with other methods of data collection. Additionally, I asked follow-up questions when needed while also reading their nonverbals. Other methods of data collection would not allow me to get as engaged with the participants as interviews permit. Interviews helped to answer my research questions because first-hand accounts, opinions, and feelings are needed to answer them, rather than other forms of data collection.

Four additional chapters will be advanced in this dissertation. Chapter two shall consist of a literature review that covers relevant literature on intercultural communication theories, in addition to seminal literature on social identity theory and sport communication. Chapter three is the methods chapter, which lays out the procedures to interview the players, including the interview guide, both in English and Spanish. Chapter four will be the results chapter that will have detailed answers to each proposed research question. Lastly, chapter five will be the discussion chapter that will include main findings, theoretical contributions, applied contributions, limitations, directions for future research, and a conclusion.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter encompasses relevant literature on intercultural communication theories, first beginning with acculturation, adaptation, and assimilation. Second, I discuss acculturating individuals, then become more specific with the acculturation of athletes. Primary literature on how international athletes adjust to life in other countries while pursuing sport is covered. Third, co-cultural communication is stressed, which explains how non-dominant groups in society communicate with the dominant group. Fourth, the seminal literature on social identity theory (SIT), will be discussed, which will be the primary theory that I will use for this dissertation. SIT is the best theoretical lens because I am investigating the acculturation experiences of international-born athletes (perceived out-group) and how they shape their identities to communicate with the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches (perceived in-group). SIT claims that people perceive themselves in certain ways and identify with groups that align with their perceptions of identity. There are also dominant and non-dominant social groups and people who feel excluded in the non-dominant groups will try to adapt their identity to enter into the dominant group. Fifth, this literature review pivots to race and ethnicity in sport. Lastly, race and nationality in sport is covered, as the focus of this dissertation is the nationality of foreign-born Minor League Baseball (MiLB) players. The theoretical framework in this chapter because it is a disciplinary contribution.

## **Acculturation, Adaptation, and Assimilation**

Acculturation is both a biological and cultural adaptation as a result of our constant need to move and relocate. Darwin (1871) acknowledges that humans are a migratory species and we have always explored regions other than where we were born and raised, thus creating adaptations as a result (Cavalli-Sforza, 1997; Brown & Zagefka, 2011). Even though acculturation's roots may be rooted in human evolution, it has been primarily discussed in psychological research, but has implications in communication. The seminal definition of acculturation comes from Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936), who assert that acculturation results when groups of individuals who have different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact. This contact will subsequently produce changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. Under this definition acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, as acculturation is only one aspect of cultural change. Therefore, changes result from contact with other cultures. Berry (2005) notes that acculturation is

Culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct cultural transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modification induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life.

The changes, Berry argues, can be accomplished through behavioral shifts, including speaking, dressing, and eating. The changes can also be more problematic, including heightened levels of uncertainty, anxiety, and depression (Berry 1976; Berry, 2005). A tangible example of how acculturation has impacted behaviors of groups is when the Europeans and Native American

peoples came into direct contact in the 16th and 17th century through colonization. Europeans took on traditions of hunting techniques, clothing, and transportation from the natives. On the other hand, many Native Americans became acculturated by mainly adopting cultural characteristics of the Europeans (Berry, 1992). Therefore, multiple groups acculturate simultaneously.

Berry (1974, 1984, 1994) furthers this argument by claiming that there are two central forms of acculturation: maintenance of original cultural identity and maintenance of relations with other groups, and individuals go through psychological acculturation. Specifically, individuals will attempt to retain their cultural identity or they will engage outwardly with other groups (Berry, 1980). In addition to these preferences, there are four acculturation attitudes/strategies that individuals will adopt: Integration, which values cultural maintenance and intergroup relations; separation, which is those who cherish cultural maintenance but do not value intergroup relations; assimilation, which references those who value intergroup relations but do not value cultural maintenance; and marginalization, which references individuals who neither wish to maintain cultural maintenance nor intergroup relations (Berry, 1980). Integration is the most favorable while marginalization is the least favorable (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). Globalization enhances these strategies and is on the rise as technology becomes increasingly common, from travel to digital video communication services. Globalization is the contact that provides the beginning point for acculturation to occur (Berry, 2008). McGrew (1992) claims that our lives are influenced by other cultures. Specifically, globalization is

the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation-states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system. It defines a process (emphasis added) through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world

can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe. Nowadays, goods, capital, people, knowledge, images, communications, crime, culture, pollutants, drugs, fashions, and beliefs all readily flow across territorial boundaries. Transnational networks, social movements and relationships are extensive in virtually all areas of human activity (McGrew, 1992, pp. 65–66).

Berry (1992) acknowledges that acculturation happens at both the group level and the individual level. The differences in acculturation at these levels are vastly different. At the group level, or the overall population of a cultural group, acculturation happens culturally, socially, and institutionally. At the individual level is where behavioral traits change. He notes that there should also be a distinction is how both are coined. Berry (1992) believes that the acculturation at the group level should just be called *acculturation*, while the behavioral shifts in an individual should be called *psychological acculturation*. Otherwise, there would be confusion as who is doing the acculturating.

The reasons why people leave their home country is called motivational orientation (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). There are “push” and “pull” factors for why people move to other countries. The “push” factor is when something negative happens in one’s home culture. Examples are being forced out by persecution, war, and poverty. On the other hand, the “pull” factor is seen as positive, as individuals are deciding to move somewhere else, often to pursue something (Berry, 1992). A notable example is when people come to the United States to pursue employment and freedom, something that may not be possible in their home country. People who leave their home countries voluntarily have fewer adaptive problems that people who are “pushed” to move somewhere. This is because voluntary immigrants can prepare themselves for adaptation to a new culture by reading and researching on the new culture, while also improving

language proficiency (Berry, 1992; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). It is important to mention that many of the players I will be interviewing will most likely depart for their home countries after the MiLB season ends in September. So while there is a “pull” factor for them to come to the US, they may not stay in the US during the times of year where baseball is not being played.

With acculturation, there are two primary models (Gans, 1979): unidimensional and bidimensional. The unidimensional model is based on the assumption that cultural identity change takes place over time. The acculturating individuals are foregoing their attitudes, values, and behaviors of their own culture while simultaneously adopting the new society’s attitudes, values, and behaviors (Gans, 1979; Gordon, 1964; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). This definition of a unidimensional model is extremely similar to assimilation. On the contrary, the bidimensional model claims that “acculturation can be more completely understood when heritage and mainstream cultural identities are seen as being relatively independent of one another” (e.g., Berry, 1997; Ramirez, 1984; Zak, 1973; Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000, p. 49). While the unidimensional model requires individuals to give up their identities in order to accommodate to the hosts countries’ identities, the bidimensional model suggests that one can adopt values and behaviors without giving up their self-identity in the process (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000).

It is also important to clearly differentiate the terms “acculturation” and “assimilation” and “adaptation,” as they not interchangeable. Rosenthal (1960), distinguishes acculturation and assimilation by claiming that acculturation refers to how a newcomer adopts the culture of the new host society, while assimilation is how the newcomers remove their cultural identity in order to fit into the new society. Acculturation happens quickly, while assimilation happens at a much slower pace, as it may be generations before assimilation can even be reached (Gans, 1997).

Acculturation also “entails a variety of processes and outcomes; groups and individuals within groups adopt different ways to deal with the acculturation experience, only one of which might be assimilation” (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 473). Kim (2001) furthers this difference by saying that acculturation is when an individual changes due to the traits taken from another culture, while assimilation is when people absorb cultural values. Essentially, acculturation is taking on a new culture while assimilation is forgoing all past cultural traits to adopt new ones to fit into a new culture. Assimilation is how people are included and accepted in a society, which may not happen from acculturation (Gans, 1997). From an American perspective, there are a couple reasons why acculturation is a faster process than assimilation: American culture entices people to move here and the American traditions are known throughout the world; Discrimination is prominent in the United States. Therefore, it is an issue for other people to assimilate because they can only do this if they are allowed to enter the “American” group or institution. Assimilation may not happen in the first generation, but most likely in the second or third generation (Gans, 1997). Adaptation is different from both acculturation and assimilation. Adaptation is one’s psychological well-being and how individuals manage socioculturally. Therefore, adaptation is a consequence of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010). To better recognize how Latino MiLB players adapt to life in the US, a research question is posed:

**RQ1:** In what ways do Latino MiLB players describe themselves as acculturating to a new environment, both linguistically and behaviorally?

In addition to understanding specific ways in which they adapt, I am also interested in what their cultural experiences are like during this transition. To better understand their specific experiences navigating a new culture in the US South, an additional research question is offered:

**RQ2:** How do Latino MiLB players describe their cultural transitions in the US South?

## **Acculturating Individuals**

Specifically, there are five groups who are impacted with acculturation: immigrants, refugees, native peoples, ethnic groups, and sojourners (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Battochio et al., 2013; Meisterjahn & Wrisberg, 2013; Schinke et al., 2016). Sojourners are temporary visitors to another country on some sort of assignment (Sussman, 2002), who tend to return home after an extended period of time away. Examples are expatriates, international students, and in this case, international-born Latino MiLB players. These groups have a motivational reason to leave their home country to pursue something new in another country and culture (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). These groups face five broad categories as a consequence of acculturation. These are physical changes (e.g., new place to live, different kinds of housing, different population, and a different climate), biological changes (e.g., diet, disease, and different types of ethnicities), cultural changes (e.g., political, economic, linguistic, and religious), new social relationships (e.g., in-group/out-group, established dominance patterns), and individual psychological changes (behavioral as a result of mental health changes; Berry et al., 1987). All of these are possible, if not probable, for Latino-born MiLB players.

Sojourners do not all have positive experiences during their time in a new culture. Difficulty adjusting to a new way of life and culture is a main reason why business overseas fail (Black, 1988; Riddle, 2000; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) and why international students have a considerable amount of stress (Cushner & Karim, 2004; Kristjánadóttir, 2009). Specifically regarding sojourners, they have to overcome enculturation, which is different than acculturation in that it references one's own identification with constant engagement in the beliefs, values, and behavior of their own culture (Berry, 1993). Essentially, enculturation is the process in which people adapt to their surrounding culture after years of exposure and socialization (Sussman,

2002; Kim, 2001). This process molds children's mind to how things should be performed culturally. Enculturation ends in late adolescence and then people have a set view of how things should be in one's own culture. Most adults are not aware of his or her cultural identity because they have been taught to think and act in certain ways. However, it makes a great impact for our interactions with people from our own culture and people from other cultures as well. When sojourners arrive in a new culture, the process of enculturation recommences (Kim, 2001). Sojourners quickly realize what patterns and norms make them feel comfortable and uncomfortable and anxious in another country. Through this experience, sojourners begin to realize their cultural patterns and habits they are used to and prefer.

Decisions to try and fit in while being comfortable in the host country can cause anxiety and other mental health issues. Examples of this are waiting in line at a bus stop, which is comfortable but maybe not effective, or whether one should wear shorts in public. Even though it may be hot, this act may offend the locals. After a while, sojourners will reach "equilibrium," as they find a comfortable medium with what is proper and what is easy (Sussman, 2002). A baseball-specific example of this may be that Latino players go out to restaurants, but only with their Latino teammates. While they may be embarrassed to order in English, they will eventually get more comfortable with interacting in their second language and with people from the dominant culture. Cultural differences are also likely to happen in the baseball context, as well. Expectations for how to practice and train in the US need to be learned, as the expectations for how these things are done may be different in Latin America. Understanding US baseball culture and expectations should also create comfort for the Latino players in the organization.

Sojourners tend to be welcomed more openly in their host culture in comparison to other visitors, mainly immigrants and refugees (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Therefore, sojourners

often perceive their stay internationally as more pleasurable and the local hosts are nicer than immigrants and refugees may feel. Sojourners are motivated to accomplish certain goals during their time spent in another host country. First, a sojourner may strive to achieve an instrumental goal, which is a task-based goal that is accomplishable during their stay. An example is military officers completing military service (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018) or an international student graduating from college. Another goal can be socioemotional, which seeks to fulfill personal developmental, relational, or recreational goals. An example of a baseball player accomplishing a socioemotional goal is eating at a restaurant and ordering in English to help them practice in a low stakes scenario. This will also prepare them for the media spotlight, should they make it to MLB. If a sojourner wishes to accomplish both instrumental and socioemotional goals, they are hoping to achieve a mixed motivational goal, which is a combination of instrumental and socioemotional. Lastly, and possibly the most critical factor in the adaptation process, is personal expectations of the sojourner. A sojourner who has a more positive outlook on their experiences and their expectations for the host culture often fare better than those with negative expectations (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). This impacts their mentality, feelings, and overall behaviors in a new culture. Having a positive outlook helps to equal out the negative stressors that sojourners face in a new environment.

When it comes to adaptation, there are two main types: psychological and sociocultural. Psychological approaches are feelings of well-being and satisfaction, while sociocultural is the ability to “fit in” and navigate certain aspects of the new culture (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adaptation is understood within a framework of stress and coping, such as personality, life changes, and social support. On the other hand, sociocultural adaptation can reference linguistic ability, cultural distance, and amount of contact with host nationals (Ward &

Rana-Deuba, 1999). Berry (2005) helps to explain the difference by noting that psychological adaptations, in addition to a sense of well-being, is self-esteem. On the other hand, sociocultural links the individuals to others in the new society or by having effective communication interactions (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). One reason why people experience psychological, sociocultural, or a combination of both adaptations can be because of locus of control (LOC). LOC was developed by Rotter (1966), who believes that behavior is more powerful and effective if the individual believes that one's success is contingent upon his or her behaviors in the new culture. Ward and Kennedy (1992) clarify this by claiming "behavior is more powerful and effective if the individual believes that reinforcement is contingent on her or his own behavior as opposed to being dependent on unpredictable or uncontrollable factors" (p. 175). In other words, this is the degree in which people believe that they can control the outcome of their lives, rather than external forces. There is both internal LOC and external LOC, as internal LOC refers to the perception of positive and negative events as a result of one's own behavior and whether it can be controlled, while external LOC refers to the perception that these events are not contingent on behaviors, but rather rely on factors like fate, chance, or luck (Rotter, 1966).

Many studies have gauged both psychological and sociocultural processes of adaptation. For instance, Ward and Kennedy (1992) conducted a study where they distributed an 11-page questionnaire to 84 New Zealand sojourners living in Singapore. It was found that locus of control, personal relationship satisfaction, social difficulty, and contact with people in the host country predicted psychological distress, also known as mood disturbance. These findings are for psychological adaptation, specifically. In contrast, for sociocultural adaptation, it was revealed that length of residence, cultural distance, cultural identity, and mood disturbance were factors.

LOC was able to predict psychological distress and well-being (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). It is worth noting that, unlike previous research suggests (Armes & Ward, 1989; Searle & Ward, 1990), extraversion was not an indicator of psychological adjustment. The main findings from Ward & Kennedy (1992) are that personality, life changes, and social support were able to predict psychological well-being during a sojourners' journey. Additionally, length of time in the host culture, perceived cultural differences between the original and host culture, and one's cultural identity are able to predict sociocultural outcomes. Therefore, it may be more difficult for MiLB players to adapt to the new culture initially because their length of time in the host culture is very short. This should improve the longer they are in the professional baseball pipeline.

A similar study was also conducted by Ward and Kennedy (1993), where they focused specifically on the psychological and sociocultural processes of 145 Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand, in addition to 156 Malaysian students living in Singapore. A 13-page questionnaire was distributed to all participants. The findings are in line with previous research, as locus of control, life changes, social difficulty, and social support predicted psychological adjustment during these cross-cultural transitions. On the other hand, sociocultural adaptation is influenced by interaction with host nationals, extroversion, the four acculturation strategies, and overall moods (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). The findings from this study demonstrate that interacting with individuals from the host culture, while also having an outgoing personality, help people during cross-cultural transitions. This is applicable to MiLB players, as they are experiencing a major life transition in a new culture.

Gudykunst (2005) asserts that sojourners confront two major challenges: uncertainty and anxiety in the new culture. They experience stress, are drawn aback, work through the problem,

and move forward with overcoming it (Kim, 2005). Cross-cultural adaptation happens overtime, and therefore, longitudinal studies work best for this type of research. Even though Kim (2005) suggests that longitudinal studies are the most appropriate type to conduct on sojourners, rarely do studies incorporate this method. Rather, questionnaires, surveys, and interviews are performed the most. For instance, Searle and Ward (1990) looked to distinguish between psychological and sociocultural forms of adjustment by surveying 105 sojourners from New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore. They found that extraversion was conducive to psychological well-being and satisfaction with relationships with New Zealanders (the host country). Extraversion also is positively correlated to psychological adjustment. In contrast to these psychological well-being findings, the social learning framework is more beneficial to analyze sociocultural adjustment. Searle and Ward (1990) claim, “The social learning model presupposes that inability to deal competently with the new environment due to lack of social skills is the most important factor in cross-cultural transitions” (p. 458).

Fritz, Chin, and DeMarinis (2008) conducted a similar study on international students. Surveys were distributed to 286 international students at a diverse community college in Southern California. It was found that language was a main stressor for Asian students, while it was more difficult for European students to be away from friends and family. This study demonstrates that categorizing international students as one entity is ineffective, as each subgroup has certain needs that are more pressing than others. Therefore, analyzing international MiLB players as a whole category is not useful, as each player has their individual struggles. These can come from their time spent in the US, their country of origin, even their personalities.

## **Athlete Acculturation**

In sport, acculturation is the athlete's transition to one or more practices of the dominant culture in which the athletes are involved (Kontos, 2009). When athletes partake in sport in a foreign country, they bring habits and customs to their new country and team. These include religion, language, diet, and dress (Kontos, 2009; Schinke et al., 2011; Schinke et al., 2016). In addition to having to confront stress from being in a new cultural environment, athletes also much deal with the stress from competing in sport at high levels (Schinke et al., 2016).

International athletes' acculturation by adopting a second culture is not achieved over a specific period of time. Rather, it resurfaces every time a new or unfamiliar practice is confronted (Chirkov, 2009; Rudmin, 2009). Therefore, the athletes are constantly faced with acculturation during social situations with teammates and coaches, different practice routines (Schinke et al., 2016), expectations of diet (Schinke et al., 2013) and other differences from the athletes' own culture and the host culture where they play. Two main issues with acculturation that athletes face are: navigating two world views (being frustrated with the host and home sporting context) and acculturation loads, which is not fully understanding the host language (Schinke et al., 2013). Athletes are expected to adopt the training and language practices of the host culture, often without being given prior warning for what to expect in the culture by their teams (Schinke & McGannon, 2014), which can take a negative toll on them personally and athletically. The athletes' often struggle because they must adapt by themselves without the help from players or coaches. This is known as one-dimensional acculturation and this enhances stress, depression, and loneliness (Schinke & McGannon, 2014).

Because international athletes come to the North America to perform often at the highest levels of sport, these athletes would be considered sojourners, as their stay in the North America

is often temporary, as they will most likely return home once they finish accomplishing a goal (Ady, 1995; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Ward & Furnham, 2001). Many athletes come from all over the world to North America, playing mainly hockey and baseball (Battochio et al., 2013). Roughly 19% of the National Hockey League (NHL) derive from Europe and Russia (Battochio et al., 2013), while Major League Baseball (MLB) has 29% of its player come from Latin America (29 percent of players, 2018). Since professional sports are littered with international players, they must acculturate in order to be successful in another culture. Schinke et al. (2011) has recognized stressors related with relocation and intercultural stressors encounters by professional athletes, which includes living in an unfamiliar country, being far from home, family and friends, the struggles of trying to fit in socially, along with unfamiliar food. In regards to sport specifically, athletes have to confront new methods of coaching, foreign team dynamics, and isolation from teammates. Adaptation for professional athletes is contingent on their ability to respond to stressors (Orlick, 1986; Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011).

Battochio et al. (2013) conducted a study to understand how newcomer international athletes, in their first to third years in North America, from the NHL and MLB have discussed their experiences with adaptation. The authors searched each teams' website along with newspapers to see how these athletes have discussed their experiences in North America. Each newcomers name was searched in Google News to see if any articles were written with direct quotations from them. Four main themes were found: fostering understanding (teammates and coaches help athletes learn English) fostering control (effort to build confidence in the athletes), fostering belonging (sense of affiliation and community with teammates and coaches), and trust (faith in teammates and coaches to help newcomer athletes adapt to life in North America). In addition to these themes, there are a few significant findings that help newcomer athletes

acculturate to the new cultures they face. Rather than taking formal English classes, teammates and coaches help foreign-born athletes learn English. While this is important for being successful on teams, this will also help with their futures in North America, if they choose to stay after their careers are over. Furthermore, positive relationships with teammates and coaches are vital with the transition to a new city, country, and team. There is usually at least one teammate or coach that speaks one's native tongue, which plays a great role in their adaptation (Battochio et al., 2013).

Unlike many aspects of society, sports tend to offer equal opportunities and promote racial equality, which helps to reinforce positive self-identities to many groups, including youth migrants (Elbe et al., 2018). One such study surveyed 120 male adolescents. Participants were Eastern European migrants living in Greece and Latin American migrants living in Spain. It was found that the similar culture, language, and religion of Latin American migrants in Spain fared better than Eastern European migrants living in Greece because the languages and cultures are not as aligned as the participants in Spain. Most importantly the researchers found that links between team cohesion and team structures can better facilitate integration (Elbe et al., 2018).

A similar study looks at elite athletes between 16-18 years old at the English Premier League (EPL) soccer academies in England. The players who attend these academies are the best in the world and come to the academies to train before their professional careers in the EPL, the finest soccer league in the world. 16 athletes in the academies were interviewed about their acculturation process. It was found that homesickness, loneliness, and linguistic differences were the most prominent hindrances of acculturation. Mainly, lack of knowing English led to frustration, so learning English became the priority for most of the players interviewed (Weedon, 2012).

Sport also can promote intercultural dialogue, while also serving as a bridge to cultural identity and socialization (Walseth, 2008). There is a belief that participating in sports can help migrants overcome social problems like exclusion, discrimination, and stereotypes (Elling & Claringbould, 2005). Sports psychology literature has focused on team cohesion, which is defined as a “dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998, p. 213; Morela et al., 2013). Because team members share the same goals, this can help the process of integration. Certain studies have focused on integration, acculturation, feeling of a team, and socialization within the sporting context. Such studies include female basketball players from different countries (Kernan & Greenfield, 2005), Korean basketball players playing in the US (Heo & Lee, 2007), and female athletes with a migrant background in Norway (Walseth, 2008). Therefore, it is suggested that being affiliated with a sports team can help one feel more comfortable in society (Morela et al., 2013). While the research on athlete acculturation is well-established, no known studies focus on the acculturation experiences of Latino MiLB players.

### **Co-Cultural Theory**

Co-cultural theory is a useful theoretical framework to analyze communication performed by international-born and domestic-born MiLB players, as a perceived less-dominant group is communicating with the perceived dominant group. To understand co-cultural theory, one must first understand the two theories from which it originated: muted group (Ardener, 1975) and standpoint theory (Collins, 1986). Muted group theory argues that society has dominant groups that are able to create language to detail their own experiences, in ways that oppressed or non-dominant groups cannot. While the main groups of society have the capability to detail their

lived experiences, marginalized groups are often “muted” (Kramarae, 1981). Co-cultural theory also elaborates on standpoint theory. This theory believes that “specific societal positioning serves as a subjective vantage point from which persons interact with themselves and the world” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 5). Standpoint theory also posits that, even though there are some similar experiences among marginalized groups, not all group members have the same perspective. This varies from culture to culture, but it is mainly women and non-Whites who are overly marginalized (Buzzanell, 1994).

Both theories directly lead into an updated theory called co-cultural theory, which was first developed by Orbe (1998a), who uses the term “co-culture” because it is used to avoid negative connotations of non-dominant cultural groups. Co-cultural communication encompasses the “interactions among underrepresented and dominant group members” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 3) and there are two core assumptions. First, all marginalized groups share similar communication behaviors, even if their individual experiences differ. Second, these communication behaviors vary greatly within and between unlike co-cultural groups (Orbe, 1998a). Additionally, Orbe (1998a) asserts that the United States is a culture of vast diversity and all cultures are influenced by one another. This, in turn, allows cultures to function together rather than separately. Even though there are many cultures in the United States, and in other countries, there is always a dominant group in which minority groups have to interact and communicate with. More often than not, that is White men.

There are multiple assumptions of co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998a). First, every society has a social group that is dominant. In the US, the dominant group is White, heterosexual men whose socioeconomic status is middle to upper-class. Moreover, dominant communication structures delays the progress of those who are in non-dominant social groups, and those in the

non-dominant group have difficulties securing membership in the dominant group. Aside from the dominant group, all members of co-cultural groups share similar experiences, even though their specific groups and experiences may be different; In order to measure one's "success," co-cultural group members have certain communicative behaviors when operating in public communicative configurations (Orbe, 1998a). When a member of a co-cultural groups communicates with the dominant culture, one of three communication approaches are used: nonassertive (individuals do not confront members of the dominant group), assertive (voicing feelings, opinions, and concerns, while addressing the needs of themselves and their respective group), or aggressive (happens when individuals express their thoughts and feelings in a way that ignores the larger group) (Orbe, 1998b). Of these three approaches, assertive behaviors tend to function best.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory (SIT) derives from a social psychological perspective about how individuals view and define themselves in terms of their place in group membership, which has positive psychological outcomes, mainly emotional (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner & Oakes, 1986). This definition of SIT derives from Sherif's (1967) definition of "any behavior displayed by one or more actors toward one or more others that is based on the actors' identification of themselves and the others as belonging to different social categories" (p. 62). How one views themselves is known as self-categorization and is a fundamental variable to this theory.

Understanding one's perceptions of their belonging in society helps to answer the question, "who am I?" (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Turner, 1982; Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). In terms of group identification, people must view themselves as psychologically connected with the overall group goals, mentalities, and ideologies. The need for group membership can be traced back to how

individuals develop bonds with others in order to perform group behaviors for survival purposes (Hogg & Turner, 1985). One must also be willing to experience the successes and failures of a particular group. A specific example would be an organization and people do this in order to increase their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth (Hogg & Turner, 1985; Tajfel, 1978; Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

SIT also focuses on intergroup relations, group processes, as well as individual perceptions. SIT at a rudimentary level asserts that social categories, such as nationality, political affiliations, and sports teams for which an individual belongs to provides a reference for who that person is in terms of essential characteristics. These individuals have an individual belief of who they are, what they should think, and how they behave. These self-perceptions often extend from the individual to the group. Groups and their members feel obligated to act in certain ways, in accordance with the larger group they identify with. This is how in-groups and out-groups form and are reinforced, through ideologies. Thus, self-enhancement guides the social categorization process to where the basic norms and practices of in-groups align with other in-group members. For example, if a Latino MiLB or MLB player is fluent in English, that could equate to greater endorsement opportunities in the North American market. SIT also argues that if individuals belong to a less dominant group, they will be unlikely to be committed to that group. Instead, they will tend to disidentify with the less-favorable group in order to gain entry into the dominant (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

SIT is also associated with the innate need for self-esteem and the enhancement and improvement of it. SIT addresses a few central points for one's self-perception, specifically when they feel out of place in a situation: The greater one's difficulties (ambiguous, complex, problematic, unstructured) in a situation, the greater their uncertainty is and the need for

information to reduce it; The need to reduce uncertainty leads to informational dependence on other individuals and groups; Informational dependence leads to the approval and acceptance of influence from others, which alters one's self-identity. In turn, one may change one's affiliation with a social group (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Additionally, people tend to conform to the social norms that their in-group believes strongly in.

SIT also claims that humans operate in concert both as individuals and society as a whole. A group's unity and coherence comes from the shared norms that people follow to maintain to align with group membership and identification. SIT also believes that one's identity is socially constructed, where the individual's views are a critical element of the psychological processes of society. Examples are "citizens," "Americans," "Catholics," and others groups that people identify with. The group that one belongs provides a shared mental depiction of themselves, their own identity by sharing norms and values that make meaning of their group (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Often when people wish to improve their self-esteem, they tend to marginalize other individuals and groups whose views do not align with theirs by putting them down. This negative behavior is a way to have a clear distinction between the in-groups and out-groups (Hogg & Turner, 1985). Group formation happens through self-categorization and maintaining positive esteem is done by maintaining "competitive intergroup discrimination" (Turner 1981, 1982; Hogg & Turner, 1985, p. 52). Having social categorizations helps us to organize and classify our environments, while also providing a reference for our place in society. This process tends to be comparative, where people observe others to see who is better or worse, similar or different, all in comparison to other groups. Overall, this theory suggests that people strive for positive self-worth and inclusion in a group. People will do what it takes to feel included.

SIT has been studied through the lens of sport, albeit, hardly from the athletes' perspective, as it is typically examined from the media perspective. It is rare to get information directly from the athletes themselves, presumably due to a lack of access. End et al. (2002) studied college students' fan identity and found that fans were more likely to identify with successful teams rather than unsuccessful teams. The authors also found that there was a positive relationship between one's favorite team and the overall success of that team. Thus, fans wish to identify with teams that perform well over teams that do not perform well (End et al., 2002). There are more recent studies that use social identity theory to study stereotyping of athletes. Ferrucci and Tandoc (2018) found that participants stereotype Black quarterbacks more strongly than White quarterbacks. Some of the stereotypes are reinforced through media, such as being naturally gifted and their athleticism as the main reason why they succeed. Regarding baseball, Ferrucci, Tandoc, Painter, and Wolfgang (2016) showed participants a photo of a White, Black, or Latino baseball player, while also reading articles with stereotypical language. Similarly, Black players were stereotyped to being naturally athletic, while the White and Latino players were not stereotyped. SIT was used for the last two studies because they figured that in-group and out-group biases would be present. So a White participant would stereotype a Black or Latino more than they would stereotype members from their own perceived identity group. Furthermore, Slater et al. (2014) use social identity theory in terms of leadership in sport. The authors argue that leadership characteristics by athletes would be "in-group" and players that do not occupy leadership strategies are the "out-group" (Slater et al., 2014).

### **Race and Ethnicity in Sport**

Race and ethnicity are often seen interchangeable terms, but there are vast differences between the two. Oftentimes, race gets confused with skin color, which contributes to the

confusion to what race actually is. Coakley (2009) suggests that ethnicity references a “cultural heritage that people use to identify a particular population while race is when that population of people are *believed to be* [emphasis added] naturally or biologically distinct from other populations” (p. 276). Thus, ethnicity refers to one’s cultural heritage and culture (e.g., Hispanic, Asian, etc.), while race is a socially constructed idea (e.g., hairstyle and dress). The media tends to describe people based on their skin pigmentation because it is easier to label people this way rather than detailing their unique culture. American culture specifically follows the “one-drop rule” (Sweet, 2005), where people are labeled as “Black” if there is any nonwhite blood in them. Even though Jeter is of mixed heritage and Osaka is Haitian and Japanese, they are both considered “Black” because their pigmentation is darker, but there is much more to these players’ identities than solely skin color (Billings & Butterworth, 2021).

Minority athletes are frequently confronted with stereotypes, which impacts how they are described in the media and even constitutes which positions these athletes should play in their respective sport. For instance, stacking in sports refers to how athletes of certain races are overrepresented in specific sporting positions, while also being underrepresented in certain positions, as well (Jones et al., 1987). Racial minorities have been historically excluded from positions that are viewed as requiring leadership and high levels of cognition (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). In other words, stacking involves the placement of athletes in roles that tend to fit the social expectations of identity groups (Billings, Butterworth, & Turman, 2018). The foundational study on stacking was conducted by Loy and McElvogue (1970), where they analyzed this topic regarding baseball and football. Their findings suggest that White players often played *central positions*, and these positions are where discrimination occurs most. As Edwards (1973) argues, “The factor of centrality itself is significant only in so far as greater outcome control and

leadership responsibilities are typically vested in centrally located positions since actors holding these positions have a better perspective on the total field activity” (p. 209).

Additionally, Madison and Landers (1976) found that Black athletes often felt pressured to change from central to outside positions, in accordance with stereotypes. White athletes, on the other hand, are often moved away from “athletic” positions and into positions where intelligence plays a greater role than athleticism (Pitts & Yost, 2013; Ferrucci & Tandoc, 2017). Racial stacking is also prominent in other sports, including baseball. Black athletes are more likely to play in the outfield, Latinos tend to play in the middle infield, and White athletes often play corner-infield positions, along with catcher (Margolis & Piliavin, 1999). The similarity between football and baseball stacking revolves around the idea of cognition, where the White players play the “smarter” positions, while Black and Latino athletes play the more “athletic” positions.

It has long been noted in academic literature that racial stereotypes are prominent in sports media. The overt rhetorical marginalization and stereotypes of athletes in sports media has been prominent in academia since Rainville and McCormick’s (1977) initial study on the racial prejudice by professional football announcers. They found that White football players were more likely to be described by their intelligence rather than athleticism. Black football players were subject to comments about their physicality and athleticism, rather than intelligence. These findings align with Mercurio and Filak’s (2010) study where they analyzed how journalists describe White and Black quarterbacks prior to the NFL draft. A content analysis was conducted on written descriptions of pre-draft quarterbacks from 1998-2007 on *Sports Illustrated*’s website. 295 quarterback prospects were analyzed and they found that White quarterbacks were described

as intelligent and Black quarterbacks were described as physical. Thus, certain studies have found clear differences between how White and Black athletes have been described in the media.

However, not all studies on race and football find striking differences in how each race is discussed. Billings (2004) analyzed 54 games and 162 hours of professional and collegiate football games. A total of 3,800 descriptors were found using quantitative methods and there were a few key findings. Mainly, there were no significant findings between how White and Black quarterbacks were described. White quarterbacks received more attention, but the traditional stereotypes were not present, and Black quarterbacks were not found to be portrayed in negative ways, such as a lack of concentration. This study suggests that there may be progress with combatting racial stereotypes in sports media. Similarly, Byrd and Utsler (2007) studied how Black and White quarterbacks are portrayed in *Sports Illustrated* during the 2002, 2003, and 2004 NFL seasons. They examined magazine coverage of 12 NFL quarterbacks, half Black half White, concluded that Black quarterbacks were described more physically than the White quarterbacks. However, most of these had positive descriptions and characteristics, and the Black quarterbacks were described as the superior athletes. Overall, both types of quarterbacks were described in similar ways, and there were not striking differences between the races.

In a similar vein, Oates (2007) studied how Black players were portrayed during the NFL draft combine rather than their play in the NFL. Again, Black players were described by their physical traits, mainly their bodies. They were described “rock solid,” physical specimens, and even received comparisons to Roman gods. Oates (2007) even goes as far to comparing the combine to the slave trade. The combine is similar because Black bodies (for the most part) are being observed and often picked apart by White executives and coaches, who will end up purchasing the athletes, often based on body type. It even “creates a sadly familiar white fantasy

in which black men are cast as primitives who are identified primarily with their bodies, while white men take their accustomed place at the top of the constructed hierarchy” (p. 86). This example is an interesting take on race in the NFL as it puts race into perspective, as White people in leadership positions are “erotically gazing” at Black bodies to be purchased and developed. Oates (2007) uses the example of the combine to advance a media product that was highlighting mostly Black athletes.

In MLB, Latinos comprise a large portion of the league. On Opening Day 2021, Latino players encompassed 28.1% of the league (Lapchick, 2021), which is significantly more than the other two major sports in the US. The population of Latinos in the National Football League (NFL) is .04% (Lapchick, 2020a), while the National Basketball Association (NBA) is .02% (Lapchick, 2020b). Since Latinos are significantly more prominent in baseball, there are also media stereotypes that they are confronted with. Such stereotypes include being fiery and flashy (Bjarkman, 1994; Regalado, 1998; Ferrucci et al., 2016). While White athletes are usually deemed intelligent and Black athletes are considered athletic, Latino baseball players have a strong work ethic and natural baseball abilities. Latinos also must overcome obstacles to achieve success, mainly poverty, while also being naturally gifted and having a strong work ethic. They also have stereotypical, Americanized nicknames coined by their American teammates, with names like “Chico” (Eagleman, 2011). Interestingly, Arth and Billings (2019) found that non-White players receive much more commentary about their failures than White players. Moreover, non-White players are much more emotional than White players.

In addition to media portrayals, Latinos are viewed differently in American clubhouses. Examples like this indicate there is a distinction with how Latino players are subject to stereotypes when compared to domestic players. Gentile and Buzzelli (2021) add to this by

observing how Latino MLB players are portrayed if they are English-proficient. Instead of having negative, stereotypical language about them, they are viewed in an extremely positive light. They were coined as leaders, taking it upon themselves to learn English, English is a way to acculturate to American life, and speaking English is central to their success in MLB. These findings are significant because they counter traditional Latino stereotypes of being uneducated, lazy, and lacking a willingness to learn. These findings can be tied back to social identity theory, as being English-proficient allows Latino players are able to be viewed as leaders, which Slater et al. (2014) claims is a trait that places athletes in the “in-group.” Moreover, English allows Latino players to be better adjusted to life in the United States, which helps them feel included in the dominant US culture.

### **Race and Nationality in Sport**

Race and nationality tend to overlap in sport due to the idea of the “other.” A seminal article on this topic is Butterworth’s (2007) article about race and nationality during the 1998 home run race between Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa. McGwire is a White American, while Sosa is a Black, Dominican-born player. Butterworth (2007) conducted a textual analysis on newspaper articles to see how the players were described. It was determined that McGwire was often referred to as a hero, which is connected to a notion of whiteness. He was also described by his physical strength, which resembles the idea of American exceptionalism. On the other hand, Sosa was consistently referenced by his heritage of being Dominican. His nationality was referenced more than his strength, and Butterworth (2007) even notes that “the consistent references to Sosa as Dominican defined him explicitly in terms of his heritage, reinforcing the distinction between him and the white American, McGwire” (p. 237). Therefore, this article demonstrates that nationality and race operate alongside one another because, like race, Sosa’s

nationality was highlighted as the “other.” Sosa was also part of the steroids controversy in the early 2000s and even pretended to have language difficulties during the Congressional hearing in 2005. Sosa, citing the language barrier, had a lawyer read an opening statement while having a translator next to him during the session. Even though Sosa cited a language barrier, he answered each question in English (Price, 2005).

Other scholars have also touched on the linkage between race and nationality in baseball. McGovern (2017) argues that skin color, skin tone (e.g., dark-skinned/light-skinned) and nationality have a great influence in leadership roles and opportunities within MLB. The leadership roles that are mentioned are “important” playing positions like catchers, pitchers, and middle infielders, because those are the ones that occupy the majority of future managerial roles. McGovern (2017) demonstrates that the privilege of White and light-skinned Latin-born individuals tend to occupy leadership roles. What is staggering is that, as of 2014, there are less light-skinned players born in Latin American countries than there are medium-skinned and dark-skinned. However, the lighter-skinned players hold more managerial, coach, and broadcaster positions than the other groups. This suggests that Whiteness is valued even in nationality. This example is unique because it encompasses race, ethnicity, and nationality.

Continuing with baseball, Eagleman (2011) conducted a textual analysis of *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN The Magazine* from April to September (baseball season) from 2000 to 2007. Her goals were to see how MLB players were described in feature stories and how MLB players of different races were portrayed. She breaks down the findings based on race and nationality. White players, both domestic and international, were described by having a strong work ethic. American Black players were described by obstacles they had to overcome to pursue baseball. However, Black players from Latin American countries like the Dominican Republic

and Venezuela were often labeled as being destined for baseball greatness. This makes it seem like Latinos are bred to play baseball. There was no data to report U.S. born Asian players, but Korean and Japanese born players were labeled as the “other.” These findings demonstrate that Whites, regardless of nationality, were described by their strong work ethic. Black and Latino players were not described by this, but rather they were described by their “otherness” and natural, physical traits. The conclusions from this article are not uncommon in sports literature, as the non-White players are consistently described by their physical abilities as the main reason why they are successful (Eagleman, 2011). This study suggests that race and nationality are both central factors for how the media describes non-American and non-White players.

Additionally, Gentile (2021) argues that MLB discriminates against dark-skinned players because the scouts and coaches assume that if a player is dark-skinned, then they must be Haitian. In the Dominican Republic, where baseball is king and MLB has an international office in addition to each team having a presence on the island in the form of academies, being Haitian is frowned upon. There are many negative stereotypes towards Haitians in the Dominican Republic, including being criminals, mooching off Dominican public benefits, and also being burdens to those living in the Dominican Republic (Craemer & Martínez, 2021). With baseball specifically, Haitians also have a stereotype of being extremely poor, so they are often not born in hospitals. Since a player must provide a copy of their birth certificate to MLB, MLB assumes that Haitians’ paperwork is fraudulent because they were too poor to travel to hospitals. Haitians are also known to be darker-skinned, so there is discrimination based on both race and nationality. Gentile (2021) provides an example of Miguel Sanó, who currently plays for the Minnesota Twins. He is a Dominican, although his parents are Haitian. Sanó is darker-skinned, and MLB did not believe his paperwork to be accurate. Since MLB teams want players as young

as possible, they thought he was older than 16, which is what his paperwork claimed. To determine his age, he was subject to bone density scans, fingerprinting, DNA tests, and his school records were analyzed to try to determine his age. Results came back inconclusive, but MLB has a department of investigations in Santo Domingo to research issues based on race and nationality (Gentile, 2021).

There is a clear dichotomy of media coverage based on nationality of Americans and non-Americans, particularly in the context of the Olympics. Angelini and Billings (2010) note the difference in nationality in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing by claiming, “nationalism largely trumped race as athletes of all racial background were shown as long as they excelled and did so in one of NBC’s high profile sports” (p. 7). Additionally, Angelini, Billings, and MacArthur (2012) analyzed 64 hours of prime time Olympic coverage from NBC during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. They found that US athletes were emphasized at rates three to four times that their successes in terms of medals actually imply. For example, of all the medals awarded during the Olympics that year, athletes from the U.S. won 14.3% of the medals, and 10.5% of the gold medals. However, they disproportionately received 42.3% of all athletic mentions. Moreover, many star athletes did not receive much recognition by NBC at all, and it is likely due to their nationality. Marit Bjorgen is an example of this. She was a Norwegian cross country skier and won five medals during the Vancouver games. However, the analysis found that she received only two mentions during the 17-night broadcast by NBC (Angelini, Billings, & MacArthur, 2012). This reinforces the notion of American exceptionalism and non-Americans are often viewed as inferior.

Moreover, American athletes were more likely than non-American athletes to be portrayed as succeeding based on their intelligence, commitment, and consonance (or good

luck). This resembles closely how White athletes have been described in other forms of academic literature. Furthermore, non-American athletes are more likely to be portrayed in failure due to their lack of strength and skill. Non-American athletes also receive much more commentary about the size of their bodies. This makes them almost physical in nature, like Black athletes. This is extremely similar to how Black athletes are portrayed in the media, mainly that physicality is highlighted over intelligence. Like Black athletes, they have mainly been coined as “athletic” over “intelligent” and strength and skill would fall into the “athletic” category. These findings are not isolated to only this study. Scholars have found in other Olympics, mainly from the 2002 and 2006 Winter Olympics, that NBC recognizes Americans success to be contributed to terms like commitment, concentration, courage, and composure. The success of non-Americans is more likely to be due to things like experience and skill (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2008). These findings suggest that foreign athletes have observable characteristics, such as being fast or accomplished based on their performances. On the other hand, domestic athletes tend to be described based on unobservable traits, such as being courageous and composed.

There are other Olympic studies that show how race and nationalism go hand-in-hand. Angelini et al. (2014) conducted a content analysis by watching 69 hours of NBC’s 2012 London Summer Olympic coverage to see if there would be differences between athletes from different countries and ethnic backgrounds. They discovered that White athletes were mentioned 64.3% of the time, more than all other athletes combined. The authors also found that there were significant differences for the commentary based on the ethnicity and nationality of athletes. All in all, out of the 3,610 comments that were analyzed for this study, White athletes were mentioned 57% of the time, Black athletes at 25%, Latino/Hispanic athletes at 6%, 1% of Middle

Eastern athletes, and 1% other. Of these comments, White and Asian athletes were more likely to have their success attributed to strength over their Black counterparts. Black athletes' experiences were a central reason why they succeeded, much more than White and Asian athletes. Also, Black athletes were more likely to have their failures being due to experience, more than the White and Asian Olympians (Angelini et al., 2014).

Aside from the Olympics, race and nationality are also demonstrated to go alongside one another in other sporting contexts. For instance, Zenquis and Mwaniki (2019) wrote an interesting article that focuses on Nnemkadi and Chinenye Ogwumike, two sisters who are second generation Black African Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) players. The sisters were born in the Houston suburbs and both attended Stanford, both excelling in academics and athletics. Their parents are Nigerian and the sisters do lots of humanitarian work in Nigeria. The authors claim that Black African immigrants are somewhat of a "model minority" in US society, as many of them are educated and are coming to the US to pursue the American dream. This is unique because their nationality is more widely accepted than their race. While there is a distinction here, there is not when the Ogwumike sisters are described in sports media. The authors conducted a search on LexisNexis and searched their names, "Nigeria", and "athletic." More often than not, the sisters were described in physical, somewhat negative terms. They were consistently described as *bulling* their opponents, being *terrifying*, while also trying to *intimidate* their competition. Overall, they are portrayed as the Black other, which is consistent with other studies on race and sport. This study specifically shows that being a "model minority" and one's nationality is not enough to combat preexisting racial stereotypes (Zenquis & Mwaniki, 2019).

Stereotypes and racial language are also found in MLB when it comes to nationality. It has been said that that Asians are the perfect minority because they are smart and work hard, which can be damaging if they do not conform to this stereotype. In newspapers, Hideo Nomo and Hideki Irabu, two Asian players specifically had stereotypes attached to them of being a model minority and an economic threat. Nomo was the model minority because he was excited about his opportunity to pursue the American dream and Irabu was labeled an economic threat because he did not perform up to the large, multimillion dollar contract he signed (Mayeda, 1999). Therefore, it is almost as if Irabu was criticized for stealing the team's money because he underperformed.

To contribute to social identity theory in sport, along with race, ethnicity, and nationality, I ask an additional research question:

**RQ3:** Which ingroups do Latino MiLB players describe as their primary identity?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

To best answer my proposed research questions, I interviewed Minor League Baseball (MiLB) players to understand their cultural experiences in the United States and how they view themselves. Since I am interested in how players detail their experiences adjusting from their home country to another, interviews were the best method to understand their experiences in detail. I asked questions from the IRB approved semi-structured interview guide, that will be found later in this chapter as Appendix A. The guide is semi-structured because interviews should be more of a conversation rather than a question and answer session. Therefore, participants may already answer a question, or I may want to ask a follow-up question on something that the player says. The approved interview guide has questions both in English and Spanish, but I spoke to all players in Spanish. Even though I already had IRB approval (see Final Appendix), a revision was filed with an updated interview guide. All questions aimed to get a better sense of their cultural transition while chasing a dream of being a professional baseball player, and how they view themselves. All in all, this dissertation aims to understand how players acculturate to life in the US and if players attempt to alter their identity to align with the perceived dominant group of players, mainly American players, as a cultural transition strategy. This dissertation also unpacks what their cultural experiences have been like as professional

baseball players playing in small towns and cities across the United States. Many places players get assigned to do not have a Latino heavy, Spanish-speaking population, so it is important to understand how they acculturate in these unfamiliar areas. More specifically, I interviewed players in the US South in order to gauge their specific experiences in this region of the country. I uncovered how they adjust to this major cultural and life transition and what identities come to the fore within these reflexive narratives. Even though I focus on the US South, there are limitations to doing so. First, their experiences may not be generalizable to other Latino players in other areas of the US. Another limitation is that focusing on the US South does not take into consideration their previous professional baseball experiences. It is very possible that the players who currently play in the US South got traded from an organization where their minor league affiliate teams are not located in the southern region of the US. Thus, even though I spoke with them about their current acculturation strategies in the South, it may exclude their previous acculturation experiences elsewhere in the US.

### **Rationale for Interviews**

Interviews were conducted as opposed to other methods of data collection because I was interested in the players' perspectives and issues that concern them (Bryman, 2008), mainly from a cultural perspective. Interviews also allow participants to "ramble" (Bryman, 2008, p. 437), which reveals what is significant to them. Moreover, interviews allow research participants to "reveal more than can be detected or reliably assumed from observing a situation" (Simons, 2009, p. 43). Additionally, interviews are a "construction site for knowledge" (Kvale, 1996, p. 14) and interviews allow the researcher to collect descriptions of their of how the interviewees interpret the meaning of a particular phenomenon (Kvale, 1983). Interviews were also appropriate for this dissertation as they allow participants to share their experiences and beliefs

in detail that other forms of data collection do not allow (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). Moreover, interviews allowed me to learn about the participants' unique perspective on a topic (Turner et al., 2015), and in this case, their experiences navigating professional baseball.

### **Interviewing Strategies**

For this dissertation, I adopted tenets of phenomenological and ethnographic interviewing. Phenomenological interviewing allows researchers to examine individual experiences in detailed ways, as it aims to uncover the meaning that people place on their lived experiences. Studies that use phenomenological interviews result in “contextual, holistic, thematic descriptions of particular experiences” (deMarrais, 2004, p. 56). In phenomenological interviews, the researcher becomes the learner, as the interviewee shares his or her experiences. This makes the participants the experts on the topic, and they share their experiences with the researcher (deMarrais, 2004). I am relying on experts other than academics who helped develop the current theories and this will help to advance them further.

The objective of phenomenology is “to understand the phenomena in their own terms — to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96). Questions that should be asked in phenomenological interviews ought to be framed in a way that focus on the participants experiences, feelings, and beliefs on a certain subject (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Some of my questions in the interview guide adopt a phenomenological interviewing framework to learn about the players' experiences, including how their experiences help shape how they view their nationality and what their transitional experiences were like. I incorporated elements of the ethnographic interviewing technique, which focuses on cultural meanings (Wolcott, 1982) and it interviews people from a particular culture who share similar experiences (Fielding, 2011). Ethnographic interviewing sheds light

“on the personal experiences, interpersonal dynamics and cultural meanings of participants in their social worlds” (Heyl, 2001, p. 6). Since I am focusing on the linguistic and cultural transitions of Latino MiLB players, using elements of an interviewing technique that emphasizes the culture of a specific population is necessary to the outcome of this study.

In addition to incorporating portions of the two approaches, I asked a few informative questions that are neither phenomenological or ethnographic. I asked these questions because they are important to answering my research questions, but the wording of the questions do not allow them to be considered phenomenological or ethnographic. The phenomenological questions are gauging at their experiences and how they shape the players’ realities, while the ethnographic questions aim at helping to understand how their cultural understandings help them feel comfortable in a new environment.

**Quality Data.** The questions in the interview guide (see Appendix A) were occasionally addressed in a different order because the participants may answer a question while expanding on a previous question. Thus, it was important to listen closely and be familiar with my interview guide, so I could switch to other questions if necessary, even though they were out of order on the guide. I also needed to ask follow-up questions on something that was stated rather than continue with the next question on the guide. It is vital that listening skills are present in semi-structured interviews so I can understand which areas have been covered and what should be covered next (Roulston, 2010a). As Roulston (2010b) posits, there are four central aspects of interviews that must be considered to produce quality interviews. Interview data is appropriate to informed the research questions that are posed.; The interaction created by the interviewer generates “quality” data. Asking questions in effective ways will produce data needed to answer each research question; “Quality” comes from the research design, the analysis, and the

interpretation of the findings; The interpretations and representation of data correspond with the theoretical framework of the study. I followed these tenets to produce quality data. I define quality data as data that is conversational, responses that are well thought out, and responses that answer my questions, but follow-up as to why the interviewee responds in a certain way. Quality data also comes from clear transcripts, which I received through the GoTranscript service. Once I received these transcripts, I then relistened to the interviews to make sure that the transcripts were clear in their interpretation of the data. Once I felt as though the transcripts were clear and concise, then I assume to have quality data. I also decided to use this transcription service because of the rate of speed in which the players spoke. As a non-native speaker, it was difficult for me to hear some of the words and phrases being spoken. However, native speakers would be able to transcribe these interviews better than myself. GoTranscript allows customers to choose the language of transcription, and the transcribers who work with this company are all native speakers.

Another way I ensured quality data is by making the interviews semi-structured, which provides structure and guidance, but does not force the researcher to follow the interview protocol identically (Harding, 2018). Semi-structured interviews also ask open rather than closed questions, so participants may follow-up on their responses. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to give a detailed description of their feelings and experiences, while also being flexible in terms of how the research approaches different interviewees (Azungah, 2018). Overall, semi-structured interviews helped to answer the “how” and “why” questions of participants, while demonstrated that individual realities are socially constructed and interpreted by the worldviews of the interviewees (Mason, 2004).

## **Reflexivity Statement**

One of the most important things to consider as a qualitative researcher is reflexivity, which is when a researcher acknowledges their position and how it influences their research (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). Specifically, being reflexive means that researchers are situated “by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical-personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition. The extent to which influences are revealed or concealed when reporting data is circumscribed by the paradigms and disciplines under which we train, work, and publish” (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 115). Essentially, I needed to be aware of the assumptions that I brought into an interview and how it can impact the interview. I am a 26-year-old White male, college-educated researcher, my native language is English, and I interviewed Latino players who were unlikely to possess an advanced education and will more than likely be younger than me. These differences can impact an interview, as the players may feel intimidated to speak with someone older with high degrees of education. Being conscious of my privilege and identities helped me to interview better and gain trust and rapport with the players whom I interviewed. Interpersonal connection for interviews are important and should produce a better quality interview (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007), and I did my best to create rapport and a positive relationship with the participants. I oftentimes brought up my experiences abroad, but I felt as if the best thing that I did was speak to them in Spanish.

**Linguistic Abilities.** There were also linguistic abilities that need to be considered (Rouslton, 2013), as having a firm grasp on English is something that should not be assumed, especially while interviewing for this dissertation. I was granted access to interview players in Spanish if needed, as UA’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved a translator’s declaration, which allows me to serve as a translator (see Appendix B). I spoke with all players in Spanish

rather than English because I felt they would be more comfortable in Spanish and it would also give them a chance to discuss their experiences in more detail, due to their comfort and familiarity. While I am able to be considered a language insider by being able to converse in Spanish, there are other parts of our identities that are drastically different, including race and ethnicity (Cormier, 2017). By being a language insider, I was able to have knowledge of the context and of the participants, either linguistically or contextually, that non-language insider researchers may not observe (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Being an insider is also advantageous because I had a better chance of obtaining consent as opposed to other researchers who are unable to speak their native language (Kim, 2012). Most importantly, being a linguistic insider is often viewed positively by the participants (Cormier, 2017), so having this form of credibility may allow the participants to be more comfortable in my presence. This allowed me to develop good rapport, which ought to produce a quality interview.

### **Coding**

For this dissertation, I used some a priori organization for findings, but then embraced the inductive approach. I began by organizing my findings with an a priori approach, but then I embraced the inductive approach. To organize my findings, I kept in mind what previous research on acculturation and sport have found. For instance, previous research suggests that having teammates and/or coaches who speak an athletes' native tongue accelerates the acculturation of international athletes (Battochio et al., 2013), knowing English helps players acculturate (Gentile & Buzzelli, 2021), and the communities in which MiLB players are assigned tend to lack a heavy Latino population (Regalado, 2002). Even though I used elements of a priori analysis, the majority of my analysis adopted an inductive approach. As Thomas (2006) notes, "The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the

frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (p. 238). Therefore, the transcripts identified themes and categories based on each research question.

To code qualitative data, the researcher must assume that the data can be broken down by coding. Once the transcripts have been coded the researcher can then identify themes from the data (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Coding is more than just identifying data, as it also helps to link themes together. Coding “leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137). Therefore, coding allows the researcher to group and organize similar coded data into groups because they share characteristics and patterns (Saldaña, 2012). For this dissertation, I followed this way of coding by organizing themes into groups based on colors that were assigned.

By using an inductive approach to interviewing, I also was able to connect the gaps in the social identity and sport communication literature. There are no known qualitative studies that focus on social identity theory (SIT) and player adaptation. There have been studies that use SIT and fan identity (End et al., 2002), stereotyping of athletes (Ferrucci, Tandoc, Painter, & Wolfgang, 2016; Ferrucci & Tandoc, 2018), and using leadership as a criteria for “in-group” and “out-group” status (Slater et al., 2014). To fill the research void for the acculturation of Latino MiLB players and their possible identity shifts to accommodate to the perceived dominant group, an interpretivist approach of interviewing allowed me to find themes from the data itself.

## **Context**

For this dissertation, I focus on the acculturation experiences and identities of players who are currently playing in the Southern regions of the United States. There are 120 teams in MiLB, spanned across four levels: Class A, Class A-Advanced, Double A, and Triple A (Mayo,

2021). Players in Class A are comprised mainly of players being promoted from the rookie leagues. While the rookies leagues (Arizona League and Gulf Coast League) are affiliated with MiLB, they play 60 games beginning play in June, rather than April like Class A through Triple A. Class A-Advanced is comprised of players who have been promoted at least twice. High draft picks also usually begin their professional careers at Class A-Advanced (Business of MiLB, n.d.). Players in Class A and Class A-Advanced tend to be younger and at the early stages of their professional careers, while players in Double A and Triple A have been in the system for longer, which means they have been living in the US for longer. While it would be have been ideal to interview players at each level, this dissertation's core focus is interviewing Latino MiLB players in the Southern region of the United States. Therefore, an equal representation of players in each league is not necessary. This study's central focus is about ways in which Latino MiLB players acculturate to life in the US, specifically in the Southern region.

All international players, with exceptions to players from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Canada, first get assigned to the academies in the Dominican Republic. In addition to learning English, these players learn about the cultural expectations in the US. Some of what is taught at the academies involves opening up a bank account, how to tip at US restaurants, how much rent may cost, and even sex education. Some academies even offer the opportunity for players to earn a high school diploma, as many players drop out of school at a young age to pursue a baseball career. Having programs in place to help the players should their baseball careers not pan out is extremely beneficial to most players.

**Recruitment.** To recruit the participants, I contacted the teams themselves in order to communicate with the players. Each MiLB team's front office information is online, so I first sent an initial email to the general managers, as they are the leaders of the organization,

functioning as the gatekeepers that will either grant or deny me access to interview their players. The gatekeepers are essentially the bridge between researcher and informant (Wanat, 2008). Marland and Esselment (2019) offer strategies to convince the gatekeepers that interviewing informants is worthwhile and necessary. Such strategies include being concise in emails until a relationship is developed, being flexible with my time, be respectfully persistent, and emphasize benefits that are applicable the gatekeepers themselves. Fortunately, the gatekeepers were very responsive to my inquiries, so I did not need to be persistent.

The general manager also sometimes directed me to contact the public relations department, as it is typically their responsibility to coordinate events outside of baseball with the players. I will reached out to teams in the local area, including the Birmingham Barons, Rocket City Trash Pandas, which operates in Madison, AL, and the Montgomery Biscuits. Being geographically close allowed easy travel and access if the teams would request in-person interviews. All of the three teams in Alabama requested in-person interviews, but the day before I was going to Madison to interview a few players, they instead requested Zoom for the interviews. After I interviewed players on these teams, I then requested to interview players who play for other teams in the US South, including teams located in Mississippi, Tennessee, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and portions of Virginia.

Once I was giving approval to interview players, I reached out to teams and scheduled interviews. When I contacted the general managers, I offered the option to interview in-person, via a video call/conferencing platform, or over the phone. However, I originally believed that most general managers would prefer the latter two options out of convenience, which turned out to be the case. While certain research suggests interviewing the participants is best in-person, as interviewing participants in natural settings allows the researcher to get a better sense of how

people in their comfortable setting operate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), that was not often realistic, nor effective. First, COVID-19 protocols from MiLB and the individual teams may prevent non-team or media members from entering the clubhouse. All minor league teams were given an operations manual for the 2021 season, but the public does not have access to this (Cooper, 2021). Therefore, I was unaware if I would be allowed to physically be in the clubhouse and around players. Second, if I was allowed in the clubhouse to interview players, I may have had to travel throughout the southeast to do so. I did, however, travel to Birmingham and Montgomery to interview players. Due to these potential restrictions and logistical issues, the interviews were more often than not conducted via a video call/conferencing platform or phone call rather than in-person.

**Interviewing Platforms.** Even though Lindlof and Taylor (2019) argue that in-person interviewing is the best, other scholars (Tracy, 2013; Archibald et al., 2019) disagree. Tracy (2013) maintains that there are benefits to interviewing people through mediated platforms. It is cost-efficient, easy to interview many participants, and the ease to schedule interviews regardless of time zones is also particularly appealing. Similarly, Archibald et al. (2019) contend that there are three main benefits with using video call/conferencing platforms, specifically Zoom, as a research tool: rapport, convenience, and simplicity/user-friendliness. Since Zoom has a simple interface and does not have as much lag as other videoconferencing technologies (e.g., Skype), it is still easy to read one's nonverbals through a mediated form. Moreover, videoconferencing technology is also convenient for participants because of its access to geographically distant participants, cost and time-effectiveness. Zoom is also user-friendly, as one only has to click on a link. Zoom has also become extremely familiar for many people since the pandemic began, with

over 300 million people using their platform each day (Mihalcik, 2020). I found this to be true, as most teams requested that I conduct the interviews via Zoom.

From the players I did interview in-person, I found them to be not as effective as the interviews over the phone or Zoom. There were two main reasons why the in-person interviews were not as successful. First, the teams considered me “media,” so I was only able to have 15 minutes with each player. Second, the interviews were conducted a couple of hours before games, in-between batting practice and on-field workouts. This caused the players to be more focused on the game rather than these interviews, so their responses were often short and not very detailed. Since I was considered media, these responses are normally appropriate for media interviews, but not an in-depth academic study. It may not have been the in-person interviews that were the issue, but rather the timing of the interviews. The interviews were not optimal right before the game, and the findings and depth of them may have been different if I interviewed them at another time during the day or on a day where there was no game. Since the in-person interviews occurred first and were not very successful, I then encouraged the interviews to be conducted on Zoom or over the phone.

To conduct the interviews, I followed the IRB approved semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A). Olson (2011) believes that following a semi-structured interview formation allows for probing and follow-up questions that still helped to answer research questions. The questions on the guide began with questions such as where the players are from, and how long they have been playing in the US for. I then transitioned to questions that focused on their identity. I asked a question about how they describe themselves based on the experiences they encountered during their time in the US. I then followed-up by asking if this has changed from when they first arrived in the US. I thought they may describe themselves as a Dominican, a

baseball player, or both. In reality, they mainly responded with personality characteristics. I then asked questions about how they communicate with non-Latino or non-Spanish speaking players and coaches. Then, I posed questions that focused on their experiences, both good and bad, about their cultural experiences and encounters in the US, and the importance of knowing English both on and off the field. The interview guide has 14 questions, but it is a semi-structured guide.

Therefore, I frequently asked other questions that were relevant based on the flow of the conversation. The interviews were conducted solely in Spanish because the players should open up more in their native language. I am considered to be a full professional proficiency Spanish speaker, as I am able to carry conversations in Spanish with ease. This category of proficiency also is able to communicate in all levels related to professional needs (Language Proficiency Definitions, n.d.), which in this situation would be about baseball. For this dissertation, I was able to communicate and understand nuanced baseball terminology that I learned while working with MLB in the Dominican Republic, which would classify me in this group.

### **Data Analysis**

Once all of the interviews were been completed, the recordings were transcribed by a transcription company called GoTranscript. The reason that my transcripts were done by a third party was strictly for time management. Transcribing takes time to do well, and I wanted to focus on securing, conducting, and coding interviews rather than using this time for transcription. Even though I had a company transcribe on my behalf, I was still be part of the transcription process as I incorporated elements in the transcription that I believe were important. For instance, I made notes in the transcripts about their nonverbals both from in-person and Zoom interviews. If the players seemed distressed or nervous, then I frequently made a note of it in my transcripts. Regardless of the platform in which I interviewed the players, I had a notepad with me to record

notes that I may include in the transcripts. These notes were then placed in the transcripts where the actions take place. By noting recording nonverbal communication, it gave me an extra layer of analysis that a transcription itself would not provide (Hammersley, 2010).

I interviewed all players in Spanish, even if they could speak both languages. Spanish was the default interview language because it is their native language and they will most likely give more detailed responses in Spanish than English. Moreover, they should be more comfortable speaking to me in Spanish rather than in English. It is important to note that interviewing in Spanish is different than English, as Latin American countries tend to be collectivistic (Schreier et al., 2010) and people from these countries tend to communicate with a more indirect approach (Martin & Nakayama, 2013). The differences of one's country of origin impact how they communicate with others. For instance, certain countries adopt a low-context form of communication that involves the use of clear and straight-forward messages.

In contrast, others may adopt a high-context form of communication that involves implicit and indirect messages where meanings are located in the individual or the sociocultural setting (Hall, 1976). Individuals from individualistic cultures like the US tend to use low-context communication, while people from collectivistic cultures tend to use more high-context communication (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988). As Gudykunst et al. (1996) believe, "Cultural individualism-collectivism has a direct effect on communication because it affects the norms and rules that guide behavior in individualistic and collectivistic cultures" (p. 511). Therefore, the culture that one derives from impacts their communication styles. This was important to keep in mind as I interviewed the players because I may need to ask more follow-up questions when speaking with players from high-context cultures for clarity.

As previously mentioned, I first used elements of deductive, or a priori, analysis and then transitioned to inductive analysis. The only reason I started with a priori analysis is for a mental framework, as I looked for themes that have been previously stated in academic research. After I went through each transcript and looked for these themes, I then began inductive analysis. As I went through each transcript, I highlighted sections of text that correspond with each research question. Each research question was assigned a color in the transcripts and whenever I found an answer to a research question I highlighted it with the respective color. By doing this practice of coding, I was also able to identify themes within the larger research question. Themes repeatedly were revealed by doing the color coding, so I was able to locate subthemes for each research question. Once I used a certain section or quote, I then bolded it in the transcript so I know that it has already been used. There were a lot of highlights, and I cannot provide every detail in this dissertation. Therefore, I focused on the quotes that provided lots of insight and detail, rather than mention every quote in the dissertation to answer each research question. I also focused on quotes that demonstrate theory. Players' comments overlapped, so I focused on the quotes that are more specific and detailed. There was a chance that players are uncomfortable speaking with me, so while they may provide responses that answer my research questions, they may be very vague and non-detailed. While these comments are still invaluable to understanding this subject matter, I did not include those comments in the dissertation itself. Once I finished color coding for research questions, I then had a color that highlights important comments, but did not relate to any research question. There was information that I was not expecting that is important to include, so I had a color that highlights those comments. Next, I incorporated the comments that answer each RQ and the miscellaneous but important comments in the dissertation in a way that helped to answer each of my proposed research questions.

In chapter 4, I offer dual language transcriptions in order to state directly what the players say in Spanish, while then translating the statements to English. Having direct quotes in Spanish and then translating them allows readers to see what was spoken originally and how it translates to English. This should bring a unique perspective to the dissertation that allows English readers to understand what they said, while also using direct quotes from the players.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The central purpose of this dissertation is to understand how Latino MiLB players acculturate, both linguistically and behaviorally, to a new environment. I am also interested in their cultural transitions from their native country to the US while playing in the US South. Lastly, this dissertation is concerned with which ingroups Latino MiLB players primarily identify. The three research questions that guide this dissertation are below:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** In what ways do Latino MiLB players describe themselves as acculturating to a new environment, both linguistically and behaviorally?

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** How do Latino MiLB players describe their cultural transitions in the US South?

**RQ<sub>3</sub>:** Which ingroups do Latino MiLB players describe as their primary identity?

To answer each research question, there were many subthemes that I found. Even though I only have three research questions, there was enough data to create subsections that I felt were important and contributed to answering the aforementioned research questions.. I felt as if the findings were better organized to have multiple subsections for each to contribute to the answering the larger research questions. Each quotation used in this chapter is written in English, but the longer block quotes will be in both English and Spanish. The discussion and implications for these findings will be discussed in Chapter 5.

**RQ1: In what ways do Latino MiLB players describe themselves as acculturating to a new environment, both linguistically and behaviorally?**

After reviewing the transcripts, I determined that players acculturate in two main ways by altering language and behavior. The players mainly acculturate by learning English, as understanding the host group is extremely helpful to avoid miscommunication. While the majority of acculturating is learning English, there are still behavioral adjustments that players must overcome to feel comfortable in a new country and culture. The answer to research question one is subdivided into two parts: (a) linguistic acculturation and (b) behavioral acculturation. The linguistic portion has four subcategories: (a) majority of acculturation is learning English, often through self-motivation (b) communication is easy due to the prominence of bilingual players and coaches acting as teachers, (c) reciprocal language learning, and (d) the academies in the Dominican Republic helps prep the players for the US. The behavioral section has two subcategories: (a) the organizations help the players learn English and acculturate, and (b) baseball is constant in the change. Each of these is described in detail below.

**Linguistic Acculturation**

**The Majority of Acculturation is Learning English.** Learning English is arguably the most important part of acculturating to life in the US, according to my participants. For instance, Fernando Piñeres, who allowed his name to be used in this dissertation, the Atlanta Braves' Cultural Development Coordinator, helped me schedule interviews with players in the Braves' minor league system. Fernando has only been with the Braves for a few years, but when I spoke with him, I never asked specifically how long he has been in his current role. It is unknown how many other teams have someone on staff like Fernando, as his name is not located on the staff directory for the Braves. However, through my connections with staff members of the teams

trying to secure interviews, I know that the Tampa Bay Rays and Chicago White Sox both have members like Fernando to help players acculturate to the US. While the Braves practices helping players acculturate seems effective, comparing them to the practices of other organizations is beyond the scope of this dissertation, as I did not have as much access to others. It would be difficult for me to compare the Braves to other organizations without having equal access to multiple organizations.

While speaking with Fernando, he said that teaching players English is 95% of what he tries to teach them, as this will set them up for success in the US. Multiple players agreed that learning English is arguably the single most important part of acculturating to a new culture. For instance, one player in the Braves' system said, "English is the key to communicate, to make things better here. Yes, those who speak English are more comfortable here...English is fundamental to be able to live here." Other players in the Braves organization echoed a similar sentiment about the importance of English for succeeding in life in the US, oftentimes using the metaphor "key" to describe the importance of English. Having the knowledge of English allows players to communicate with almost anyone and succeed in many social situations, both on the field and away from it. In a similar vein, one Venezuelan player acknowledged that learning English helps to communicate, but also helps him join the larger American society. He said that the "first step" to succeeding off the field in the US is learning English:

Prácticamente el primer paso, sencillamente ponerlo como eso, el primer paso, lo más importante es poder comunicarte, poder expresar lo que sientes, lo que piensas, lo que quieres hacer, lo que necesitas. Para todo necesitas comunicarte. El inglés es la herramienta perfecta para comunicarte estando en los Estados Unidos.

Practically the first step, simply put it like that, the first step, the most important thing is to be able to communicate, to be able to express what you feel, what you think, what you want to do, what you need. For everything you need to communicate. English is the perfect tool for communicating while in the United States.

According to these aforementioned players, English is the most important aspect of acculturating to a new country and culture. They are able to communicate what they need and are more independent because of their knowledge of English. While English helps them for life in the US, they are also able to communicate better with their teammates. One player in the Seattle Mariners organization believes that knowing English helps him not only in life, but also allows for a source of bonding with teammates. When asked if players who speak English are more comfortable in the US he said:

Cien por ciento. Porque aquí se te hace más fácil todo. Entender cada palabra, cada instrucción que te dicen, no tienes que estar buscando un traductor, "¿Qué me dijeron?". No te hace falta una persona que te traduzca. Por lo menos ahorita, tenemos tres latinos en el equipo. Primero estaba él solo, después llegué yo y estábamos él y yo nada más, él es abridor, yo soy relevo, él a veces está por allá, yo estoy por allá. En el bullpen el único latino soy yo, si yo no supiera hablar inglés, imagínate lo aburrido que fuera para mí estar en el bullpen, sin hablar con nadie, sin echarle un chiste a nadie, sin escuchar un chiste de nadie. Para mí el juego sería muy aburrido.

One hundred percent. Because everything is easier for you here. You understand every word, every instruction they tell you, you don't have to be looking for a translator, "What did they tell me?" You do not need a person to translate for you. At least right now, there are three Latinos on the team. First there was only one Latino, then I arrived and it was him and me. He is a starter; I am a reliever, so he sometimes he's over there (in the dugout), I'm over here (in the bullpen). In the bullpen the only Latino is me, if I didn't know English, imagine how boring it was for me to be in the bullpen, not speaking to anyone. Without joking with anyone, without listening to a joke from anyone. For me the game would be very boring.

For this player, feeling a sense of community on the team is possible by knowing English so he is not isolated on the team. Speaking English is an easy way for him to interact with his teammates, which is something that he struggled with when he did not speak English. Similarly, one player mentioned that understanding English helps him to not feel as isolated in a new country and culture. He said that not knowing English is an issue because a non-English speaker does not know how to go out and order what he needs. He said that he was unable to speak or interact with his teammates, which made him feel very lonely and isolated. However, learning

English helped combat his feelings of loneliness because he was able to engage in conversation and feel the sense of community that he longed for. One Dominican player, who is currently playing in the Miami Marlins organization, acknowledged that English is extremely important when trying to navigate a new country and culture, mainly as a way to feel comfortable. This player said, “If you learn English it is much more comfortable for everything, the truth is, English is used here for everything. English is super important, because after you learn it, everything is much easier.” Therefore, the players are motivated because they may see success and comfort coming if they learn English.

Since loneliness and uncomfortable situations can be alleviated through English, many players dedicated themselves to learning English about as much as practicing baseball. The opportunities in the US are vast, both in and out of baseball, and knowing English can help players in the US and elsewhere once their careers are over. One player felt so strongly about learning English as a tool to be successful in the US that he convinced other players to work on dedicating themselves to learning it. This player argued that English helps open doors for those who know it by claiming English “is a very interesting language that can open doors for you, it can help you move forward, it can help you in our future, in your career, whatever you are doing. It's very interesting, I love it.” This internal motivation to learn English drives players to take it upon themselves to learn. While I did not ask them about if they believe reaching MLB is realistic, they must know the chances are not high. This may be another reason why they are pushing themselves to learn English, so they can have many opportunities in the US if baseball is not ultimately their long-term careers.

While the player described above loves learning English, another player noted that learning English was the most difficult thing he had to learn, both in and out of baseball. He then

reflects on this learning experience by saying “learning English is the single most important thing. After you learn English, the rest becomes easier.” Many players mention the connection between learning English and comfort, even if they mention different instances both in terms of learning English and their experiences of comfort. One player even mentioned that his dad urged him to learn English early on because the language itself allows for an abundance of opportunities that may not be reaped without being bilingual. Even before this Mexican player was a professional baseball player reported that his dad told him, “You have to learn English, because it is the language that is used worldwide. You can communicate in English in any country you can go to.” Other players understand that they will most likely never make it to MLB. Thus, understanding English is crucial for the careers after baseball. According to one player:

Hay muchos que no puede lograr conseguir sus metas de llegar a las grandes ligas y hay muchos que quizá tienen su vida aquí. Pueden ser latinos y tienen su vida aquí, si no logran ese objetivo tienen que quedarse aquí como han venido haciendo, que vivían aquí. Sí porque pueden charlar, pueden conseguir trabajo en cualquier sitio.

There are many who cannot achieve their goals of reaching the big leagues and there are many who perhaps have their lives here. They can be Latino and have their life here, if they do not achieve that goal they can stay here as they have been doing. Yes because they can chat, they can get a job anywhere.

The notion of knowing English to succeed in the US and in baseball is also tied to one’s comfort level, as well. Feeling comfortable is a common theme amongst the players, from one’s desire to speak English fluently with teammates to feeling comfortable in the US as a whole. One player noted that players who speak English are more comfortable in the US. He claimed he feels very good because he has the fluency to speak with anyone and believes the key to comfort and learning English is to “just keep talking.” A Venezuelan player who is currently playing in South

Carolina, gave a similar response about the importance of English and it helps players feel comfortable by saying:

Hay personas que, al principio, yo que acababa de llegar, no salía ni siquiera a pedir comida, tenía que ir acompañado, tenía que decirle a alguien que me acompañara a pedir comida, necesitaba llamar y no podía llamar porque no sabía el inglés. No hablaba tanto con los peloteros americanos, con los coach americanos. Es demasiado incómodo estar así, por eso uno tiene que aprender rápido el idioma, para tratar de estar más cómodo tanto en el terreno cuando esté jugando o practicando, tanto como afuera del terreno, porque es algo que te va a ayudar siempre.

There are people who, at first, I who had just arrived, did not even go out to ask for food, I had to go with someone. I had to tell someone to come with me to order food. I needed to call and I couldn't call because I didn't know English. I didn't speak as much with the American players, with the American coaches. It is too uncomfortable to be like this, that's why one has to learn the language quickly, to try to be more comfortable both on the field when playing or practicing, as well as off the field, because it is something that will always help you.

Understanding English does more than just making players feel comfortable and connected with the team and country. English also helps players understand the American culture. A former player and current coach claimed that English is important to “know the culture of us Latinos, the cultures are very different, but the United States gives us that opportunity to learn the English language that is so beautiful, it is a strength for us to learn the language.” Moreover, certain players noted that Latino players are naturally at a disadvantage due to the culture and language differences. However, that can be combated if they know English. Knowing English puts players “a step ahead” because “everyone in this country speaks the language.” This player also suggested that being a Latino puts players at a disadvantage socially, but they can overcome that if they know English. Another player agreed and by saying that “it is no secret that being in the United States and knowing how to speak perfect English is an advantage.” Similarly, the theme of being a step behind by not learning English also resonates

to another player, currently 21-years-old and also in his first year playing professionally in the US. He echoed a similar sentiment by saying:

Si, es muy importante porque todo el mundo aquí habla ese idioma y, si no lo hablas, siempre vas a estar un paso atrás. Siempre tienes que aprenderlo, seguir aprendiéndolo, seguir hasta que realmente te salga ese idioma.

Yes, it is very important because everyone here speaks that language and, if you don't speak it, you will always be one step behind. You always have to learn it, keep learning it, keep going until that language really comes out.

Being a “step behind” by not knowing English in addition to already being at a disadvantage as a Latino in the US may put fear in the players if they do not learn English. This might also be a factor as to why players take it upon themselves to learn English rather than struggling by not knowing English. Since the players are motivated to learn English themselves, they can use it well enough to know that it is essential while adjusting to the US. Additionally, a motivating factor is oftentimes seeing players struggle with a language barrier. Seeing other players struggle with English actually has motivated one player to learn it. He agreed that knowing English allows players to be more comfortable in the US, as it alleviates many issues. This player claimed:

Sin duda alguna quién sabe el inglés está más cómodo, lleva un paso adelante porque sabe dónde va, sabe lo que hay que hacer, entiende las cosas. Si tú sabes el idioma, si tú sabes lo que te están tratando de decir, tienes menos problemas. Un ejemplo, una persona que no sepa el idioma, le están diciendo que se mueva a la derecha y no sabe, es un poco complicado tratar con esa persona. A veces uno mismo se siente mal. Esas son de las cosas que te impulsan a aprender más inglés.

Without a doubt, those who know English are more comfortable, they take a step forward because they know where they are going, they know what to do, they understand things. If you know the language, if you know what they are trying to tell you, you have less problems. For example, a person who does not know the language, they are telling him to move to the right and he does not know, it is a bit complicated to deal with that person. Sometimes you feel bad yourself. Those are the things that drive you to learn more English.

The notion of fruitful opportunities in the US by understanding English remains a prevalent theme that many players mentioned. One reason that this may be repeated by players is because they often come from countries to where there may not be as many economic opportunities as there are in the US. The players may see that these opportunities are in reach, both in and out of baseball, if they learn English. A Dominican player maintained that knowing English opens doors that are not possible without learning English, especially once their careers are over. According to him, English is “fundamental” and he urges his teammates to learn English to help them once their careers are over.

English is also critical for these players from an organizational perspective. They must communicate well with players and coaches do not speak Spanish. However, they do not report many issues of miscommunication, mainly because everyone is extremely supportive of their adaptation and learning experiences. Having players, coaches, and staff who are understanding, encouraging, and supportive not only helps players feel better, but it also may help the team perform better due to comfort and communication. One of the players mentioned in the interview that even though there is sometimes a language barrier, members in the organization are all extremely supportive of one another in terms of learning English:

Yo me la llevó bien con todos, hablo demasiado con ellos, hablo mucho con mi pitching coach, hablo con el manager, los cátcheres, los pitcher. Así como nosotros somos amigables con ellos, los peloteros latinos, eso nos da más confianza a nosotros de poder aprender inglés con ellos, porque ellos también nos ayudan a nosotros. Creo que yo tengo mucha amistad con ellos.

I got along well with everyone, I talk a lot with them, I talk a lot with my pitching coach, I talk to the manager, the catchers, the pitchers. Just as we are friendly with them, Latino players, that gives us more confidence to be able to learn English with them, because they help us too. I believe I have lots of friendships with them.

English is critical for on-field communication, mainly for both pitchers and catchers. For instance, a Puerto Rican catcher in the Chicago White Sox organization said that he needed to

learn English in order to communicate with his teammates. As a catcher, knowing English is critical to communicating his pitchers, especially if there is miscommunication with the game situation or confusion with the catchers' signs. Another catcher on a different team said something similar, as well. According to him, "English is very, very important because you have to communicate with the pitchers and your coach. The language is number one for a catcher." The sentiments offered by the catchers are telling, especially since catchers are often considered the leaders on the field because they are responsible for telling the pitchers what pitches to throw. Both pitchers and catchers are involved in every play during a game, so communication between them has to be effective for on-field success. In addition to catchers needing to know English to communicate with pitchers, the theme of self-motivation to learn English is also present with the aforementioned quotes from the catchers.

A majority of the players said that even though there are people like Fernando Piñeres of the Atlanta Braves, whose sole job is to help Latino players acculturate to the US while also helping them with English, they take it upon themselves to learn English. Many players discussed their desire to learn English, even though there are often programs in place within the organizations to assist them in their transition. As I was wrapping up an interview with a Dominican player, he wanted to make sure to get his point across that English is extremely important to learn:

Realmente con el inglés, yo le aconsejo a todo el mundo es que se pongan bien, que traten de aprender inglés, que la comunicación es la base de todo. Cuando tú te aprendes a comunicar con las personas, que tú a dónde quiera que vayas te sepas comunicar, la gente te va a aceptar... Es difícil que tú llegues en un lugar y tengas que decir, "Yo no puedo porque no me sé comunicar." Por eso es tan importante el inglés para nosotros los latinos de aprenderlo, porque siempre tenemos que comunicarnos de una forma u otra y eso es lo que yo diría a todo el mundo. Aprendan el inglés, que eso es lo más importante.

Really with English, I advise everyone in the world to try to learn English, that

communication is the basis of everything. When you learn to communicate with people, that wherever you go you know how to communicate, the people will accept you ... It is difficult for you to arrive in a place and have to say, "I am not able because I don't know how to communicate." That is why English is so important to us. Latinos need to learn it, because we always have to communicate in one way or another and that's what I would tell to the whole world. Learn English, that's what more important.

Many other Latino players shared similar views when it comes to learning English by themselves, but they still credited the organizations they are a part of for their desire to help Latino players. One 24-year-old Mexican player, in his seventh year in the Atlanta Braves system, attributed the Braves in helping him learn English:

Podría decir que mi conocimiento de inglés es un 60%, 70% y yo llegué aquí a Estados Unidos hablando absolutamente nada. Yo les agradezco yo mucho a los Bravos por el interés que le dan a sus jugadores al hacer aprender a sus jugadores hablar inglés. Les agradezco mucho a ellos por el interés que nos dan por darnos ese servicio de inglés.

I would say that my knowledge of English is 60%, 70% and I came here to the United States speaking absolutely nothing. I thank the Braves very much for the interest they give to their players by making their players learn to speak English. I thank them very much for their interest in providing us with this English service.

A few players described originally underestimated the importance of learning English until they had a bad communicative experience in the United States. Negative situations often were the turning point for the player realizing that they need to learn English to feel comfortable living in the United States. The fear of not knowing how to do something because of a language barrier often spurred players to dedicate themselves to learn English. For example, one Dominican player for the White Sox, in his eight years playing professionally in the US, credited his urge to learn English to feeling uncomfortable in social situations when he first arrived. He mentioned that it was difficult when he first arrived because he did not know how to do anything, including ordering food. He then said after a while "it's nice...to learn the proper way to say what you want or what you need."

Another player mentioned a similar exchange at In-N-Out during his time in a development league in Arizona. Even though this did not happen in the US South, it was still a negative experience that he faced, which was one of the main reasons why he decided to dedicate himself to learning English:

Recuerdo que una vez, el primer domingo libre no quería ir a IN-N-OUT porque no sabía pedir. Cuando me decidí, el caso fue que la hamburguesa que pedí no me la pude comer porque ella me preguntó que si quería, un ejemplo, mostaza. Yo le dije, "Yes." El caso que cuando me tocó comerme la hamburguesa no me la pude comer porque tenía todo lo que yo no comía. Dije, "De aquí en adelante ya yo tengo que aprender a hablar inglés o a pedir las cosas. Facilitarme un poquito más las cosas con el inglés".

I remember once, on the first Sunday off, I didn't want to go In-N-Out because I didn't know how to order. When I made up my mind, the fact was that the hamburger I ordered I couldn't eat because she asked me if I wanted, for example, mustard. I told her, "Yes." The fact was that when I had to eat the hamburger I couldn't eat it because it had everything that I didn't eat. I said, "From now on I have to learn to speak English or to ask for things. Make things a little easier for me with English."

A 21-year-old player, currently assigned to an Atlanta Braves affiliate, credits his struggles when he first arrived to helping his English improve. He became annoyed by the “inconveniences” in the US because he did not know English. This player mentioned that he always felt comfortable on the field and talking baseball because that is what he knows best and loves. But when he got into the local community, that is where he struggled linguistically. One Dominican player in his fifth year in the US, wanted to learn English quickly because he prides himself in being independent rather than reliant on other people. He stated:

En pocas palabras, aparte del equipo, yo mismo traté de aprender rápido, de reconocer las cosas rápido. Yo mismo traté de siempre aprender y comprender rápido para yo mismo hacer mis cosas... Yo entiendo una mayor parte, me puedo comunicar con algunos de mis compañeros, algunos de los fanáticos, con los coaches. Yo necesito aprender mucho, en serio.

In short, apart from the team, I myself tried to learn fast, to recognize things fast. I myself tried to always learn and understand quickly to do my own thing... I understand a great part, I can communicate with some of my teammates, some of the fans, with the coaches. I need to learn a lot, seriously.

The same player concluded the interview by saying how important learning English is before coming to the US. He said that if he had to give advice to players about to come to the US to play, that learning a little English by themselves before they arrive will help them greatly, both on and off the field. He said that he recommended that “anyone who has the opportunity to study English before coming should study it...if you come without knowing anything it is difficult.” Another player in Rome, Georgia struggled originally because he did not learn English until he arrived in the US. He offered advice to other Latino players by saying everyone needed to learn English before they arrive because it is “not easy for a Latino to leave home and ignore their culture to adapt. It is a long process to be able to adapt to the American culture.” Therefore, having a foundational knowledge of the US can benefit them before they arrive.

Other players compare learning English to baseball, as both operate in concert for success in the US. Without baseball they would not be in the US and without knowing English they would be uncomfortable communicating in and away from baseball. One Puerto Rican catcher in Triple-A suggested that English is arguably more important for Latinos than baseball while playing in the US. He said that learning English is the “most essential” part of his transition, even more than baseball. He said that before playing baseball in the United States, Latinos should learn the language to really prosper in the US. Another player compared the importance of English to the fundamentals in baseball:

Para mí este idioma del inglés es tan importante como lanzar una pelota, como batear, porque eso es como el pan de cada día de cada uno de nosotros los peloteros que quieren jugar en grandes ligas. esa es la meta que hay. Seguir aprendiendo cada día, seguir aprendiendo porque uno no nace aprendido inglés. Uno siempre, cada día tiene que seguir superándose y seguir aprendiendo un poquito de cada cosa. Como el tema ahorita es del inglés, seguir aprendiendo y sin tener barreras, sin ponerse barreras, ir adelante.

For me, English is as important as throwing a ball, as hitting, because that is like the daily bread of each of us players who want to play in the big leagues. That is the biggest goal

there is. Keep learning every day, I keep learning because one is not born learning English. One always, every day has to keep improving and keep learning a little of everything. As the subject right now is English, keep learning and without having barriers, without putting up barriers, go ahead.

One player did not even mention how English can help him in his baseball career. Rather, he said he wanted to learn it because it's an international language, but he also wanted to teach his family English so they could use it when they escape Venezuela. He said that English is great to know because if you go to almost any country and you do not speak their native language, "the second language they ask if you speak is English." Regardless of where one is in the world, this player believed that English will be enough to let him communicate and navigate a new country and culture. He also said that he has "always wanted to learn English to teach my family" and this could not have been possible without baseball.

A 23-year-old Venezuelan player, currently playing for a Tampa Bay Rays affiliate in South Carolina, wished he had paid more attention in his English classes that the Rays provided. Since he has struggled a bit with the language, his negative linguistic experiences are a driving force in learning English himself:

Lo que puedo decir es que es algo superimportante, que de verdad nosotros necesitamos. Creo que es algo que ya desde que empezamos a firmar, deberíamos prestarle mucha atención para que cuando vengamos hacia acá no tengamos los mismos problemas que han tenido los otros. Igual, aunque ya tenga cinco años aquí, yo no dejé de seguir estudiando inglés, porque quiero igual mejorarlo, seguirlo mejorando.

What I can say is that it is something super important, something that we really need. I think it is something that since we started signing, we should pay close attention so that when we come here we do not have the same problems that others have had. Likewise, although I have been here for five years, I did not stop studying English, because I still want to improve it, continue to improve it.

This section focused on an internal drive to learn English, often because of feeling uncomfortable due to both negative experiences and wanting to avoid negative interactions in the US. Having the skill to speak English helps players on the field with players and coaches, but

more importantly, allows them to succeed outside of baseball when there may not be someone around who can translate. To avoid these negative experiences, players take English as seriously as baseball. If they are able to master both, their potential in the US, both in and away from sport, is very high

**Informal Learning: Bilingual Players and Coaches as Teachers.** In addition to English being critically important both for on the field purposes and helping to adjust to a new culture away from the field, multiple players emphasized how communication on the field is actually somewhat easy due to the presence of bilingual coaches and players. Players often mentioned that their roommates have helped them, but also players and coaches within the organization. One player remarked that he had a Mexican roommate who taught him “good places to eat and he helped me with the language.” A Venezuelan player, currently assigned to a team in Arkansas, noted that he had a Venezuelan-born roommate who lived most of his life in Minnesota and was bilingual. He said that having him as a roommate “helped me a lot with the language” during the two years together. This is just one of many instances where bilingual players aided one another.

A Dominican player currently playing in the Chicago White Sox organization considered that, even though there may be a language barrier, there is usually someone to help if needed. He then goes on to mention how communication between players and coaches is typically very good because, even though they come from different cultures, they are extremely close, like a family:

Yo puedo comunicarme bien con ellos. Si no sé algunas palabras llamo a un compañero y que él explique mejor lo que yo quiero saber, pero tengo muy buena comunicación con todos mis coach y con todos los jugadores. Tenemos buena comunicación porque, aparte de peloteros, somos como una familia porque pasamos más tiempo entre nosotros unidos que con nuestra propia familia.

I can communicate well with them. If I don't know some words, I call a teammate and he can better explain what I want to know, but I have very good communication with all my

coaches and with all the players. We have good communication because, apart from players, we are like a family because we spend more time with each other together than with our own family.

The same player then finished the interview by saying that it was difficult at first, but after he adapted, then it was a lot easier and more fun to communicate with his teammates from other cultures. He said that he tries to “learn something new every day and that is the best thing...to learn something new in life.” One Dominican-born player in the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim organization, said that when he first arrived in the US he did not know any English. However, there was always a Spanish-speaking person around to help translate, whether that is a bilingual player or coach. A Puerto Rican player said that his team in Alabama is roughly 50% Latino, so it is especially easy to communicate this year. If he does run into any issues, there is always someone there to help translate. Similarly, a Mexican utility player in the Tampa Bay Rays organization posited that there is always someone on the team who is bilingual. Throughout his experiences in the organization, and specifically on his current team, there is always “someone who knows Spanish,” whether that is a coach, trainer, or player. The same player said that knowing English allows coaches to have more confidence in players, which allows them more opportunities on the field because they can be trusted more. A Venezuelan coach did not mention specifically that English helps with the confidence that they have in players, but he urges Latino players to learn English for a variety of reasons. This coach noted:

De verdad que es algo que yo le digo a los jóvenes que me envían a coachar, les dejo saber qué tan importante es inglés para ustedes. De verdad que es muy importante aprender inglés para comunicarte con tus compañeros, para comunicarte con todo el staff, es bien importante. Además, estamos en Estados Unidos y es el idioma que se habla.

It is really something that I tell the young people that they send me to coach, I let them know how important English is to you. It is really very important to learn English to communicate with your colleagues, to communicate with all the staff, it is very important. Also, we are in the United States and it is the language that is spoken.

The same coach said that, even though communication between the Americans and Latinos is not perfect, they find a way to fully understand each other. He said the majority of the team speaks English, and when he struggles understanding something, he looks for ways to understand each other. Most importantly, he claimed “we are always on the same page.” This quote also indicates that the team is supportive and non-dismissive of players and coaches who are learning English. This corresponds with a previous quote from one player that said everyone on the team is family. It seems that teams in the minor leagues are very close-knit. When there is a communication issue or misunderstanding, the players, coaches, and staff work through the issues rather than dismissing them. Since the players and coaches seem to be very close, especially since they spend most every day together, they are comfortable asking for clarification when necessary.

**Reciprocal Language Learning.** Even when there are not bilingual coaches or players around to help translate in certain situations, many players who were interviewed mentioned how American players are supportive of the Latino players and they aid in teaching the Latino players English. Both American and Latino players have a desire to learn the other language, as it maximizes communication and even friendships. While it may be tempting and easy to communicate only with players in their native language, multiple players mentioned how they seek out speaking with players and coaches who speak other languages. One 26-year-old Venezuelan player claimed that the Americans are “Good people who talk to you. If I said a wrong word they try to correct me. Likewise with Spanish, when they don't know I tell them how to say it and that's how we always help each other.”

One 24-year-old player in the Seattle Mariners organization said that he speaks to American players “in English...I teach them Spanish and they continue to teach me English. Every day I continue to learn English.” Similarly, one Venezuelan player said that Latinos are

not the only ones learning a new language. He believes that the Spanish-speaking players also aid English-speaking players and coaches with learning Spanish:

Agradezco a los coaches porque quieren también ellos aprender el español, entonces yo creo que ellos, al momento de intentar hablar el español, y nosotros hablar en inglés... Porque yo le corrijo cuando él dice las cosas malas y él me corrige cuando digo las cosas mal en inglés, pero cuando en sí... tengo suerte que hay un compañero latino que sabe hablar inglés y le pido ayuda a él o hay un coach. Ahí es como me apoyan o nos apoyamos.

I thank the coaches because they also want to learn Spanish, so I think that when they are trying to speak Spanish, and we speak in English... Because I correct him when he says bad things and they correct me when I say bad things in English, but when we do not understand each other...I am lucky that there is a Latin colleague who knows how to speak English and I ask him help him or there is a coach. I support them and they support me.

Additionally, a 23-year-old Dominican pitcher playing in Kentucky, echoed a similar sentiment about communicating in the other language with native speakers on the team. He mentioned that he tries to talk to Americans when possible and he embraces that because the Americans want to learn Spanish. He said most of the teammates “already try to learn Spanish,” but if communication becomes difficult, there is a Spanish-speaking coach who acts as the translator. One player even said that he enjoyed the challenge of trying to learn English. He commented that he enjoyed learning English and teaching the American players Spanish. Even though both groups are learning a new language together, he did not have “any inconveniences with anyone.”

For one Venezuelan player in his early 20s believes that even though communicating with American teammates, coaches, and trainers may be difficult, the players know enough English to get by. Additionally, many players, coaches, and trainers have been around enough Latino players that they speak a little Spanish:

Creo que todos los tuvimos inconvenientes. La mayoría de los trainers son americanos. Gracias a Dios, también como nosotros, ellos tienen muchos años aquí y han visto pasar

muchos peloteros latinos, también saben un poco español y eso es lo que también nos ayudó. Nosotros medio le decimos algo, ellos nos lo responden quizás en español. Quizás no lo dicen tan bien, pero ya uno los entiende. Tenemos varios peloteros aquí, que son compañeros de nosotros, que hablan el español también siendo americanos. Es un poco difícil, a veces nos llega un jefe, como le dije, o un trainer y nos quiere hablar de una cosa, pero no lo entendemos. Buscamos unos coaches, tenemos que buscar a una persona que lo traduzca, pero bien. Inconvenientes siempre van a haber, siempre hay que enfrentarlos.

I think we all had problems. Most of the trainers are American. Thank God, like us too, they have been here for many years and have seen a lot of Latino players pass by, they also know a little Spanish and that is what also helped us. We half say something to them, they answer us perhaps in Spanish. Maybe they don't say it so well, but you already understand them. We have several players here, who are teammates with us, who speak Spanish and are also Americans. It's a bit difficult, sometimes a boss comes to us, as I said, or a trainer and wants to talk to us about something, but we don't understand it. We are looking for coaches, we have to find a person to translate it, but fine. There are always going to be drawbacks, you always have to face them.

Similarly, when I asked one player why he said he does not have any communication issues with his non-Spanish-speaking teammates, he responded by saying that he “finds a way.” Everyone in the clubhouse, including players, coaches, and trainers, are willing to help him when he needs it. From his experiences, everyone helps one another because they are all “family.” Not having communication issues with the team is surprising, but also telling about the commitment that the teammates and coaches have to improve themselves and the team itself.

English has also been said to be a tool to create bonds between teammates and coaches, both native speakers and players who are learning the other language. A different player in the Seattle Mariners organization, currently playing in Arkansas, noted the importance of learning English to develop tight bonds and friendships. English is the bridge that connects cultures, which also creating friendships between players of all cultures. Moreover, since the players aspire to play in MLB and stay in the US for the foreseeable future, they may feel like learning English is a priority to connect with teammates and feel included in a new culture. Again, the notion that everyone on a team is a family is prominent, as hours are spent with each other daily

and they are comfortable around each other. Additionally, Latino players come from collectivistic countries where family and the overall group success tends to take priority over most everything else. Because they are far away from home without a family, they may fill the family void by considering their teammates as family. One player suggested:

Es muy bonito cuando haces compañeros, cuando interactúan entre compañeros, porque esto es una familia, si tú no interactúas con tu familia estás mal. Lo único, cuando ya tú dominas un poco más el inglés se te hace más fácil crear una amistad entre un americano, un latino. Yo creo que eso es lo bonito, es importante interactuar porque es tu familia, es lo que tú vas a ver día a día.

It is very nice when you make companions, when they interact with each other, because this is a family, if you do not interact with your family, that's bad. The only thing, when you have mastered English a little more, it becomes easier for you to create a friendship between an American and a Latino. I think that is the beauty, it is important to interact because it is your family, it is who you will see every day.

I asked a Puerto Rican catcher how he communicates with his teammates and coaches who do not speak Spanish. He says that communication is not an issue and he tries to “interact a lot more with them than Latinos.” He said that Latinos already know each other well, so he interacts with American players and coaches to learn more English every day. This player is not afraid to speak up and ask questions if he has them. He stated that “if I don't understand something I ask right there, ‘how did you just say that?’ ‘What is this? I think that's the best way to learn. The relationship between us (Americans and Latinos) is super good, very good.” A Dominican player, currently assigned to a Double-A team in Mississippi, also said that he interacts well with Americans on the team:

Yo tengo una buena comunicación con varios peloteros americanos y sí, claro, me comunico con ellos como si fueran latinos también, no tengo ese problema. Creo que ya tengo una buena relación con varios peloteros de los Estados Unidos.

I have good communication with several American players and yes, of course, I communicate with them as if they were Latinos too, I don't have that problem (language barrier). I think I already have a good relationship with several players in the United States.

Even though players may have broken English or Spanish, it is interesting and significant that many players say communication between the two is good. This could be due to their friendship that spans language. One player said that he does not have problems speaking English, he just “tries to make sure that they understand me when I start talking. When I don’t understand, I tell them, ‘No entendí’ (I don’t understand). Could you help me with this?’ But I don’t have problems talking.” Similarly, a highly-touted Dominican outfield prospect in the Miami Marlins organization said that even though he is still learning English, he still has American friends on the team and miscommunication is not very prominent:

Hay muchos de los americanos que son mis amigos, yo me comunico con ellos, hablo en inglés con ellos... pero sí con los coaches que son americanos también me comunico bien, todo realmente superbien.

There are many of the Americans who are my friends, I communicate with them, I speak in English with them... but with the coaches who are American I also communicate well, everything really is super good.

A similar response was given by a young Venezuelan player in the Tampa Bay Rays system.

When I asked him who he first interacted with he got to the US, he said that at first he interacted with the Latino players because he did not speak English. He needed to lean on the other Latinos initially, but after a while, he spent more time with the American players. Now, he enjoys spending time and communicating with the American players and they get him to open up and practice English. For one player, the lure of spending time with American players was at the forefront of his mind when he first arrived to the US to play baseball. He says:

Mi primer día estaba superemocionado, yo me acuerdo que tenía que estar a las 8:00 AM en el campo, pero yo ya estaba despierto ya desde las 6:00 AM, porque yo estaba demasiado ansioso y ya quería llegar a entrenar. Ya quería estar con el uniforme, entrar al campo y empezar a practicar con los demás. Primero iba a estar con peloteros americanos, quería estar con ellos, practicar con ellos y hablar con ellos.

My first day I was super excited, I remember that I had to be in the field at 8:00 AM, but

I was already awake since 6:00 AM, because I was too anxious and I already wanted to get to training. I already wanted to be in uniform, go on the field and start practicing with others. First I was going to be with American players, I wanted to be with them, practice with them and talk to them.

One Venezuelan relief pitcher mentioned how he likes to talk with his American teammates about more than just baseball, even during games. As a reliever, he revealed how there is lots of free time during games, and he does not always want to talk about baseball. Having a desire to have normal conversation with his American teammates assists him learn English, but also helps him feel connected to the team that he is on. He said that he tries to talk about everything when he is not warming up to go into a game, just to practice his English and to have a sense of community in a different culture and country. He said “we always talk about anything during the game. We talk about family, cars...really any type of conversation.” A Dominican player gave high praise to his American teammates. When I asked him what surprised him most about the US, he responded by saying:

Los peloteros americanos de verdad que se portan muy bien con nosotros los latinos, siempre nos ayudan. Siempre nosotros necesitamos hacer unas cosas, ellos si está a su alcance, nos ayudan. De verdad que todo ese tipo de cosas, y se me escapan muchas cosas más, pero ahorita que me acuerdo eso fue lo más que me impresionó.

The American players are very good to us Latinos and they always help us. We always need to do some things, if they are within their reach, they help us. Really, all those kinds of things, and many more things escape me, but right now that I remember that was the most that impressed me.

These findings demonstrate a lot of the education the Latino players received about English is through informal interactions with teammates. The Americans are eager to learn Spanish and the Latinos are eager to learn English. Helping each other learn another language seems to be a very powerful way to learn another language, while also connecting with their teammates.

**Formal Learning: Help from the Academies.** Many players mentioned how the academies they attended in the Dominican Republic helped them with both their cultural

transition to the US, while also teaching them English. Every MLB team has an academy located in the Dominican Republic, which is the first step for international players in their professional baseball pursuit. The academies are the first step of the minor leagues for these players, but the academies also house, train, and educate players on English and American culture. Essentially, these are large dormitories with many fields and weight rooms, where players first go once they are signed to professional contracts. A player from Venezuela, currently playing for a Double-A team in Arkansas, credits his curiosity as a reason why he has a desire to take it upon himself to learn English. He also makes a reference to the Mariners' academy in the Dominican Republic, where he began learning English. He says that he took the academy learning programs seriously, and his curiosity of learning US culture continued when he arrived in the US. While this player says that he learned great things in the academy, he said that the English program in place there was not sufficient. The team would hold English classes every day for one hour. This player said that was not enough to have a good grasp on the language. Rather, he said that he learned most of his English by himself while talking with his teammates:

Todos los días, prácticamente, una hora cada día. Te quedan 23 horas de puro español, tú no hablas más inglés en todo el día o es muy difícil. Es Mentira que tú vas a aprender el idioma en Dominicana como tal. Idioma yo empiezo a aprenderlo, a ponerle más atención cuando llego aquí y veo la necesidad de aprenderlo, porque tengo que hablar, tengo interactuar.

Every day, practically, an hour every day. You have 23 hours of pure Spanish left, you don't speak any more English all day or it's very difficult. It is a lie that you are going to learn the language in the Dominican as such. I started to learn the language, to pay more attention to it when I got here and I see the need to learn it, because I have to speak, I have to interact.

Many players offer similar feelings about learning English in the classroom versus learning with their teammates while in the US. This player says that the academies in the Dominican Republic gave him a good foundation of the language, but he learned much more by practicing in the US.

He says that learning in the academies “are not the same” as doing it in the US because they need to speak it. In the Dominican Republic, however, “very few people will want to.” Luckily he always had an interest in learning the language, so he embraced the opportunity to speak it regularly when he arrived in the US to play professionally. While the academies offer a good foundation for players, one player in the Atlanta Braves system that he was not there for very long because he was promoted essentially once he arrived there. He did notice, however, benefits to the education system in place by saying, “I think it helps all the players because they help you with the language, they train you little by little to send you to the United States. I think it is a preview of what awaits you soon.” Another player agreed that the English classes in the Dominican Republic were a good basis, but they did not learn as much there as they do while in the US and being forced to use it daily. He says:

Aquí estamos aprendiendo un poco más porque nos estamos rodeando de personas que lo hablan. Eso lo estamos poniendo en práctica todos los días, tratamos de hablar con las personas que lo hablan, mayormente lo peloteros americanos, tratamos de hablar todos los días con ellos de palabra en palabra, para que no se nos olvide, porque es importante también... Dentro y fuera del estadio es muy importante.

Here we are learning a little more because we are surrounding ourselves with people who speak it. We are putting that into practice every day, we try to talk to the people who speak it, mostly American baseball players, we try to talk to them every day from word to word, so that we do not forget, because it is important too... Inside and outside the stadium it is very important.

The educational program in place in the academies helped with the cultural transition more than anything, according to a Venezuelan player in the Seattle Mariners organization. He says that the academies are essential for the well-being of players because they do not come to the US with a completely unknown sense of what to expect. This player says that “one comes to the US with an idea of what it is like already.” He came with a “certain education about the country,” but it is still different living in a new culture. Similarly, a different Venezuelan player in Arkansas says

that his team has a Rosetta Stone program for all of the players to work on initially. He says that having the basics of English is most important to the team. He later says that the team holds “meetings about what life is like in the United States and what the rules are...they prepare us every day for when one arrives here.”

**Culture Learning.** A 21-year-old Venezuelan catcher player in the Atlanta Braves organization, believes that the academies help in many facets of life, such as improving his baseball skills, helping him learn English, and what to expect in the US. He says that the academies helped in his baseball preparation, the ability to converse in English, and what the culture is like in the US. He credits this as to why he feels so comfortable in the US. One highly touted Mexican prospect in the Tampa Bay Rays system, says that even though he was familiar with the US by growing up in Tijuana, the academies still helped him tremendously. He believes that growing up near the US/Mexico border gave him an understanding of the US, but the academies really helped teach him about the traditions of the US in comparison the Latin American countries. According to these players, the academies are crucial for their transition to the US because they prepare the players for the language and customs found in the US. In addition to the academies, the organizations often help players acculturate while in the US. The academies are discussed in this subsection because the academies serve players by teaching them the culture of the US. One way in which they teach them about the culture is by teaching them English because they will need the language to succeed while playing in the US.

### **Behavioral Acculturation**

**Organizations Help Players Acculturate.** Multiple players mentioned how their host organization has helped them greatly during their time in the US. Mostly, these sentiments came from players in the Atlanta Braves organization. The Braves have a bilingual Director of Cultural

Transition on staff to help them with learning English and their transition to the US. Other teams may also do this, but I had the most access to the Braves, so I have more knowledge about how the organization operates. Three players in the Braves organization mentioned how both Fernando, and a clubhouse attendant named Manny helped them adapt to the US. According to one player, an example of cultural transition that they help with is punctuality and responsibility, because the US culture is one of extreme punctuality. This is not the case for many Latin American countries as their time orientation is different. One player in the Braves organization says that Fernando and Manny “always takes care of us Latinos.” One player said that Fernando:

Nos ayudó estando aquí nos ayudó bastante también fuera. En toda la pandemia también nos ayudó, siempre estuvo pendiente de nosotros. Estando aquí también nos ayudó mucho que fue sacar nuestro papeles, cualquier tipo de cosita que sea necesario para estar aquí y no estar a la deriva. También el equipo, estoy agradecido completamente también con el equipo, que siempre estuvo pendiente de nosotros.

Helped us while he was here, he also helped us a lot outside. Throughout the pandemic he also helped us, he was always aware of us. Being here also helped us a lot, which was to get our papers, any kind of little thing that is necessary to be here and not be adrift. Also the team, I am also completely grateful to the team, which was always aware of us.

One Venezuelan player said that the team was always supportive of him and the Latinos on the team. He said that his transition was relatively easy because of how the Braves take care of the international players. This player claimed that his transition to the US “was not so hard because I had help from the team. They always traveled with us...A team manager was always around who helped us with everything.” Having a staff support system was extremely helpful for him, but over time, he wanted to rely less on the team because he wanted to be more independent. Because of his desire to be less reliant on the team, he struggled more after being in the US for an extended period of time. He also had to “put a bit more effort into English, or at least try to understand it.” Having the comfort of Fernando and Manny initially was great for his

first year in the US, but he thinks that he relied too much on them because now he has to “go out and buy my own food and do my own shopping.”

Another player mentioned how the team helps out the players tremendously with navigating the US, especially at the beginning. When I asked this player how baseball has helped with his transition to the US, he praised the Braves organization for helping Latino players. He said the Braves organization was very committed to his well-being since he got the call that he would be promoted to play in the US. According to him, the Braves had everything taken care of on his behalf by saying:

El equipo se empeña mucho siempre en mandarle su vuelo, a qué hora sale y te mandan siempre con alguien. Mayormente cuando es el primer año que uno viene para acá, siempre uno viene con más compañeros o sino con alguien. Inmediatamente usted llega aquí a los Estados Unidos, al aeropuerto, hay una guagua o un taxi esperándolo, nos traen a la academia. Es muy bien. Gracias a Dios siempre el equipo tiene una buena línea de hacer las cosas. Las cosas ellos no las hacen tirado o a lo loco, ellos para todo tienen su plan. Inmediatamente ellos me dicen que yo vengo para acá, ya ellos tienen todo al día, todo preparado. Uno llega aquí y su ropa, su habitación, su bloque, todo muy bien. Gracias Dios el equipo siempre está muy empeñado en eso.

The team always sends you on a flight, tells you what time it leaves, and they always send you with someone. Mostly when it is the first year that one comes here, one always comes with more teammates or someone else. Immediately you arrive here in the United States, at the airport, there is a bus or a taxi waiting for you, they bring us to the academy (spring training facility). Is very good. Thank God the team always has a good line of doing things. They do not do things in a crazy way, they have their plan for everything. Immediately they tell me that I am coming here, and they have everything up to date, everything ready. You get here and your clothes, your room, your dorm, all very well. Thank God the team is always very committed to that.

When I was in Montgomery, Alabama to interview a couple of players on the Montgomery Biscuits, I was able to have a conversation with their general manager (GM) about how the team helps players with adapting to the US. The GM said that it is important for the players to understand the culture of the city in which they play, because that will help them feel connected to the city they are living in, in addition to educating them on local culture. One

example that we discussed was that he helps arrange ways for the Latino players explore the city, including arranging for them to learn about the Civil Rights Movement. When the aforementioned player mentioned how cities have different stories, the Civil Rights in the South is one example.

In addition to the host organizations being supportive of the Latino MiLB players, a couple of players credited MLB for their dedication to helping players chase dreams and pull young kids out of impoverished communities. One player took an unusual route to play in the minor leagues. Rather than being signed by an MLB team, MLB offered him a scholarship to play at a university in Alabama. He says that MLB helped arrange his student scholarship and his visa on his behalf, which changed the trajectory of his life. He wishes to “thank those people very much, those academies in the Dominican Republic, in Venezuela, people who dedicate their time so that boys like me can aspire to a better future.” Additionally, A Venezuelan player in the Braves organization considers MLB to be “the best company in the world” because they are extremely organized and help players in a variety of areas. This player said that “everything that is going to happen in a month, they already have prepared right now. That’s what MLB is all about.” Even though this player is currently playing in Low-A, he strongly identifies as an Atlanta Brave. His loyalty to the team may be because of how the Atlanta Braves organization has treated him throughout his time in the organization. This player said that he holds back from doing certain things because he is a public figure and does not want to put the Braves organization in a bad situation. He claimed that being a member of the Braves organization has forced him to “take care of himself more than usual now.”

Of the players in the Atlanta Braves organization I spoke with, they all had high praise for both the organization, but mainly Fernando. Since they all feel so connected and supported

with Fernando and the team, they do not want to disappoint them by messing up or not taking their transition seriously. Having someone like Fernando who is bilingual, relatable, and supportive appears to be vital to the well-being of players who first arrive in the US to play in the organization. Players on other teams did not mention specifically someone like Fernando on their teams, but I know many teams have someone like Fernando on staff. Feeling connected and having someone teach them the language and culture of the US appears to be extremely effective to their overall well-being.

**The Familiar Helps With the New.** Since players are coming to a relatively foreign country and culture, they may oftentimes be uncomfortable in this new setting. However, they are comfortable with baseball and that has been their joy since they were children. I assumed that since they have been playing baseball for many years, that this would be something they are extremely comfortable with, even in a completely different culture with a new language. When it comes to cultural transitions, I was interested in how much baseball helps with their comfort in a new country because all players on a team can relate to each other through baseball. Most of the players responded by saying how baseball has helped them learn English and about US culture. I asked each player how much baseball has impacted their transition to the US, and all of them mentioned how it was extremely helpful. One young Dominican player in the Atlanta Braves system believes that baseball helped him learn a new culture and language. He would not have learned this without baseball:

Yo creo que me ha ayudado en sí, en todo. De la transición de aquí a Estados Unidos, literalmente es la principal razón por la que yo estoy aquí. Yo creo que, como te digo, me ha ayudado en aprender inglés, en jugar a nivel profesional y ser buen compañero o ser buena persona adentro y fuera del béisbol.

I think it has helped me in everything. The transition from here to the United States is literally the main reason I'm here. I believe that, as I said, it has helped me to learn

English, to play at a professional level and to be a good teammate or to be a good person inside and outside of baseball.

The same player finished the interview by saying even though baseball is an incredible tool to learn a new culture and gives him opportunities he would not have had without baseball. He said that learning English is still the most important part of being a professional player in the US because “inside or outside of baseball, for any type of work, for whatever situation you are in, I believe that that English is fundamental...to be able to live or simply to be here.” One 22-year-old Dominican player currently in Georgia, claimed that baseball is a vehicle to pursue a dream of succeeding in the US. He acknowledged how his mindset has changed by being in a more developed country by saying, “I am here fighting for a dream...being in a more developed country, my mind has developed too. I see life differently.” Simply by being in the US due to baseball has made this player more aware of his surroundings and the expectations in the US. A Mexican player currently playing for the Montgomery Biscuits credits baseball for teaching him about American culture. He also acknowledged how baseball has allowed him to see things and experience cultures he otherwise would not have been exposed to. He claimed that baseball allowed him to travel to cities and states that he otherwise would not have seen, which allowed him to become familiar with the life and culture of the US, specifically the southern region. Baseball helped him understand the cultures of smaller cities and towns that span across the US South. Additionally, for one Puerto Rican catcher, baseball was a vehicle to learn English and be exposed to the US. He believes that if it was not for baseball, he would not have the opportunity to be in the US. Baseball has allowed him to travel to many parts of the US, all while learning English. Learning English is something that he always wanted to do, and baseball helped him reach this goal.

Similarly, one Dominican player, currently in his second professional season in the US, recognizes that baseball is his comfort zone, and the field is where he is most happy. He also said that baseball has helped him grow as a person and as an English-speaker. Baseball has helped him a lot by giving him the opportunity to continue his career and keep the dream of playing in MLB intact. He then said:

No lo hago por trabajo, sino porque me divierte. Cada vez que estoy en el terreno lo veo como un día más para yo divertirme. Mi trabajo es seguir desarrollándome como persona, seguir desarrollando mi inglés, seguir desarrollando... Aparte de trabajo, a ser una persona buena. Me enseña a hacerlo bien, un buen trabajo dentro y fuera del terreno. En el terreno uno se divierte, uno trata de hacer las cosas bien y fuera del terreno tiene que hacer las cosas más bien para uno mantenerse en eso. Me enseña como hombre para seguir adelante y me enseña como profesional que soy, beisbolista profesional.

I don't do it for work, but because I have fun with it. Every time I'm on the field I see it as another day for me to have fun. My job is to keep developing as a person, keep developing my English, keep developing... Apart from work, to be a good person. It teaches me to do it well, a good job on and off the field. On the field you have fun, you try to do things well and off the field you have to do things better to stay at that. It teaches me as a man to keep going and he teaches me as a professional that I am, a professional baseball player.

Another Venezuelan player, in his fifth year playing in the US, gives an extremely detailed response for how baseball has helped not only with his transition to the US, but also how it gave him an opportunity to improve his life in general:

El béisbol fue algo que llegó a mi vida, que me ayudó tanto con mi familia, me ayudó a mejorar mis cosas en mi casa, como también me ayudó a crecer como persona. Me enseñó a ser más persona. Firmé a los 17 años, estaba muy joven, no tenía experiencia de nada, no sabía nada... Eso también le doy gracias a Dios, que, si yo no hubiese jugado béisbol, quizás nunca hubiese venido a Estados Unidos. Eso también me ayudó, cuando vine a Estados Unidos me di cuenta que sí tenía que prestarle atención a todas esas reglas que me decían, que ni eran para molestarte, sino que son cosas que uno debe hacer como un profesional, lucir como un profesional, comportarse como un profesional, tanto dentro y fuera del terreno, con la gente que estés hablando siempre saber hablar...te está enseñando a crecer en la vida como una persona.

Baseball was something that came into my life, that helped me so much with my family, it helped me improve my things at home, as well as it helped me grow as a person. It taught me to be more of a person. I signed at the age of 17, I was very young, I had no

experience of anything, I did not know anything...I also thank God that if I hadn't played baseball, I might never have come to the United States. That also helped me, when I came to the United States I realized that I did have to pay attention to all those rules that they told me, that they were not to bother me, but rather they are things that one should do like a professional, look like a professional, behave like a professional, both on and off the field, with the people you are talking to always know how to talk...it is teaching you to grow in life as a person.

Baseball also is a vehicle for friendship development for both Latino and American players alike. One player says that baseball opened many doors for him and helped him in “all aspects” including making friends. He said that he made many friends simply by training with players both in-season and in the offseason. Surrounding himself with people in baseball settings helped him make friends and feel a sense of community. A similar sentiment was offered by a player from the Dominican Republic currently playing for the Rome Braves. He said that playing baseball in the US is “one of the best things that has happened to me in my life.” Through baseball, he has learned English and met great people, including Americans. Baseball has helped him both professionally and culturally.

This first research question was answered in two parts: players adjusted linguistically and behaviorally. Most players mentioned how English is the most important part of acculturating, and learning English is done in many ways. Oftentimes players will take it upon themselves to learn English, but they also have the support from teammates, both American and Latino, to teach them English. Informal learning within the team was a prominent theme, as was formal learning in the academies in the Dominican Republic. The academies helped give players a linguistic foundation before arriving in the US, which some players said was crucial in their adjustment. In terms of behavioral acculturation, the organizations, mainly the Atlanta Braves, helped assist athletes in their transitions. Having people in the organization like Fernando and Manny helped these athletes feel comfortable during a major life transition. While there were

many new cultural differences the players' faced, having the familiarity and comfort of baseball significantly helped players have a sense of happiness and belonging.

### **RQ2: How do Latino MiLB players describe their cultural transitions in the US South?**

The answer to research question two has three subcategories: (a) the Latino players' transitions were a beautiful experience, (b) cultural differences between their home countries and the US (c) they often credited the presence of a Christian God for positive as to why they did not have many issues culturally or communicatively.

#### **Latinos Players' Beautiful Experiences**

Many players described their transitions as "beautiful" even though they sometimes struggled adapting to the culture. One such player had to travel from Venezuela to the Dominican Republic to attend the academy, then to Florida to play in a rookie development league. When I asked him about his experiences from when he signed to now, he responded by saying that Florida is "indescribable" because of the many things it has. Everything in Florida was "totally different" than what he imagined, but different in a beautiful way. One of the main things that this player said was how clean Florida was compared to the Dominican Republic, but also how wealthy the country looked. Another player said that he arrived in the US as a teenager and struggled initially. However, looking back, he described his transition as beautiful:

Para ser sincero fue difícil. Cuando entré a Estados Unidos por primera vez parecía un pajarito en grama, yo veía para todos los lados, no sabía ni qué hacer. Tenía yo 17 años iba para 18 años. Yo nada más veía hacia los lados y decía, "No puedo creer que estoy aquí." Todo se ve tan diferente. Uno ve nada más las calles de aquí por películas, por televisión y tú dices, "quisiera estar allá", y cuando eso se te hace realidad, es otra cosa. Es bonito.

To be honest, it was difficult. When I entered the United States for the first time, I looked like a little bird in grass, I looked everywhere, I didn't even know what to do. I was 17 or was 18 years old. I would just look sideways and say, "I can't believe I'm here." Everything looks so different. You only see the streets here in the movies, on television

and you say, "I would like to be there," and when that comes true, it is something else. It is beautiful.

In a similar vein, a Venezuelan player who spent this past season playing for the Charleston Riverdogs mentioned that he struggled initially, but he found many beautiful aspects of life in the US. According to him, he was very excited to begin playing in the US, but also noted some cultural differences. For example, he mentioned that he struggled with being punctual because time is a much looser concept in Latin America. This player also says that there are many varieties of food, which is something that is lacking in Venezuela. He also said that the US is "much more in order, cleaner, and the law is more respected...in short, it was a bit different but at the same time it was very pleasant and beautiful." Similarly, the Venezuelan coach voiced his love for the US because of the education system that he can provide for his daughter. He is "very grateful to the United States for all its culture and for the education it has."

One of the main reasons that the players experienced positive transitions is because they have always wanted to play baseball in the US because it was a lifelong dream. A few players shared stories about how excited they remember being both on their journey to the US and when they initially arrived. Being excited and happy to be in the US seems to counteract some of the culture shock they experienced. One player described his arrival as a "really beautiful experience because I saw everything different...everything was calmer." This player initially stayed at a resort in Tampa Bay and he recalls never seeing anything like it. This experience motivated him to work harder to remain in the US. When I asked a Venezuelan player about what his experiences have been like adjusting to the US, he said he had no problems at all because playing baseball in the US was a lifelong dream. When the team told him that he was getting promoted to play in the US, he did not sleep that night. For him, playing in the US was always a dream that

he was now about to fulfil. On the flight to the US he was “smiling” and was “happy all the way here.”

Another player described being more than excited when he was on his first ever plane trip to begin his professional career in Arizona. He was still extremely excited to be discussing this “beautiful” memory with his. When I asked a follow-up question about if he remembered his first day in the US he said:

Sí lo recuerdo muy bien. Llegué a Arizona. Llegué como a las 10:00 pm, 11:00 pm en Arizona, que vendría siendo 1:00am, 2:00am en Venezuela. Empecé a llamar a mi familia. Le dije, "Estoy aquí, estoy en Estados Unidos". Durante dos semanas le dije, "Estoy en Estados Unidos." Cada ratito ellos me decían, "cálmate". Yo le dije, "pero es algo que uno no puede creer; estoy aquí en Estados Unidos."

I do remember it very well. I came to Arizona. I arrived around 10:00pm, 11:00pm in Arizona, which would be 1:00am, 2:00am in Venezuela. I started calling my family. I said, "I'm here, I'm in America." For two weeks I told them, "I'm in America." Every once in a while they would tell me, "calm down." I told them, "But it is something that I cannot believe; I am here in the United States."

For many players, their initial trip to the US was the first time they ever traveled outside of their home country and, in some cases, their first time on an airplane. Before one Venezuelan player answered my question about his cultural transition, he first detailed a fun bonding moment with a few of his teammates as they traveled to the US for the first time. He said that his teammates kept making fun of him for being scared that the plane would fall out of the sky. His teammates recorded him, and while he was embarrassed, he had fun with the situation. He then turned more serious about the opportunity to play baseball professionally in the US. This player said that his family has always wanted to travel to the US but never had the financial means to do so. His family was proud of him for being the first member in their family to have the opportunity to travel to the US. He hopes someday he can bring his parents to the US as well, so they can “live this very beautiful experience.” A Dominican player echoed a similar sentiment

that he has had a great experience so far and he is grateful to be in the US. He said that his experience was “very exciting,” but he wishes that he could have spent it with his family because they have wanted to experience life in the US, as well. He knows he is in a fortunate circumstance and his family reiterates that to him.

For a 26-year-old Venezuelan pitcher currently playing in Madison, Alabama, his initial reaction to the US was a beautiful experience. He said that he has always dreamed of playing in the US since he was a kid, and even though he has not reached his ultimate dream of playing in MLB, he is still enjoying where he is at in his career. He also noted that he is extra fortunate to be playing in the US because of the political state of Venezuela. He said that “it’s not a secret that Venezuela, my country, is not doing well at this time.” On the other hand, “in the United States there are many opportunities to get ahead...that why most of us are here fighting for a dream.” He puts his situation into great perspective because the lure of the American dream rings true for him and he does not take it for granted that he has this opportunity. Similarly, the former MiLB catcher and current coach in the Miami Marlins organizations says that Venezuela lacks many professional opportunities, which is why he dedicated himself to baseball. When I asked about his transition to the US, he focused on the opportunities available in the US. Even though he did not make it to MLB, he still appreciates where his baseball took him. He claims that in Venezuela, “there are really not many opportunities to grow as a professional in many aspects.” Because of this, he “stressed sport” and “stressed on doing it well...to have a chance in American sports.” He has “fought hard” to be where he is now, which is on the journey to reach MLB. I then asked a player in a different organization about his initial transition to the US. His response indicated that even though he is excited to be in the US, his overall goal is to one day

play in MLB. He, like many other players, also credited God with helping them throughout their baseball and cultural journey. He said that:

Cuando yo recibí esa noticia de que venía a viajar para acá yo me sentí muy contento primeramente con Dios, conmigo mismo y con el equipo de verdad que me dio esta oportunidad de venir a viajar para acá, a jugar para acá. Yo sentía que yo no lo iba a defraudar, y aquí estamos tratando de hacer el trabajo como se tiene que hacer, seguir metiendo mano cada día, seguir superándome y para adelante, para tratar de llegar a grandes ligas con el favor de Dios.

When I received the news that I was coming to travel here I felt very happy, first of all with God, with myself and with the real team that gave me this opportunity to come to travel here, to play here. I felt that I was not going to disappoint him, and here we are trying to do the job the way it has to be done, keep reaching out every day, keep improving and moving forward, to try to reach the big leagues with God's help.

Even though players often mentioned how their experiences were extremely positive, a few players knew they had to adapt to the US culture to succeed personally. One player, in his second season from the Dominican Republic, said that there was a brief time where he felt out of his comfort zone. He then realized that he must adapt to be successful in the US. He said that the first thing he needed to do was understand the culture of the US and adapt to it. He says that “After I realized how it works...I took it as normal. As something I need to do to move forward.” Another Dominican player, who has been playing in the US since 2013, suggested that English alleviates some issues while adjusting to life in the US, while also noting that English is the biggest obstacle to overcome. During the interview, this player called himself a “boy” when he came to the US because he was still a teenager but he has since evolved into a man. The transition was difficult outside of baseball, but he got used to it once he got a firm grasp of English. Another Latino player remembered his initial transition as a fond memory, mainly because he had many Latinos on his team to help ease the burden of a cultural transition like he experienced. His first destination after being promoted to the US was in Tampa, where he played in an extended spring training league. At first he was very nervous, but it was then a “very nice

experience and very nice memory.” He later acknowledged that there are many Latinos, so they help each other adjust and learn English. He feels comfortable being around Latinos, as they are all pursuing the same goal and sharing similar experiences in the US and in professional baseball.

The theme of having a positive transition experience rings true for most, but not all players. While most players said their transition was overwhelming positive, a Venezuelan player who pursued college instead of professional baseball in the US disagrees. He said that “if I tell you it was a pleasant experience, I am lying to you.” He had many issues initially, mainly the language barrier. He was 17 when he left Venezuela and went to Memphis, hardly knowing any English. He felt extremely alone missed his family every day. He also acknowledged that it was hard to go from the comfort of home where he felt like he had everything he wanted, except the opportunity to play professional baseball. While he struggled, he said that having the opportunity to play baseball in the US was worth all of the hardships that he faced. It took this player “a lot to adapt to the culture of the United States – the language more than anything.”

According to these players, learning English is the foundation to all other cultural aspects in the US. If players are able to have a firm grasp on English, then everything else comes easier and is less stressful because they are able to easily communicate. While learning English is difficult, the players mentioned that once they can communicate in English, then their adaptation to the US becomes easier. Dissatisfaction for Latino players in the US seems to be tied to not being comfortable with English. The more players learn and practice English, the better their experiences tend to be. Thus, their beautiful experiences can be tied back to the knowledge of English as a factor for their positive experiences.

## Cultural Differences Between Latin America and the US

While the previous section discussed their transitions as being more positive than negative, this section focuses on the cultural differences between the players' home countries and the culture of the US. It is important to note that a majority of these cultural differences did not impact their acculturation in a negative way, but rather the players were often unprepared for the differences they faced. The food, traffic, and cleanliness of the US was surprising, but so was the overall beauty of the US. For instance, one young Dominican player, in his first year in the US, mentioned that he first noticed the beauty of the US:

Yo creo que lo que primero me sorprendió fue el lugar, nunca me había tocado a mí vivir o estar en una ciudad yo creo que tan bonita y diferente, la cual es Florida. Los parques que hay recreativos para ir, la ciudad demasiado grande, las personas. Yo creo que son muchas cosas que me impresionaron, pero de las que me acuerdo y las importantes yo creo que fueron esas de que la ciudad es muy bonita y totalmente diferente.

I think what first surprised me was the place, I had never had to live or be in a city I think was so beautiful and different, which is Florida. There are recreational parks to go to, the city is very big, the people. I think there are many things that impressed me, but the ones that I remember and the important ones I think were those that the city is very beautiful and totally different.

The cultural differences seemed to be at the forefront more for the players from Venezuela. While there are cultural differences, there are also differences in the safety and security compared to the US, which was present in their responses. One player noted that you “always feel calm and safe in the streets” in the places he has been in the US. His experiences in the US have been “incredible” and that the US is a beautiful country with many opportunities, both in baseball and out of baseball. The security and safety in the US is also the biggest difference for a young Venezuelan playing Arkansas. He said:

Comparado con el Venezuela de ahora es muy diferente en todo. En la seguridad, en las reglas, en todo. Los semáforos. Que aquí todos prestan atención a los semáforos, cuando está en rojo ellos paran. Allá no [en Venezuela], está en rojo y siguen derecho.

Compared to Venezuela today, it is very different in everything. In security, in the rules, in everything. The traffic lights. Everyone here pays attention to the traffic lights, when it is red they stop. Not there [in Venezuela], if it is red they continue straight.

Another Venezuelan player, who had only been in the US for three months and is living in the Atlanta Braves facility in North Port, Florida, also mentioned traffic as a main difference between the US and Venezuela. He said that he has not seen much of the US since he everything he needs is in the Braves' facility, including a dining area and dormitories. However, he does have to leave occasionally, both for necessity and pleasure. He will need to leave to get a haircut, for instance. He described the biggest differences are the "small things," which he claimed are cleaner streets and how "everyone respects the traffic signs." He then says that even though there are bad things currently happening in Venezuela - mainly safety concerns - he is still proud to be Venezuelan.

Aside from the safety that players felt in the US, players also experienced in other aspects of life too. For one 25-year-old Venezuelan player currently in Northwest Arkansas, it was the differences in buildings stuck out to him the most. He said that the first time he arrived in the US everything was "very orderly and very clean...there were very large buildings that you don't see much in Venezuela." One Dominican pitcher, who at the time I interviewed him was playing in Charleston, South Carolina but has since been promoted to a team in Bowling Green, Kentucky, said that the accessibility to food is much easier in the US than in the Dominican Republic. He says that back home, most fast food restaurants close before 10:00pm. However, he gets hungry after games and has the ability to find almost any food he wants. He says that ordering food, and life in general is extremely easy to navigate.

A select few players experienced significant cultural differences while in the airports in the US for the first time. One player recalls experiencing cold weather for the first time in his

life. He flew into Atlanta originally and did not know that Georgia would be cold in February. He commented that when he walked outside it was like “walking into a freezer.” He says that out of all of the differences he experienced, the first “chilling cold” is what surprised him the most. A teammate of his also recalls being surprised during his initial travels to the US. He was surprised how large the Atlanta airport was and the amount of technology in the airport. He expanded on this by saying:

De allá el aeropuerto prácticamente uno de los aeropuertos más grandes, más transitados del país y creo que del mundo entero, no sé. El aeropuerto de Atlanta. Me sorprendió la tecnología que tienen y eso porque es muy diferente a la tecnología que tenemos en Venezuela... Completamente todo es diferente a lo que uno tenía acostumbrado.

The airport is practically one of the largest and busiest airports in the country and I think in the whole world. The Atlanta airport. I was surprised by the technology they have and that because it is very different from the technology we have in Venezuela... Everything is completely different from what I was used to.

Another Venezuelan player also mentioned the culture shock he initially faced in the airport for the first time. He described his first time in the airport in the US as a scary experience:

Bastante cómico porque cuando entré al aeropuerto aquí en Estados Unidos no sabía nada. No sabía leer el inglés, nada, lo único que yo sabía de inglés era decir “hello”, más nada. Estaba en cero, estaba muy tímido. No te voy a negar que no sentía miedo, sentía alegría pero a la vez miedo porque estoy en otro país, otra cultura.

It was quite funny because when I got to the airport here in the United States I didn't know anything. I couldn't read English, nothing, the only thing I knew about English was to say “hello”, plus nothing. I was at zero, I was very shy. I will not deny that I did not feel fear, but I felt joy but at the same time fear because I am in another country, another culture.

**Food.** Another aspect of life in the US that the players mentioned as a big difference than back in their home countries was the food culture. Food is very important in the Latin American community, and this was clear in many responses by the players. While there is a greater variety in food options in the US, the players mentioned how they miss the food back home. This was something that was hard to get used to in the US. The former Venezuelan player and current

coach in Pensacola, Florida said that the biggest change for Latinos is the food. He said that the Latinos are used to “a lot of rice, a lot of black bean, and a lot of chicken. But it is something that I know as Latin Americans, we really miss the food.” Similarly, another player in South Carolina admitted that the hardest part of his transition was not the language or other customs, but it was the “very different” food culture that was the hardest to overcome. He said, “In my country, you are used to eating differently than here...the food is very, very different and that’s what I miss the most.” Lunch and dinners in Latin American countries tend to consist of rice, beans, and meat. In the US, this is not very common unless one seeks out a restaurant that serves these. Having one way of eating for essentially one’s entire life to then suddenly having to change these habits weighs on players. One player says that with food, and everything else in the US, “you always look for a way to adapt and move on until you get used to it.”

**Family.** In addition to food, players noted how they miss their families and they oftentimes feel alone without them. Latin American countries tend to lean collectivistic, which means that people are more family-oriented with an emphasis on the well-being of the larger group they belong to. The US, however, is individualistic where the well-being of an individual is often valued more than family or other groups they identify with. This contrast was clear to a few players. A Dominican player who is playing professionally in Augusta, Georgia, mentioned that the hardest thing about playing in the US is being far from family. However, to fill this void, he relies on teammates. Since Latino players are far from their families in Latin America, they “get used to the journey through companionship.” The team acts as a family because they are always together. This camaraderie allows the players to feel comfortable around each other and their tight bonds with teammates fills the void of family.

A Mexican player in Montgomery, Alabama, said that he leans on his baseball family since his real family is back in Mexico during the season. This is a very similar sentiment offered by the aforementioned player. The Mexican player said that it is especially hard to be without family while pursuing baseball, and he does not see them at all during the six-month baseball season. In baseball, he feels extra alone if he goes on a “bad streak” because it is his career and he needs to perform to make it to the major leagues. His family is not there to help him through the hard times and he often is unable to call his family after a difficult game because it is too late. To accommodate for the lack of family, he relies on his teammates when he is struggling with his performance and when he misses his family. He feels an added pressure to perform well because he is “fighting to give them the best chance” financially.

The individualism and collectivism difference was also mentioned by one player who said the way of life in the US is completely different than back in the Dominican Republic. He stated the main difference he notices between the two countries is the way in which people work. In the Dominican Republic, people “work to live and they enjoy themselves.” In the US he feels that people live to work and they do not enjoy themselves as much as Dominicans do. This player also believes that people in the Dominican Republic “live to be calm,” which is something that he does not see as much in the US. He then mentioned that Dominicans enjoy spending as much time with family as possible, which he does not believe is valued in the US.

The ways in which Latinos act in comparison to Americans was also mentioned heavily, both in baseball and in everyday life. A Venezuelan player currently in Little Rock, Arkansas said that Latino players and fans are completely different than Americans. He stated that the main difference in baseball is that there is “a lot of adrenaline in Venezuela. The fan base in Venezuela is more tense and the one here is more passive.” He said that Latino players

oftentimes play with more passion and because of that, “it is easier for a Latino to dominate the fan base here in the United States.” Similarly, one Puerto Rican player said that it unique being a Latino in a clubhouse full of Americans because of similar adrenaline-filled personalities. While he thinks that it is not difficult to be a Latino, it is different because “we are always shouting and we are always speaking loudly. Sometimes we forget those things and it is not the same culture as us.” The same player said that he has an advantage being a Puerto Rican player in the US because he was familiar with the US culture growing up in a US territory. He mentioned:

Por lo menos para los puertorriqueños, para mí, es un poco diferente porque nosotros tenemos el privilegio de que somos territorio de los Estados Unidos. Es diferente porque nosotros los puertorriqueños podemos venir para Estados Unidos cuando nosotros queramos. Lo que es un poco diferente es al nosotros mover para acá, como quien dice, "Vivir en Estados Unidos es un poco diferente", pero para nosotros los puertorriqueños no es tan difícil como los dominicanos, personas de otros países.

At least for Puerto Ricans, and for me, it is a little different because we have the privilege of being a territory of the United States. It is different because us Puerto Ricans can come to the United States whenever we want. What is a little different is when we move here, like who says, "Living in the United States is a little different", but for us Puerto Ricans it is not as difficult as the Dominicans, people from other countries.

While everything up to this point was relatively positive or neutral valanced regarding their transitions and what they note as significant cultural differences, a few players mentioned how they sometimes felt out of place of discriminated against because of their race and/or nationality. For one player, he feels that outside of baseball, Americans view him differently because he is an immigrant. He said in the US, “when you are an immigrant, you are nobody.” He acknowledged that he is fortunate because he is not viewed that way in baseball, and since he spends the majority of his time around teammates, baseball is a very comfortable space for him. When I asked a Dominican player in Birmingham, Alabama, he had any specific challenges or struggles while in the US, he detailed one story that stuck out to him:

Una vez en Alabama, entré a un restaurante Waffle House se llama, y cuando entré se quedaron mirándome porque yo era el único de color oscuro cerca. Se quedaron mirándome hasta que me senté a comer, y hasta que no me fui no me dejaron de mirar como si hubieran visto algo raro. Creo que es una de esas pocas experiencias que he tenido en cuanto a eso.

Once in Alabama, I walked into a restaurant called Waffle House, and when I entered they stared at me because I was the only dark-colored one nearby. They stared at me when I sat down to eat, and until I left. They didn't stop looking at me as if they had seen something strange. I think it is one of those few experiences that I have had in regards to that.

Another player discussed how he often feels discriminated against outside of baseball because in the US, he believes Americans think that Latinos take jobs away from them. He said that he has had an overwhelming positive experience in the US, but the worst part of it is the discrimination he sometimes feels. He says that, “sometimes people from this country who do not accept or dislike a Latino because they think we take their jobs.” He goes on to say that “Many people say that we come to take away their work and to take opportunities away from them. But if we look at the reality of life, sometime we do jobs that people here do not like to do.”

Even though a few player mentioned unfortunate examples of discrimination, the majority of players said that the cultural differences are something fairly easy to adapt to. The weather, the technology, the traffic patterns and cleanliness of the country were all things that were different, but manageable. The most difficult parts of the transition were missing their families and adapting to the difference in food culture. Additionally, the Latin American culture of being jovial and fun was something that is often perceived as lacking with Americans. This section also acknowledges cultural differences due to individualistic and collectivistic customs in different regions of the world.

## **Religious Attributions**

Without being asked specifically about the religion, many players credited a Christian God as a reason why they were fortunate to be chosen to play in the US, but they also credited God for a relatively easy transition. One Venezuelan player, who had only been in the US for three months, said that even though he and his family faced issues back in Venezuela, God has his ways. This player never wondered “Why am I Venezuelan?” In response to his rhetorical question, he said, “God only wanted it that way. I am happy with my country and truly proud to be a Venezuelan and thank God for everything we have been through.” Another first year player also gave thanks to god for putting him in a situation to thrive, personally and professional. This player said he initially struggled with the pressure because everyone is a good player at this level, but he thanks “God that we got through it and we were able to open our eyes and realize what the situation is like that we are in.” A 25-year-old player currently playing in the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim affiliate in Madison, Alabama, said that God has given him many things, all thanks to baseball. He is pursuing a dream and he believes that he could not have done it without God. For another player who is currently on the Miami Marlins roster of MLB, but was in Triple-A when I interviewed him, said that he did not have any issues at all adjusting to a new culture and language, thanks to God. He said, “I have always prepared well for everything, that’s the truth. Thank God I haven't had any problems at all since I arrived.” A player assigned to a Low-A team says that his transition has been fairly easy because he is in the midst of pursuing a dream:

A mí me ha ido muy bien, me ha gustado mucho la experiencia. Desde chiquito he querido venir aquí con mi familia, pero se me dio la oportunidad primero a mí. ¿Qué mejor que venir a hacer lo que te gusta? No estar por ahí haciendo otras cosas que no quisieras hacer, estoy aquí queriendo lo que hago, amando lo que hago y muy bien gracias a Dios, desenvolviéndome bien igual que mis compañeros y fino, gracias a Dios.

It has gone very well for me, I really liked the experience. Since I was little I have wanted to come here with my family, but I was given the opportunity first. What better way than to come and do what you like? Not being around doing other things that you don't want to do, I am here wanting what I do, loving what I do and I'm doing very well thank God. I'm developing well just like my teammates, as well. And I'm doing fine, thank God.

These players credited God directly as a reason why they have the opportunity to pursue their dream, while most other players who wanted the same opportunity did not receive it. For most of these players, they were the select few who were able to have the opportunity to chase a dream and play in the US. Baseball is also a way to lift them and their families out of poverty, which is something that many players come from. Because they were able to leave when most others had to stay behind, they may be more religious because of their opportunity to escape to the US. Since there is not enough information to make this this connection, more research needs to be done that asks questions about religion directly and if Latino players deem themselves as more religious than both American players and the Latinos who were left behind in their home countries.

This section aims to answer RQ<sub>2</sub> regarding the cultural transitions of Latino MiLB players. Their transitions were positive, even though there were clear cultural differences and occasional instances of discrimination. The players mentioned how they were initially surprised in their arrival to the US through lawfulness, cleanliness, and also the climate. While the teams may have communicated similar instances to the players, I believe they were not completely ready for what they were about to encounter. The differences in food were discussed by players, as were relying on their teammates to fill the void of not having their families with them. Being able to communicate with them, in English, significantly contributed to their positive experiences. Lastly, they credited a Christian God for their positive experiences, which may indicate they are more religious than Latinos who are not playing professionally in the US.

### **RQ3: Which ingroups do Latino MiLB players describe as their primary identity?**

Research question three has three subcategories: (a) the Latino players often identified themselves by personality characteristics rather than other identities, (b) they are proud to represent their country, and (c) maturation is the main way which their identities have changed. To assist in answering this research question, I tried to gauge how the players view themselves and place themselves into social groups by asking questions about how they identify themselves and whether that has changed overtime. Since they are unable to change their race, ethnicity, or nationality, I was interested in the groups they identified with and if they tried to enter other groups during their time in the minor leagues. The players have previously described that they are extremely fortunate to be playing in the US. Many players also mentioned how they are proud to represent their home country and are glad to bring Latin flare to American baseball. However, one of the main themes is that the identity of being a baseball player surpasses all other identities in baseball.

#### **Personality Traits**

By aiming to understand how Latinos primarily identify themselves in order to understand which in-groups they belong to, I asked how the players describe themselves. More often than not, players described themselves as being extremely fun, positive, and lively. For instance, one player described himself as a “happy person who always tries to think positive and always leave the negative behind.” He is also “respectful, friendly, and a responsible person both in baseball and outside, as well.” Being friendly and happy are other traits that one player in the Chicago White Sox organization uses to describe himself, as well. He is a “fun person who like to enjoy every moment.” For one Cuban player, he says regardless of his performance that day, he is “always smiling.” The theme of positivity and enjoyment rings true for a player in Little

Rock, Arkansas who is always a “very happy person” and he enjoys spending time with his teammates. He later considered his teammates as his family, so he can be his true self around them. A player in Low-A in South Carolina also said that his teammates are like his family, so he feels comfortable being a “fun person” around them. A Puerto Rican player says even though he is 26-years-old, he still identifies himself as a “cheerful boy” because he wishes to express his joy of playing baseball to everyone who sees him. He said that he is a “cheerful and funny boy...I try to be a cheerful boy so that everyone always remembers be as cheerful as I am. I am always trying to do by best.” For one player, he loves showing off his fun-loving personality with his teammates by being a “prankster.” Even though he “loves to smiles, make jokes, talk to people, and be friendly” he also knows when he needs to be more serious and help out his Latino teammates when they are struggling. He “helps them when they need it.”

While being friendly, happy, and positive were at the forefront of their responses, they also described themselves in ways that align with preexisting stereotypes of being fiery and flashy. Some players mentioned how Latino culture is different than American culture because they have an energy that is not commonly found in American players. For one player, he described himself as positive and energetic by saying he is a “friendly person and a good friend...happy above all else.” In addition to being positive, he also noted that he has a “lot of adrenaline and a lot of attitude” that can irritate some non-Latino players. Playing with passion, he noted, can be mistaken for cockiness. However, that is never his intention. He just loves playing baseball and having the opportunity to pursue a lifelong dream of playing in MLB. One Venezuelan coach initially described himself by his energy. He said that he has always been energetic and that translates to the field. Now since he is in a coaching role, he still has his energy, but he mainly now like to help young players with baseball. Similarly, a Puerto Rican

player also labeled himself as “an energetic and aggressive player” but then pivots to helping his teammates and having fun with them. He said that he enjoys the game and always does his best on the field, but he loves to interact with his teammates and help them when they need him. This player has been playing in the US for eight years, so he wants to be a mentor to the younger players. One player directly acknowledged the difference between how Latinos play and how American players play, specifically in terms of energy. He claimed:

Yo creo que es importante porque nosotros tenemos una manera un poquito más diferente de jugar béisbol. Somos un poco con más energía, con más chispa y muchos de los compañeros de nosotros que no son latinos, obviamente se contagian de esa energía y podemos influir en su juego también. Yo creo que nosotros le traemos ese toque que muchas veces necesita el béisbol.

I think it's important because we have a slightly different way of playing baseball. We are a little more energetic, with more spark and many of our teammates who are not Latino, obviously are infected with that energy and we can influence their game too. I believe that we bring that touch that baseball often needs.

Many players described certain personality traits as inherently part of their Latino culture. Their personalities influence how they interact with one another off the field, as they seem to be extroverts who can find common ground with the rest of the team. Their energy and liveliness also translates to how they play. They play baseball with a certain energy and passion that may oftentimes get confused as being boastful or arrogant. Their positivity and joy may also be a reason why they do not struggle very much during their transition to the US because they have a positive mindset and embrace interacting with both their Latino and American teammates.

### **Proud to Represent Their Home Country**

Since the Latino players did not mention national identity as part of how they describe themselves, I asked each of them about the importance of their nationality in a follow-up question. Many times players communicated that being representing their country is vitally important to them. A player from Mexico said that he is representing Mexico whenever he plays.

He maintained that being Mexican is important because he carries his “Latin blood and represents Mexico internationally.” He also said that he does not just represent his hometown or his state, but rather he is representing Mexico on a larger stage through baseball. Other players, he argues, are doing the same thing which is why “most Latino players identify with each other.” For a Puerto Rican catcher, he also said that he is a representative of all of Puerto Rico, but also his family by having his last name on the back of his jersey. He articulated that there is a certain pride in representing Puerto Rico because he is an idol for all of the children who dream of playing professionally. A Dominican player agreed with the aforementioned sentiment by saying that his nationality is “everything” because he represents so many people everywhere he goes. He represents his entire nation and he also wants people who watch him play to know “how proud we are to come from where we come from.” This player later said that he has an obligation to set a good example in the US because he wants people to know how great Dominicans are, both on the field and off the field.

One player who hails from Puerto Rico said that his nationality is incredibly important to him. He then credits his upbringing in Puerto Rico as to where his passion for his nationality derives. Representing the flag is extremely important to him because he wants to recognize where he came from and how Puerto Rico helps mold him into the player and person he is. One Mexican player noted that he has a duty to represent Mexico in a positive light because he wants to show people in the US that Mexicans, and other Latinos, are good people who wish to do the right thing. They are passionate people who are chasing a dream and trying to provide a positive financial future for their families back home. The current coach and former player from Venezuela also agrees that representing all of Latin America is more important than their home country. He said:

Yo les digo a los jóvenes que tienen que aprender bastante de la cultura americana. Venimos de países diferentes, tenemos culturas diferentes, pero tanto los americanos aprenden de nosotros, como nosotros de ustedes. Siempre les dejo saber del respeto, la gente es muy respetuosa. De la disciplina y cómo trabajan tan duro. De verdad que es bastante importante.

I tell young people that they have to learn a lot about American culture. We come from different countries, we have different cultures, but both Americans learn from us, as we learn from you. I always let them know about respect, people are very respectful. Of discipline and how they work so hard. It really is quite important.

A Venezuelan player currently playing for a team in Mississippi said that nationality does not matter in professional baseball because there are so many nationalities that he does not think that one is superior over another. This is the player who attended college in the US and he says that nationality matters much more in college because there are not many Latinos who play college baseball in the US. Due to the influx of Latinos in professional baseball, he does not think that his Latin identity matters where he is currently playing. Likewise, when I asked one player the importance of his Venezuelan identity, he agreed that nationality is irrelevant, as being a baseball player and good teammate is more important to bridge cultures together:

Ahora mismo no mucho porque no la necesito, porque juego béisbol y el equipo me ayuda con todo eso... Se ha visto casos que muchas veces importa mucho, en casos, pero gracias a Dios mis compañeros son una clase de compañeros mente abierta, a ellos les gusta mucho conocer sobre nosotros, cómo somos nosotros, cómo es que nos llevamos en nuestro país. Nunca tenemos ese roce de que, "No, mira, él no es americano, es dominicano, no te pegues". Ellos siempre nos buscan mucho y nos quieren mucho, como si fuéramos igualito americano que ellos.

Right now not much because I don't need it, because I play baseball and the team helps me with all that... There have been cases that many times matter a lot, in cases, but thank God my teammates are a kind of open-minded teammates, they really like to know about us, how we are, how we get along in our country. We never have that friction like, "No, look, he's not American, he's Dominican, don't beat yourself up." They always look for us a lot and love us a lot, as if we were the same American as them.

National identity and pride may also be a reason why the Latino players describe themselves positively and in terms of their passion and energy when they play. Since they are the

national minority in baseball, they want to represent their country in a positive way by having fun with their play. This may get confused with being cocky or arrogant, but it seems that the players are just passionate because they are fortunate to represent their country through baseball. One Dominican player helps shed light on their passion because “the truth is that it is a pride to wear your nationality,” which is something that the American players do not think about because they are playing in a country where they are from. These responses in this section demonstrate that national pride is often at the forefront of their play.

### **Maturation as Identity Change**

Another way I attempted to understand how the Latino players may possibly change their identity to communicate with the Americans is by asking how they believe their identities change over time. Oftentimes the players were confused by the question or did not know how to respond. Sometimes they responded by saying just “no.” However, when they did respond with some insight, the players did not mention anything about altering their identities to accommodate to the American players and coaches, but they mainly discussed maturing and understanding the culture as ways their identity has changed. One player said that it is not his identity that changes, but rather his behavior and understanding of a new culture:

Yo creo que no tanto es la identidad. Yo creo que nosotros como que nos ajustamos a todo. Obviamente, estamos en un país que es una cultura diferente y obviamente hay muchas costumbres diferentes. Nosotros nos ajustamos pero va cambiando la misma identidad, la misma esencia de siempre, pero obviamente hay que hacer algunos ajustes porque hay cosas que en el país de nosotros es normal y hay cosas que hacemos. Probablemente, aquí no lo vean igual.

I think it is not so much identity. I think we kind of adjust to everything. Obviously, we are in a country that is a different culture and obviously there are many different customs. We adjust but the same identity is changing, the same essence as always, but obviously we have to make some adjustments because there are things that are normal in our country and there are things that we do. They probably don't see it the same here.

Similarly, a Venezuelan player claimed that his identity has changed over time, but it is to accommodate to the American culture. He said that one has to adapt to the American culture to feel comfortable in the US. Being aware of what the cultural differences are in Venezuela and the US was a way he felt like he matured. A veteran Puerto Rican catcher currently playing for the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp supposes his identity has changed due to his maturation in the US. He said that overtime he has matured as a person and a player, mainly because he had to get used to interacting with teammates from other countries. This allowed him to mature because he grew open to learning other cultures. Another player says that he arrived in the US as a teenager, and had to grow up fast because of the language barrier and the cultural differences. He is thankful for the struggles because it allowed him to grow and mature as a person. The notion of changing identities due to maturation also rings true with a 19-year-old player in the Atlanta Braves organization. When I asked about his changing identity he says that he has changed since he arrived in the US last year because he had to also navigate the linguistic and cultural adjustments. Additionally, he moved away from his family and the familiarity he had with the cultural of Venezuela was gone. Being uncomfortable allowed him to mature.

The responses offered by the players are insightful because they claim to not change their identities to align with the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches. Rather, they embrace the cultures of other nationalities and being around them has allowed them to grow and mature personally. They only mentioned changing their identity due to maturation, and not for other reasons. They also acknowledged throughout this results chapter that they enjoy learning about different cultures and backgrounds, and that everyone is supportive of one other, regardless of nationality or language spoken. Thus, it can be assumed that the identity of being a professional baseball player is more important than any other identity. The lack of division

between teammates and the support that the Latinos receive suggests that baseball acts as the bridge that connects players of all ethnicities, nationalities, and languages.

The responses by the players in this section assist in answering RQ<sub>3</sub> about how Latino MiLB players primarily identify themselves. The main takeaways are that the players describe themselves as positive, happy, energetic, and passionate. The players mentioned that their characteristics are part of Latino culture, and this also translates to their play on the field with the same traits. Moreover, they are proud to represent their home countries and Latin America through baseball, which is also why they play with passion. Lastly, the players only believed their identities changed as a result of maturation and not as an attempt to enter the space of the perceived dominant group of Americans.

Chapter 5 will be the discussion chapter in which I summarize the key findings and their implications. I will also connect the findings from Chapter 4 back to the literature and how this dissertation fills in the gaps of research previously discussed in Chapter 2. Limitations and future research will also be offered.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This dissertation uncovered the ways in which Latino MiLB players acculturate to a new country and culture through baseball. Additionally, this dissertation also aimed to reveal how players alter their identities to communicate with the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches. Through 24 interviews with current MiLB players and one interview with a current coach and former player, it was determined that learning and speaking English is the primary way that players acculturate. I found that the majority of the players described positive experiences because playing in the US was always a lifelong dream. Therefore, the players were happy to pursue this dream and also experience the American culture. Moreover, I concluded that players do not perceive themselves as altering their identities to communicate with their American counterparts, but rather the larger identity of being a baseball player surpasses any other identity. Furthermore, the perceived dominant group is not American players and coaches, but rather those who play baseball and speak English. The remainder of this discussion chapter will discuss the core findings, theoretical and disciplinary contributions, limitations and direction for future research, and a conclusion. It is important to note that these responses are not representative of the entire Latino MiLB population.

## **Core Findings**

This dissertation asked three research questions and each research question has multiple subcategories. Research question one asked about ways in which Latino MiLB players acculture to a new environment. There are two main categories for this research question: linguistic and behavioral acculturation. Research question two asked about the cultural transitions of the Latino MiLB players, while research question three focused on how the players alter their identities. Below are the core findings for each research question.

For the linguistic acculturation portion of research question one, the main finding is that English is central to feeling comfortable in a new environment. Most every player mentioned the importance of learning English, both to succeed on the field by communicating with their teammates and coaches and to adapt to life off the field. Players deemed themselves more comfortable in the US if they know English, as they can navigate life on their own while also feeling less isolated. Additionally, players declared that knowing English is an advantage because it puts them a step ahead of players who do not speak English. This helps to create opportunities in life after baseball should they choose to stay in the US. Moreover, the players mentioned how there is a strong presence of bilingual players and coaches to help them communicate. These bilingual individuals help alleviate communicative issues between players and coaches. Even though there may be language barriers, it is relatively easy to find a player, coach, or even trainer to help if an interaction needs assistance. Schinke et al. (2013) found that not fully understanding the host language is a major stressor for athletes, and while this is partially true, the players interviewed did not mention that fully understanding English is necessary for their well-being. Rather, the process of asking for help seems to work equally as well. It is helpful that there is always someone around who can translate if needed, but also the

process of learning English helps create friendships. Thus, one can be learning English and does not need to master it to be completely comfortable in a new culture. Furthermore, Schinke and McGannon (2014) argue that athletes struggle because they must adapt without the help from players or coaches. This is unequivocally contradictory to my findings because athletes from all cultures want to help each other.

The academies in the Dominican Republic helped lay a linguistic foundation for the players once they arrived in the US. The academies are where players train for the chance to be promoted to play in the US. It also teaches players about US culture and what to expect when they arrive, all while teaching them the basics of English. However, some players were critical of the English taught in the academies because, while they felt like it gave them a good foundation, it did not teach them enough to use in conversation. Even though it may not have taught them enough to be fluent, the basic knowledge of the language helped when they arrived in the US and were completely immersed in the US culture.

English-speaking players were also mentioned as being extremely supportive of the Latino players by teaching them English. Similarly, the Spanish-speaking players try to teach their American teammates Spanish, as both groups tend to have a desire to learn the other language. By taking the time to help others learn English or Spanish, this creates tight-knit bonds that develop into friendships. These intercultural friendships were described by a few players as being “beautiful” because cultures are brought together. This allows players to be more comfortable around everyone on the team. Multiple Latino players even mentioned how they seek out American players to interact with because they want to learn English and the American culture. This internal drive to learn English was present in many interviews. Oftentimes players had uncomfortable interactions when they first arrived, so these negative experiences expedited

their willingness to learn English. These findings contradict what was previously known about social identity theory. Hogg and Turner (1985) believe that in order to improve one's self-esteem, individuals tend to marginalize others by putting them down. This negative behavior allows one to feel better about themselves by reinforcing their place in the in-group. Such behavior was not found in this dissertation, as players from all races, ethnicities, and nationalities come together and create friendships through the process of learning English.

Likewise, this dissertation contributes to co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998). Co-cultural theory assumes that there is a dominant group, which is usually White, middle to upper-class men. Moreover, those in the non-dominant group have difficulties entering into the perceived dominant group (Orbe, 1998a). This theory, however, assumes that in every situation the perceived dominant group is based mainly on race and gender. This dissertation finds that race does not matter in baseball when it comes to the perceived dominant group. Rather, players who speak English are the perceived dominant group. The perceived non-dominant group, which is assumed to be Latino players, can enter into the dominant group, even with racial, ethnic, and nationality differences, by learning to speak English. The use of language has yet to be considered in co-cultural theory, and this dissertation contributes to our knowledge of this theory.

Moreover, co-cultural theory investigates specific communication tactics that one uses during communication. Co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998a) acknowledges that, while there is often a dominant power structure in place, those who are not in the perceived dominant group share similar experiences. Orbe (1998a) identifies examples of groups who are often marginalized, including racial and ethnic minorities, and how each of these marginalized groups share similar communicative patterns and experiences while interacting with the perceived dominant group. In

For this dissertation, even though I interviewed players of different ages and nationalities, they voiced similar experiences about their acculturation in the US.

Orbe (1998a) and Orbe and Roberts (2012) offer many types of communication strategies that can be utilized during communication interactions, including emphasizing commonalities, developing positive face, manipulating and dispelling stereotypes, intragroup networking, and utilizing liaisons. These strategies are applicable to the Latino players interviewed, as they incorporate these strategies to better accommodate to the perceived dominant group of Americans. More specifically, emphasizing commonalities was something that I noticed through the interviews. A main commonality is learning English, but additionally, some Latino players talked with me about how they want to communicate with their teammates and talk about things outside of baseball. For instance, one player claimed that he was the only Latino relief pitcher and he wanted to chat with other relief pitchers in the bullpen about non-baseball related things to feel more included in the team. Furthermore, one of the practices of co cultural groups is exemplifying strengths Orbe (1998a). Multiple players described the importance of playing with Latino flare rather than accommodating to the baseball traditions of the US. This example is one instance of exemplifying strengths of a co cultural group.

In terms of behavioral acculturation for research question one, the players credited the organizations for their assistance in getting players prepared to play in the US. The organizations also help the players acculturate in the US, mainly the Atlanta Braves. Having support from the teams helped players feel comfortable because the teams take care of the logistics on their behalf. Players mentioned how the Braves care about the Latino players and the players feel they are at an advantage because the organization is committed to helping them learn English and make them comfortable with the US culture. These components help the players feel more comfortable

on and off the field. Other organizations may care about their players as much as the Braves do, but I was granted the most access with the Braves, so I am more familiar with how they assist their Latino players. The last main finding from this section is that baseball is critical to their adjustment to the US. While the language and culture of the US is different than what they knew growing up, baseball has always been their comfort zone. Playing baseball is often when players are at their happiest, so playing every day is beneficial to their well-being. Additionally, a few players revealed that baseball teaches them the culture and the language that they were not familiar with when they first arrived in the US, while also creating a sense of community with their teammates. Most of these players dreamt of playing professionally in the US, and they have reached this goal, even if they are not yet in MLB. Overall, they are extremely happy with the situations they are in, regardless of their stage in the minor leagues.

This dissertation also uncovers what the cultural transitions of the Latino MiLB players in the US South are like for research question two. Mainly, their transitions were overwhelmingly positive and many players even called their transitions “beautiful.” While there were brief instances of culture shock, the players’ experiences were rarely negative. Players discussed how clean and beautiful the country is and how the law is respected, while also expressing their excitement for being here from their first day in the US. Players detailed personal accounts about their first day in the US as sheer joy they had because they had the opportunity to live in the US, both their dream and their families. Some cultural differences between the players’ home country and the US were discussed. The cleanliness of the US was commonly mentioned, as was how the traffic is much more organized here compared to some Latin American countries. Additionally, a few players from Venezuela mentioned how they feel safe in the US because the law is followed and there is a sense of security that is oftentimes not

felt back in Venezuela. Thus, they wish to remain once their careers are over. Other examples of cultural differences is the food culture in Latin America versus the US, the climate, and the lack of having one's family. To fill the void of not having their families, players rely heavily on their teammates because they spend most of everyday with them. The last central finding in this section is the significance of a Christian God. Multiple players mentioned how they were blessed with a good transition because of God. The players tended to be religious, which may be because they have an opportunity that some back home do not have or because most Latin American countries have a large Catholic population (Religious Affiliation in Latin America, n.d.). Overall, the players' transitions from Latin American countries to the US were much more positive than negative. It should also be mentioned that it is possible the players described their experiences as positive because of a sense of obligation to the organizations. These players were asked by the organizations to participate, so they may have responded well to my questions because they do not want to upset their organizations who gave them an opportunity to play professionally. There is also a power dynamic at play, as their bosses requested their participation. These two elements may factor into their positive responses.

Research question three also yielded significant findings about how Latino MiLB players primarily identify themselves. Some players described themselves as being fun, happy, and positive. Other players described themselves that align with preexisting stereotypes of being fiery and flashy (Bjarkman, 1994; Regalado, 1998), and playing with passion (Ferrucci et al., 2016; Osmer, 2011). The players credited their personality to both the Latino culture they come from, while also saying they also are in the midst of pursuing a lifelong dream of playing baseball in the US. Players also attributed their passion to representing their home country while playing in the US. Latino players are the ethnic minority in baseball, so they want to show the

fans the passion they have for both their countries and baseball. Lastly, players mentioned their identities have changed overtime due to maturation. Oftentimes the players arrived in the US as teenagers, so they had a few years to grow and mature while in the US. This maturation has allowed them to learn English and understand US culture. It is important to note that not a single player mentioned changing their identities to fit into the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches. Rather, they are proud of their Latino heritage and they embrace their culture while in the US.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This dissertation used two main theoretical frameworks and applied it to Latino MiLB players: acculturation and social identity theory. The interviews contribute to both acculturation and social identity theory literature, specifically through the prism of sport. There are clear contributions to both theories, mainly acculturation. The players did not mention much that contributes to social identity theory, but the main finding is that the players do not alter their identities in the way that social identity theory argues.

Those who study acculturation argue that those in contact with other cultures change due to one's experience and time in another location and culture (Berry, 2005). The behavior shifts that individuals experience include speaking the new language (Berry, 2005), which was a significant finding from this dissertation. Interestingly, Berry (1980) argues that when one acculturates to a new environment they will either retain their cultural identity or engage with other groups. The interviews determined that doing both are possible, rather than choosing one or the other, in the short term. Multiple players mentioned that they are proud of their heritage and embrace their cultural identity while interacting with players of all backgrounds and by playing with passion on the field. Many Latino players also described a desire to communicate with

Americans because they found an interest in their culture, while also using them to help teach the Latinos English. Therefore, this dissertation found that retaining one's identity while also interacting with other groups is a successful process because all of the players described adjusting to the US well, and doing so by retaining their culture and interacting with the Americans. These findings advance acculturation research by demystifying what Berry (1980) had previously suggested.

Motivational orientation helps to explain why people leave their home country (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018) as there are "push" and "pull" factors (Berry, 1992). Players were lured to the US because they had a lifelong dream to play baseball professionally in the US, while also helping their families financially. Thus, this attraction is part of the "pull" component because there was something positive that "pulled" players here. In line with acculturation research (Berry, 1992; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018), individuals who were "pulled" did not have many issues during acculturation because they chose to leave their home country to pursue an opportunity. This specifically contributes to acculturation literature because no known research is published on the "push" and "pull" perspectives in sport. This dissertation found that the athletes did not struggle hardly at all, mainly because they have wanted the opportunity to play baseball in the US for their entire lives.

In line with acculturation research, as well, is the notion that sojourners who have a positive outlook tend to have pleasant experiences while abroad (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Most of the players interviewed mentioned how they are positive people when describing themselves, which may be a factor as to why they do not struggle with the transition. Even though there are instances of culture shock and other minor issues, the players overall had overwhelming positive experiences. Berry et al. (1987) and Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018)

posit that sojourners are confronted with five categories as a result of acculturation: physical changes, biological changes, cultural changes, new social relationships, and individual psychological changes. While these are indeed significant changes, the players were able to overcome them relatively easily. Moreover, it has been argued that sojourners face uncertainty and anxiety in a new culture (Gudykunst, 2005; Kim, 2005). While they face uncertainty, the players are able to easily work through it by relying on their teammates, as they act as a host family during the season. There are occasional instances of anxiety, but not very many. Players embrace the cultural differences, and as a result, do not struggle very much during their transition. Another reason why players are not overwhelmed with uncertainty or anxiety is because they are playing baseball every day and have an opportunity to live a dream. Since playing professional baseball was a lifelong goal, they knew that they would be faced with challenges in a new culture. Since these players were “pulled” to the US to play baseball, they still should be categorized the same as other individuals who leave their home country to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

This findings from this dissertation add to what is previously known about acculturation, specifically regarding the academy system that MLB has in place in the Dominican Republic. Many players mentioned how their transition to the US began while in the academies in the Dominican Republic, where the teams taught them about US culture and English. Thus, this dissertation found that acculturation to the US begins in the Dominican Republic, rather than the US. No known study investigates how acculturation to one country begins in a different country. This dissertation contributes to intercultural communication literature in this way.

This dissertation also contributes to social identity theory, which argues that people group themselves based on one’s belief of who they are, as this increases sentiments of self-esteem and

self-worth (Hogg & Turner, 1985; Tajfel, 1978; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Individuals place themselves in group who share similar mental depictions (Turner & Oakes, 1986). These self-perceptions are how groups form, as there are perceived dominant and perceived non-dominant groups in every situation (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Thus, there are in-group connections and out-group disconnections. While the players occasionally mentioned being Latino or their nationality, there are not clear groups that they define themselves as. This could be why there is no division on the teams, as the players do not group themselves separately from the perceived dominant group of American players and coaches. Thus, it seems as if there are no in-group/out-group dynamics in MiLB based on race, ethnicity, or nationality. Rather, the perceived dominant group is English-speaking players, and to enter into this space, players need to learn English to feel comfortable and included. The findings highlighted that players are self-motivated to learn English because they want to feel comfortable in the new environment, while also feeling included on the team. Since they wish to feel a sense of community while in the US, they do so by pressing themselves to learn English.

This dissertation also has practical implications which can aid players in their cultural transitions. Before I was allowed to communicate with players from the Braves, their Assistant Director of Minor League Operations said that he would only allow me access if I send him my dissertation once I am finished so he can analyze what their organization does well and how they may improve. I will honor the Braves' request by sending this dissertation to them once it is completed. Moreover, I was recently contacted by the Arizona Diamondbacks to offer suggestions for how they may help their players. They requested full text of a similar article I wrote in addition to any other materials I have that may help their players. I will also send them this dissertation once it is finished. The findings from this dissertation have the potential to

impact how organizations help players acculturate to the US. From the findings, I would recommend to teams that in addition to teaching their Latino players English and US culture, it would be important and worthwhile to have the American players learn Spanish and about Latin American culture. The Miami Marlins are the only known franchise that does this, as it helps in communication on the field and away from the field with their teammates. This program also allows teammates from all cultures bond and helps Latin American players feel comfortable and supported by the organization (Wagner, 2019). Additionally, multiple players mentioned how they missed the food from their countries. Filling this void is something that teams can easily assist with, as they may be able to cater this food to the clubhouse occasionally. Having the familiarity of something as simple as delivering food they love can help them feel comfortable. This would also teach the American players Latino culture, which would strengthen team bonds. Strong and positive relationships may even improve the players' performance on the field, which will help their careers and the teams who are investing in them.

### **Disciplinary Contributions**

Specifically with the acculturation of athletes, it has been previously noted that international athletes are faced with stress from being in a new cultural environment while also navigating the stress from pursuing professional sport (Schinke et al., 2016). Stress is not something that was mentioned in the interviews, but rather they embraced the cultural differences. International athletes have previously been known to have different practice routines (Schinke et al., 2016), expectations of diet (Schinke et al., 2013) and cultural differences through sport itself. Players did not address different practice routines and expectations. However, they did mention how they missed the food culture from back home. Even though they missed meat, rice, and beans as their staple diet, they were able to adjust somewhat easily to the food

expectations in the US. A few Latino players discussed how there is a clear difference in the way that they play with passion, and how the US players and fans tend to be more reserved. While this was a difference, it was not something the players had issues adapting to. Battochio et al. (2013) also maintains that at least one teammate or coach speaks the language of any international player. This was found to be true, as players mentioned there is always someone who is bilingual. Furthermore, Weedon (2012) contends that not knowing English was the biggest stressor for international athletes in the EPL academies, so learning English became the top priority for these players. This dissertation has the same findings, as many players say learning English is the single most important part of their transition, oftentimes more than performing well on the field.

Players feel included through sport, as the team has been described by the players as family. Intercultural dialogue is promoted through sport, and sports serve as a bridge to understanding and embracing other cultures (Walseth, 2008). Similarly, players have the same goals and objectives (Carron, Brawley & Widmeyer, 1998; Morela et al., 2013), so they are able to have team cohesion this way. The players also echoed this sentiment, as they feel a sense of community on their teams, even though the majority of players are American and speak English. This dissertation advances research on athlete acculturation because it demonstrates that the players are committed learning the language and culture, while also seeking out engagement with the American players. Since the Latino players consistently mentioned feeling connected with their teammates, regardless of nationality or language spoken, teams with more Latino players may actually have a better team chemistry. This, in turn, may impact their on-field performance, as they are comfortable with the situation they are in and with their teammates.

The findings from this dissertation are also contrary to what was previously believed happened to these athletes as a result of acculturation. Schinke and McGannon (2014) contend that players are not given prior warning about what to expect in the host culture and that the language barrier takes a negative mental toll on the athletes. Stress, depression, and loneliness tend to be results of lack of expectations before arriving in a new country. This dissertation finds the complete opposite. The majority of players who participated in this study are aware of what to expect, both in terms of culture and language, from the academies they train in while in the Dominican Republic. Latino players are prepared to confront a new culture and already have a foundation of English before they arrive in the US. Thus, they experience acculturation to US culture while physically in the Dominican Republic. Most of the players I interviewed did attend the academies, but a few did not. This will be addressed later in this chapter.

This dissertation also advances sport communication literature because it focuses on how international athletes adapt to a new environment while playing sport at a high level. Sport, and baseball specifically, is a central reason why players acculturate so well because sport has been shown to bridge cultures and alleviate divisions (Walseth, 2008; Elling & Claringbould, 2005). Additionally, language is critical to both acculturate off the field, but it also allows players to communicate and improve their playing on the field. This is especially relevant for pitchers and catchers, as they are communicating on every pitch, albeit a lot is communicated nonverbally. More research needs to be conducted on how international athletes transition and the importance language has on one's ability to feel comfortable in a new culture while pursuing sport.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Even though this dissertation has produced significant findings, there are some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, I interviewed players mainly from the Dominican

Republic and Venezuela, as these are the two nationalities most prominent in professional baseball, aside from players from the United States (Lapchick, 2020). Players from these countries are assigned to the teams' academy in the Dominican Republic where they are taught about American culture. Therefore, the majority of the players said they feel comfortable in the US, and they also credited the academies for helping with this transition.

Out of the 25 interviews, only two players were from Puerto Rico and only one was from Cuba. These three players did not attend the academies, since Cubans must either make residency in another country or play in the Cuban league for six years to sign with a MLB team. Thus, Cubans do not attend the academies. Players from Puerto Rico also do not attend the academies because they are subject to the MLB Draft, since Puerto Rico is a territory of the US. Since only three of the 25 players, in addition to one Venezuelan who attended college in the US, did not attend the academies, their transitional experiences are different because they did not have the education about the US culture and English classes before arriving. Therefore, the overall findings may be applicable more to players who attended the academies rather than the players who were required to pursue alternative avenues to professional baseball. More research should be conducted on Cuban and Puerto Rican baseball players on their transitional experiences because they have to adapt more on their own rather than be aided by the organization first.

Additionally, this dissertation only focused on Latino MiLB players in the US South. The players' MLB parent franchise they are playing for dictates where they are assigned. This dissertation only inquired about the southern region of the US. The experiences of the players may be different in other regions of the US, as the regional culture, size of cities and towns, and the demographics of the population vary. For instance, the Toronto Blue Jays' High-A affiliate is

located in Vancouver, British Columbia. It is likely that the experiences of players in Vancouver are extremely different than those of a player in the US South.

Moreover, another significant limitation is that the gatekeepers assigned players to me to be interviewed. While I am extremely grateful to have been able to interview players, the selection process of players to participate in interviews was often unclear. Some teams said that they chose players to participate because they would be good players to interview because they were outgoing. Other teams chose players because they asked all the Latino players on the team if they wanted to participate, and only a select few wanted to volunteer. The players who were chosen may have had more positive experiences than the players on the team who did not participate. Thus, the selection process of players is a limitation that should be acknowledged.

Furthermore, an additional limitation is the length of time spent in the US and how that impacts their identity evolution over time. While some players mentioned that maturation during their time in the US changed their identities, some players are relatively new to the US. Some players were in their first year or two in the US, so their identities have not had the chance to change yet. A couple of players in the Braves organization specifically were only in the US for a couple of months, so the questions about their identities were not applicable to them. This is a limitation that should be addressed.

Another limitation that should be addressed is that the findings from this dissertation may not be applicable to other sports and other nationalities. The academy system clearly helps the players adapt to the US, but this is unique to MLB. Future research should be conducted on how other international players acculturate to the US in sports where there is no academy system, such as leagues like the NBA and NHL. Furthermore, future research can be conducted on individual athletes who compete worldwide, not just in a host country. For example, golfers and

tennis players often play tournaments throughout the world, so they must adapt to a myriad of cultures regularly. The ATP Tour, the highest level of competition in men's tennis, hosts tournaments over the course of the year in Australia, Austria, Belgium, China, England, Italy, and the US, among others (Tournaments, n.d.). Thus, players are confronted with potential cultural challenges week in and week out. The (Ladies) European Tour in golf, arguably the second best circuit behind the PGA and LPGA Tours, is similar to the ATP Tour in that they host tournaments weekly in different parts of the world. Locations that host tournaments range from Denmark, Germany, Kenya, Spain, the US and the UAE (European Tour Schedule, n.d.). Players from these tours come from around the world speaking different languages, so there is not one dominant culture they must adapt to. This may be extremely challenging, which can also impact their play. Additionally, there are not teams that the players are part of, like in professional baseball. Because these individual players do not have organizations committed to helping their transitions, they are on their own to navigate the cultural differences on a consistent basis. Future research should investigate ways in which these players acculturate, whether that is learning multiple languages or otherwise.

It is also worth acknowledging that the responses by the players may have been so positive because of the organizational culture were a part of. These organizations gave players a chance to chase their dream, and in many instances, escape poverty in Latin American. As Jermier (1991) argues, any representation of culture always comes from a certain point of view with particular interests. As such with the study of Latino MiLB players, their perspective may be one of gratitude for the organization, so they may not have wanted to say anything negative to a researcher who they do not know. These players also have certain interests, which is to remain with the team and to get promoted. They may believe that making negative statements about

their experiences in the organization could get them demoted or released, so they wish to praise the organization to protect their careers. While some organization communication scholars claim that words should be taken at face value for organizational workers (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001), other disagree by arguing that they may not disclose their experiences, especially if they are negative. As Schein (1985) posits, “To really understand a culture and to ascertain more completely the group’s values and overt behavior, it is imperative to delve into the underlying assumptions, which are typically unconscious but which actually determine how group members, perceive, think, and feel” (p. 3). Therefore, understanding these underlying assumptions would be beneficial to completely understand their experiences, but it is difficult to gain this type of access.

The last significant limitation is that some of the interviews were less effective as others. The interviews that did not go as well were interviews that were conducted in-person. While Lindlof and Taylor (2019) argue that in-person interviews are superior to mediated forms of interviewing, I found that interviewing over the phone and Zoom was much more effective. When I interviewed players in-person in both Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama, the teams considered me as part of the media. Members of the media are only allowed 15 minutes with each player, so I had to both eliminate questions and rush the questions that I did have. The players also did not seem to want to engage with me, as I was allotted time right after batting practice and before the game started. Thus, the players were eager to get ready for the game and the responses they gave me were often very brief and not full of thought. This limitation may be more of a product of timing rather than interviewing in-person. The interviews may have turned out differently if they were conducted earlier in the day or during an off day. This limitation was not catastrophic, as only four of the 25 interviews were conducted in-person. This limitation is

worthy to note because researchers may consider videoconferencing technology like Zoom first rather than scheduling interviews in-person. Of the players that were interviewed both over the phone and Zoom, they were usually in their apartments and were not hurrying to be somewhere else. The responses I acquired from these platforms were much more detailed and thoughtful than the interviews conducted in-person.

Most of these players mentioned in some capacity that they were playing professionally for both to accomplish a dream, but also to help their families who are often in dire financial situations. Because they are trying to better their families back home by providing for them monetarily, this may also impact their transitions, as they may feel like they have more to lose if they do not succeed. Thus, they may work harder to fit in and be more committed to performing well in baseball because they do not want to let their families down. Athletes who do not need sport as a way to escape poverty may approach a new situation differently. Since athletes who come from less humble upbringings may have other options should their sports careers falter, they may have different motivations for playing. Additional research should be conducted on international athletes from more developed nations, specifically in Europe. For instance, future research can investigate European hockey players in the US and their acculturation experiences. Most of the time, these athletes are White and English-proficient. As of 2017, 91% of students in primary and secondary school in Europe were studying English (Devlin, 2020). Since a majority of Europeans learned English in school, their acculturation may be different, as the language barrier might be a non-issue.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation sought to understand how Latino MiLB players acculturate to life in the US South. Since these players often are assigned to small cities and towns scattered across the

region, this dissertation intended to uncover ways in which these players tried to adapt to life in places like Rome, Georgia, Bowling Green, Kentucky, Montgomery, Alabama, and Jackson, Mississippi, among others. First, the main finding is that learning English is often the most important aspect of feeling comfortable in the US. The academies in the Dominican Republic helped to lay a linguistic and cultural foundation with the players, but many players said that practicing speaking English around the team helped them learn more and become more comfortable. Moreover, certain teams helped players acculturate by teaching them English and cultural norms specific to the US, such as punctuality. The players also claimed that their experiences, while challenging at times, were overwhelmingly positive. For the players, they have always wanted to play professionally in the US, so they are living a lifelong dream. They also credited the team as being their family away from home, even with American players. Additionally, the majority of players said that they teach their American teammates Spanish, and the Americans teach them English. This helps form bonds between teammates of all ethnicities and nationalities, which often develops into friendships.

This dissertation also sought ways in which Latino players alter their identities to align themselves with the perceived in-group of American players and coaches. The players did not mention changing their identities, aside from maturation, but rather they described themselves often as fun, passionate, and positive. They are also extremely proud to be Latino and proud of their home countries, and this can be seen on the field through their play and off the field. While they described themselves as often more jovial and energetic than their American counterparts, the Latino players described everyone as family, regardless of background. Thus, the identity of being a baseball player surpasses all other identities, as there does not appear to be in-group/out-

group divisions within the teams. Overall, the most central finding from this dissertation is that learning English helps international players acculturate more than anything else.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Minor League Baseball Study

#### Semi-structured interview questions for international baseball players (English)

1. What is your name, where are you from and how long you have been in the US playing baseball?
2. How do you describe yourself?
  - a. How important is national identity to you?
  - b. Has this changed over time?
3. Why did you decide to play baseball over another sport?
4. In thinking about your experiences on your team and your interactions with others, how would you describe the ways that your nationality matters here?
5. What surprised you when you first came to the US to play?
6. Think about your experiences when you transitioned from your home country to the US to pursue a baseball career. Could you tell me about that experience in as much detail as possible?
  - a. Tell me about your first day in the US
  - b. What was it like when you first came here?
  - c. How did you cope with the differences between your country and here?
  - d. What was hard for you?

- e. Who did you interact with when you first came?
  - f. Who helped you?
7. What is your knowledge of English like? When did you start learning?
  8. Do you think players who understand English are more comfortable here? How so?
  9. Have you had miscommunication between you and a player, coach, or staff member due to the language barrier?
  10. Have you had any struggles, with the language or culture, that you did not expect? If so, can you tell me about them?
    - a. What is the most difficult thing about American culture that you notice?
  11. How do you communicate with your teammates and coaches who are from the US and speak English?
    - a. Can you give me an example?
    - b. How much do you talk with them as compared with those from other countries?
  12. Who is your roommate when you are traveling?
  13. How has baseball, both the sport and your teams, helped your transition to the US?
  14. Final question. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Minor League Baseball Study  
Semi-structured interview questions for international baseball players (Español)

1. ¿Cómo te llamas, de donde eres, y cuántos temporadas llevas en los Estados Unidos jugando béisbol?
  - a. ¿Qué tan importante es la identidad nacional para ti?
  - b. ¿Ha cambiado conforme avanza el tiempo?
2. ¿Por qué decides jugar béisbol en vez de una otra deporte?
3. ¿Cómo te describes?
4. Piensa sobre tus experiencias durante tu tiempo en tu equipo y tus interacciones con otros. ¿Cómo describirías las maneras en que la nacionalidad importa aquí?
5. ¿Lo que te sorprendió cuando llegaste por primera vez a los Estados Unidos para jugar?
6. Piensa sobre tus experiencias como hizo la transición de tu país nacional a los Estados Unidos para persigue una carrera en béisbol. ¿Puedes dime sobre esa experiencia con el mayor detalle posible?
  - a. Dime sobre tu primera día en los EE UU.
  - b. ¿Cómo fue cuando llegaste aquí?
  - c. ¿Cómo te arreglaste como las diferencias entre tu país y aquí?
  - d. ¿Era duro?
  - e. ¿Con quien interactuaba como primero llegaba?
  - f. ¿Quién ayúdate?
7. ¿Cuál es tu conocimiento de Inglés? ¿Cuándo empezaste a aprender?
8. ¿Crees que jugadores quien entender inglés están más cómodo aquí?
9. ¿Tuviste algunos ejemplos de mala comunicación entre tu, otro pelotero, entrenador, o el personal debido una barrera idiomática?

10. ¿Tuviste algunas luchas culturalmente o lingüísticamente, que no anticipabas? Si si, puedes dime?
- a. ¿Qué es lo más difícil de la cultura americana que notas?
11. ¿Cómo comunicas con sus compañeros de equipo y entrenadores que son de los EE.UU. y hablan inglés?
- a. ¿Puedes dame un ejemplo?
  - b. ¿Lo mucho que hablas con ellos comparado con peloteros de otros países?
12. ¿Quién es tu compañero de cuarto cuando viajas?
13. ¿Cuánto haya ayudado el béisbol, ambos el deporte y tus equipos, a tu transición a los EE.UU.?
14. Pregunta final. ¿Hay algo más que te gustaría decirme?

APPENDIX B: TRANSLATOR'S DECLARATION

**AAHRPP DOCUMENT # 67**

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA  
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM**

**FORM: TRANSLATOR'S DECLARATION**

**NOTE:** *If more than one person works on a translation, each person shall sign this form but only one copy of the source and the translated document need be attached.*

**IRB Study #:**

**PI:**

To the University of Alabama Institutional Review Board:

I, \_\_\_\_\_Patrick Gentile\_\_\_\_\_, declare that I am fluent in and

understand the English language and the \_\_\_\_\_Spanish\_\_\_\_\_ language. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the attached translation(s) is true, accurate, and correct.

\_\_\_\_\_ This is a word-for-word translation, OR

  X   This is an equivalent translation (the meaning is the same).

The original (source) English document and the translated version are attached.

Other than my role as translator:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I have no other involvement with this research proposal.
2.   X   I will be serving as an interpreter/interviewer as well as a translator.\*
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I will be consulting about the findings.

Translator's Printed Name:   Patrick Gentile  

Address:       172 Roscommon Road, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405      

Phone:       205-317-4747       FAX \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CHART

\*All of the below information is applicable to when they were interviewed.

Length of Time in US	Country of Origin	Age	Assigned City
1 year	Venezuela	20	Tampa, FL
1 year	Dominican Republic	21	Augusta, GA
1 year	Dominican Republic	21	Tampa, FL
1 year	Venezuela	22	Tampa, FL
2 years	Cuba	19	Columbia, SC
2 years	Dominican Republic	23	Bowling Green, KY
2 years	Venezuela	23	Columbia, SC
4 years	Dominican Republic	22	Augusta, GA
5 years	Venezuela	23	Charleston, SC
5 years	Dominican Republic	24	Charleston, SC
5 years	Dominican Republic	25	Madison, AL
6 years	Mexico	23	Montgomery, AL
6 years	Venezuela	23	Montgomery, AL
6 years	Venezuela	24	Little Rock, AR
6 years	Mexico	24	Rome, GA
6 years	Dominican Republic	24	Jacksonville, FL
6 years	Venezuela	25	Fayetteville, AR
6 years	Venezuela	26	Jackson, MS
7 years	Mexico	24	Jackson, MS
7 years	Dominican Republic	26	Jackson, MS
8 years	Puerto Rico	26	Birmingham, AL
8 years	Dominican Republic	27	Birmingham, AL
8 years	Puerto Rico	27	Jacksonville, FL
9 years	Dominican Republic	25	Jackson, MS
10 years	Venezuela	26	Madison, AL
15 years	Venezuela	32 (coach)	Pensacola, FL

## APPENDIX D



April 14, 2020

Patrick Gentile  
Department of Telecommunication and Film  
College of Communication & Information Sciences  
Box 870172

Re: IRB # EX-20-CM-103: "The Acculturation Experiences of International Baseball Players in the Major League Baseball (MLB) Pipeline"

Dear Mr. Gentile,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under exempt review category 2 as outlined below:

*(2) 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) if at least one of the following criteria is met:*

*(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).*

The approval for your application will lapse on April 13, 2021. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the continuing review to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

March 16, 2021

Patrick Gentile  
Department of Telecommunication & Film  
College of Communication and Information Sciences  
The University of Alabama  
Box 870172

Re: IRB # EX-20-CM-103-R1 "The Acculturation Experiences of International Baseball Players in the Major League Baseball (MLB) Pipeline"

Dear Mr. Gentile:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.104(d)(2) as outlined below:

*(2) 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) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).*

The approval for your application will lapse on March 15, 2022. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.