Minority Youth Participation in an Organized Sport Program

Needs, Motivations, and Facilitators

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Abstract

The goal of the study was to examine youth participation in an organized sport program (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) to better understand how needs, motivations, and facilitators affected involvement. With a grounded theory approach, we drew on socioecological models, social determination theory, and the concept of facilitators to leisure as sensitizing frameworks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 participants (11 African American and 2 Latino boys aged 13–15) and 5 administrators of the program. As a result of the study, the needs-motivation-facilitators model was developed. The model includes several components: 1) the effects of innate psychological needs on the participation in the program, 2) motivations for participation in the program, and 3) the role of facilitators in promoting youth involvement in the program.

Keywords: *minority youth; sport program; needs; motivations; facilitators*

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A growing body of literature has documented the benefits of after-school recreational sports programs. Youth involvement in sports can instill confidence, promote positive values, and improve academic, social, and physical skills (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005; Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005; Olushola, Jones, Dixon, & Green, 2013). Participation in sports improves physical and psychological health and decreases obesity levels among youth (American College of Sport Medicine, 2002; Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Jacobsen, 2002). For minority youth, after-school sports programs have been found to decrease delinquency and serve as a buffer from negative effects of low socioeconomic status, discrimination, and neighborhood crime (e.g., Hartmann, 2001). While some studies have not found a link between sport participation and positive outcomes among minority youth (e.g., Miller, 2009; Spaaij, 2009), the prevailing paradigm in the field of recreation is that minority children's involvement in after-school sports programs is a means of fostering positive social, psychological, and physical development (Witt & Crompton, 1996). Given the importance of sport activities, this study will examine how minority youths' needs, motivations, and other factors facilitate participation in an after-school baseball program.

Traditionally, the provision of after-school sports activities in disadvantaged communities has been primarily the domain of not-for-profit organizations, churches, schools, and parks and recreation departments (Witt & Crompton, 2002). However, in recent years, professional sport leagues such as Major League Baseball (MLB) have begun to organize programs to involve disadvantaged youth in sport while, at the same time, providing them the opportunity to engage in positive, team-oriented activities that keep them "off the streets," teach community responsibility, and increase academic achievement (Major League Baseball, 2012a). Participation in such sports programs is likely to be affected by a plethora of socioecological factors related to individual youth needs, motivations, and psychological characteristics (Deci & Ryan, 2000); social contexts (e.g., influence of parents, peers, and coaches; Dixon, Warner, & Bruening, 2008); as well as communities in which they reside (e.g., accessibility of opportunities, physical environment, safety; Trussell, 2006). Few studies, however, have provided thorough examinations of factors that affect minority youth involvement in organized after-school sport activities (Busey, Batten, Young, & Bragg, 2007; Melnick, Sabo, & Vanfossen, 1992). This study is designed to begin to fill this gap. With a grounded theory approach, we draw on the socioecological models (Humpel, Owen, & Leslie, 2002), social determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), and the concept of facilitators to leisure (Raymore, 2002) as sensitizing frameworks.

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that affect minority youths' participation in an organized sport program from a socioecological perspective. The specific objectives were to 1) explore the effects of innate psychological needs among minority youth on their participation in the program, 2) examine motivations of minority youth for participation in the program, and 3) explore the role of facilitators in promoting youth involvement in the program. As a result of the study, we developed the needs-motivation-facilitators model of youth sport involvement, which shows how multiple factors may affect urban minority youths' participation in organized sport.

Literature Review

To provide the theoretical and empirical background for this study, the Literature Review will cover the following areas: socioecological models; self determination theory (SDT), motivation, and human needs; as well as motivations for and facilitators of youth participation in sport programs.

Socioecological Models

Socioecological models are widely used to understand people's health behaviors. They highlight that human actions are simultaneously affected by a plethora of interrelated factors, including individual intrapersonal traits (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, skills, cultural values), characteristics of the physical environment (e.g., access to recreation facilities, characteristics of neighborhoods), as well as social interactions, social systems, and public policies (Sallis & Owen, 2002).

Socioecological models have been useful in understanding the determinants of adolescent participation in leisure time physical activity (LTPA) and sport, including among minority populations (e.g., Casey, Eime, Payne, & Harvey, 2009; Elyer et al., 2002; Langille, 2010). The *intrapersonal factors* examined in previous research included sociodemographics (e.g., age, income, education, employment, race/ethnicity); biological or health factors (e.g., perceived health, BMI); and psychological issues (e.g., self-efficacy, perceived self-competence, attitudes and beliefs) (e.g., McNeill, Kreuter, & Subramanian, 2006; Sylvia-Bobiak & Caldwell, 2006). *Environmental factors* focused on social environment, physical environment, and policy/organizational issues. Those of the *social nature* included, among others, social support, role modeling, access to childcare, family/friend approval, and discrimination (e.g., Eyler et al., 1998, 1999; Martin & McCaughtry, 2008; McNeill et al., 2006). Correlates related to *physical environment* included access to parks and facilities, weather, safety, traffic and transportation, neighborhood design, quality of natural environment, as well as presence of sidewalks and streetlights (e.g., Estabrooks, Lee, & Gyurcsik, 2003; Eyler et al., 1999; Reis et al., 2009). Those of an *organizational nature* included zoning and transportation regulations, land use, and policies that support LTPA programs (e.g., Casey et al., 2009; Sallis et al., 2003, 2006).

The current study will examine a range of factors that affect minority youth's participation in an after-school sports program. They will include those at an individual level (needs, motivations, and intrapersonal facilitators), and those related to the social and physical environment in which the youths are immersed (interpersonal facilitators related to the effect of significant others and structural facilitators related to the availability of programs and facilities).

Human Needs, Self-Determination Theory and Motivations

Human needs and SDT. The idea that humans have essential needs that drive behavior has a long history in psychology (Hull, 1943; Murray, 1938). Identifying what the biological and psychological needs of people are, what constitute core human needs, and whether they can be arranged in a hierarchical manner constituted an important subject of theory development and research for the last 70 years (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010; Maslow, 1954; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). One of the more prominent theoretical frameworks that focus on the essential psychological needs that underlie behavior is the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). SDT consists of a number of "mini theories," including basic needs theory, organismic integration theory, and cognitive evaluation theory (Kleiber, Walker, & Mannell, 2011). According to the basic needs theory, humans have three basic psychological needs—the need for relatedness, autonomy, and competence. *Relatedness* refers to a sense of belonging to one's community and connectedness to other individuals, caring for others and being cared for. *Autonomy* describes behavior of an individual that is self-initiated in accordance with his or her interests and value system, that represents the expression of himself or herself. Finally, *competence* refers to a feeling of being effective and having skills and capacity to interact with one's social environment (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Many studies have supported the notion central to SDT that satisfaction of basic needs for auton-

omy, relatedness, and competence leads to improved well-being in many domains of life, including family, friends, relationship, school, and work (Milyavskaya & Koestner, 2011; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Satisfaction of these basic needs may affect a person's well-being either directly (as predicted by the SDT) or through enhanced motivation, which could serve as a mediator between needs satisfaction and well-being (Milyavskaya & Koestner, 2011).

There is some evidence that ethnicity may be an important factor affecting core psychological needs (Schutte & Ciarlante, 1998; Sheldon et al., 2001). With respect to leisure-based needs, a recent review by Walker (2014) uncovered five studies that explored cross-cultural differences. These included a study on core needs satisfaction among White, Asian, and Black British exercisers (Edmonds, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2010), and four studies on the satisfaction of expressed needs (Hunt & Ditton, 2001; Shaull & Gramann, 1998; Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2001; Winter, Jeong, & Godbey, 2004). The studies focused on nature-based recreation among adult Hispanic and Asian North Americans and did not examine adolescents' recreational sport participation. Overall, as Walker (2014) commented, research on cross-cultural differences in needs is exceedingly scant. We may argue that this is particularly true for cross-cultural research on the needs of minority adolescents that may be satisfied through recreational sport.

Motivation. While needs have been described as relatively stable factors that "compel people to seek out specific leisure activities and experiences" (Kleiber et al., 2011, p. 156), motivations actually move people toward action or, as Roberts (2001) put it, "give impetus to achievement behavior" (p. 4). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), individuals' actions can be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, or can lack motivation altogether—being amotivated. Intrinsic motivation means doing something for its own sake, because the activity is inherently enjoyable and interesting to an individual. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is associated with participation in an activity for the sake of certain outcomes that can be obtained through participation, rather than for the sake of pure enjoyment from participation. Extrinsic motivation can be divided into four types based on the level of its internalization (external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration), with external regulation being the least internalized and integration being the most internalized (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Amotivation is a state in which a person lacks interest and willingness to participate in an activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In the leisure context, Kleiber et al. (2011) developed a model that proposed how personality and needs are related to motivations for and intention to participate in leisure and how constraints and constraints negotiation enter into the process (see Figure 1). The model was unique, as it combined elements of the theory of planned behavior, constraints on leisure (Crawford & Godbey, 1987), and constraints negotiation (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993). It accounted for the effects of personality and sociocultural factors on leisure participation, but it did not specify where the latter would enter into the model and did not account for other possible factors that may facilitate leisure involvement.

Research on differences in leisure motivations between ethnic and racial groups is quite extensive, although it mostly comes from a single researcher and his colleagues (Walker, 2009, 2010; Walker & Wang, 2008). A large portion of this research focuses on cross-cultural differences in leisure motivations between Anglo Canadians and Mainland Chinese/Chinese Canadians, primarily in the context of outdoor recreation (Walker et al., 2001). This study is designed to contribute to this body of research by examining, among others, motivations for participation in an organized sport program among African American and Latino adolescents.
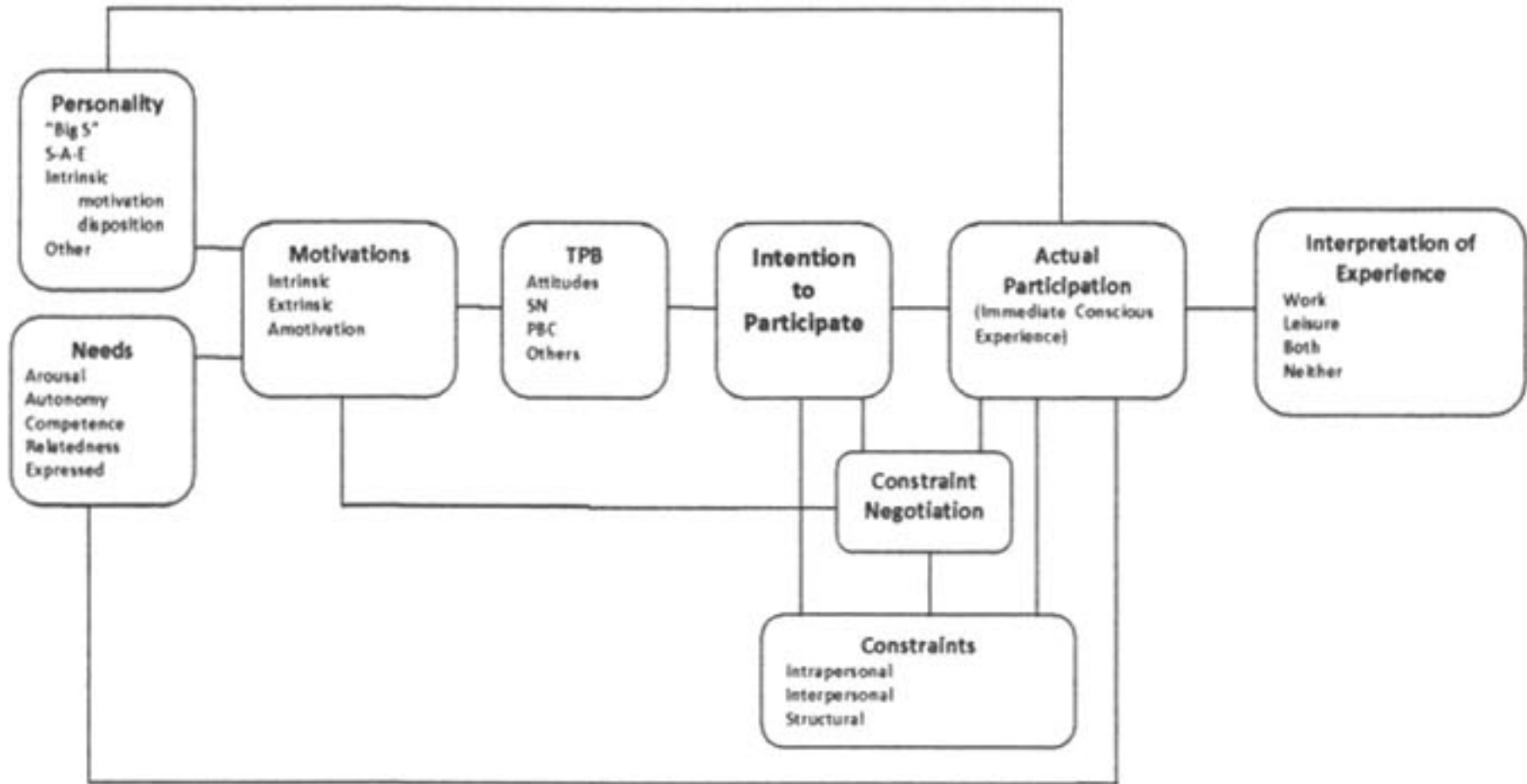
Figure 1. Sociopsychological Leisure Participation Model (Kleiber et al., 2011, p. 178)

Motivations and Facilitators of Youth's Participation in Organized Sport Programs

Research on what motivates people, including youth, to participate in sport is extensive. In their review of research on participation in sport, Allender, Cowburn, and Foster (2006) reported that common motivations among youth included social interaction, enjoyment, and weight management. Other motivations were excitement/fun, feeling good, socialization and team affiliation, skill acquisition and development, and achievement/status (McCullagh, Matzkanin, Shaw, & Maldonado, 1993; Sit & Linder, 2005).

Motivations for participation in sport have been reported to vary based on adolescents' age, gender, and racial/ethnic background. For example, exploring motivations for participation in competitive swimming, Brodkin and Weiss (1990) established that older children and high school swimmers found social status to be their main motivation, while younger children named significant others and fun as the most important. In Sirard, Pfeiffer, and Pate's (2006) study, important motivations for 7th and 8th grade boys included competition, social benefits, and fitness. The study by Ogden and Hilt (2003) showed that organized sport participation may have additional meaning for ethnic/racial minority youth. For example, it may serve as means of self-identification and self-image for African Americans. While motivations are important factors that increase chances of youth's involvement in organized sport programs, facilitators may also enhance adolescents' participation in sport.

Introduced by Raymore (2002), *facilitators* are "factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived or experienced by individuals to enable or promote the formation of leisure preferences and to encourage or enhance participation" (p. 39). To avoid the confusion with motivation, Raymore clarified that facilitator is a condition that enables participation in sport and/or recreation and not the process through which behavior is motivated or energized. Following the analogy of constraints to leisure (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991), Raymore classified facilitators as intrapersonal, interpersonal, or structural. She defined *intrapersonal facilitators* as "individual characteristics, traits, and beliefs that enable or promote the formation of leisure preferences and that encourage or enhance leisure participation" (p. 42). As *interpersonal facilitators,* Raymore defined individuals and groups that encourage and enable leisure participation, including peer influence and parental involvement. Last, *structural facilitators* are institutions,

organizations, societal norms, and belief systems that influence an individual's leisure preferences and participation.

While the term "facilitators" has not been widely applied outside of the leisure field, research that focuses on factors enhancing participation in sport has been conducted for many decades. *Intrapersonal facilitators* to sport participation that were identified in previous studies include personal agency; personality traits such as neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, adventurousness, and risk-taking; and "virtually any personal attribute that influences the way an individual views the world and the opportunities it offers" (Raymore, 2002, p. 46). One of the most commonly cited models used to analyze socialization into sport is Kenyon and McPherson's (1973) sport involvement model. It consists of three components: personal attributes, significant others, and socialization situations. The personal attributes, which could be considered intrapersonal facilitators, include personal characteristics and abilities, self-perceptions, self-esteem, self-competence, interests, preferences, skill level, and goal orientation (e.g., Çağlar, Asçi & Deliceoglu, 2009; Sit & Linder, 2005; Stuntz & Weiss, 2009).

Raymore (2002) also identified several *interpersonal facilitators* to leisure. Under this category, she included participation and encouragement of friends, parental example, and provision of opportunities by parents. The influence of significant others on youth involvement in sport has been recognized by Kenyon and McPherson (1973), who included socializing agents as one of the three components of the sport involvement model. Parental support has been considered as one of the most important facilitators to youth participation in sport (Greendorfer, Lewko, & Rosengren, 1996; Stroot, 2002). Not only do parents introduce and socialize children into various sport opportunities and provide equipment and transportation, but they also create a healthy psychological climate that enables and facilitates continued involvement in sport (Coakley, 1993; Dixon et al., 2008; Greendorfer, 2002; Partridge, Brustad, & Stellino, 2008). Among other factors, parental socialization was found to be associated with youth short-term and long-term sport participation (Dixon et al., 2008; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005), while parental support was shown to be positively associated with youths' enjoyment of sport and self-esteem (Leff & Hoyle, 1995).

The evidence of differences in parental support for youth from various ethnic groups is mixed. Greendorfer and Ewing (1981) found that fathers played particularly important role in socializing White boys to sport, but the same was not true for African American children. Lindquist, Reynolds, and Goran (1999), on the other hand, found few differences in minority youth sport and physical activity participation, once family's social class and single versus dual parent family background were controlled for.

Not only parents, but also coaches have been shown to play an important role in youth involvement in sport (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Brière, 2001). Stroot (2002) claimed that coaches are a major influence on youth sport participation as they are often respected and admired by players. They are particularly important for children with low self-esteem who depend on their encouragement and support. In Olushola's et al. (2013) study, female coaches served as mother figures to African American teenage basketball players. They were considered the role models, trusted mentors, and even spiritual leaders who provided guidance to African American girls. A task-oriented (vs. competition oriented) atmosphere created by coaches has been found to help athletes experience higher level of satisfaction of needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002).

Besides the influence of parents and coaches, youth's motivation to participate in sport is likely to be affected by their peers. Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee (2010) argued that peers influence youth's motivation through social relationships, competitive or collaborative be-

haviors, and evaluative communications. Children often desire to excel in sport because they are afraid to lose their friends, and they experience positive competition as well as friendly support and encouragement. Ullrich-French and Smith (2009) also claimed that youth with more positive perceptions of sport-related peer acceptance and friendship quality are more likely to continue involvement in the sport.

Structural facilitators. Structural facilitators (Raymore, 2002) discussed in previous research included existence of facilities, structure of society, and demographic characteristics such as race, gender, and social class of participants. Research has shown that social class significantly affects participation in organized sport among adolescents (Lareau, 2002; Trussell, 2006). Not only are finances more available to youth of middle-class status but also the sense of entitlement experienced by these children and emphasis that is placed on sport by their parents are significantly higher (Lareau, 2002). Participation in sport programs is also affected by a lack of resources available to youth from working-class families. Along with direct costs of programs (i.e., registration fees) families are often required to pay for "hidden" indirect costs (e.g., equipment, transportation, uniforms), which often prevents children of lower socioeconomic status from participation (Trussell, 2006).

In order to increase participation in sport programs among youth we need to understand the broad range of factors that affect their involvement. To accomplish its goals, this study will consider both the innate psychological needs and motivations that move one to participate in sport, as well as facilitators that make such involvement possible. It will contribute to the exceedingly scant literature on ethnic differences in needs and motivations for involvement in recreational sport among minority youth.

Methods

This study was based on a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), with the goal of developing theory based on the data. The socioecological models, the SDT, and the concept of facilitators to leisure served as sensitizing frameworks. Such research strategy allows insights into the rich experiences of participants and promotes the development of a theoretical base relevant to the population examined in the study.

Prior to commencement of the study, appropriate IRB approvals had been obtained. Data for this study were collected in a large Midwestern metropolitan area by using in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted during the second half of the Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) program in late July of 2010 (the program began in late June and ended in early August). The interviewees included 13 program participants (11 African-American and 2 Latino boys aged 13–15) of the RBI program and 5 administrators. The administrators included two employees of the park district responsible for the implementation of the program, two members of the national agency that sponsored the program, and one representative of the Major League Baseball (MLB) franchise responsible for organizing and delivering the program. All of the study participants were male. Theoretical sampling aimed toward theory construction was used to identify participants (Charmaz, 2006).

The RBI program was established in 1989 in Los Angeles by a former MLB player and scout John Young. In his original conception, Young established RBI to lead youth aged 13–16 away from street life via baseball. Just two years later, MLB endorsed RBI, offered financial and organizational support, and committed to grow the program beyond Los Angeles. In the last 23 years of existence, RBI has remained focused on increasing participation in baseball, specifically among minority youth. The central RBI office has established three divisions for baseball

and two for softball according to age (i.e., 13–14, 15–16, and 17–18 for boys, 14-and-under and 15–18 for girls). The all-star program is, as the name suggests, for elite players and engages individual chapters of RBI in a global competition culminating annually in the RBI World Series. Although MLB recognizes the "more than 170 RBI participants" (MLB, 2012b) who have been drafted since the program's inception, presumably via the all-star competition, the remainder of the divisions remain true to Young's participation-centric vision. RBI chapters competing in the non-all-star divisions are chiefly focused on increasing participation in softball and baseball, though player development, promotion of teamwork, development of self-esteem, and academic achievement have emerged as complementary pursuits (MLB, 2012c). In 2010, the chapter of RBI examined in this study included 26 teams comprised of minority youth.

All interviews were conducted in English by two Caucasian researchers and two African American graduate assistants involved in the project. Interviews with adolescents were conducted face to face in quiet locations in the sports complex either before or after games. An interview with one of the park district employees was conducted in his office and with the representative of the MLB franchise in an empty cafeteria of a large ballpark where his office is located. Three interviews (two with members of the national agency that sponsored the program and one with a representative of the park district) were conducted over the phone. The interviews with program participants lasted on average 30 minutes and interviews with the stakeholders lasted an average of 50 minutes.

The interview protocols were developed based on the review of previous research on the topic and to address the specific objectives of the study. While in some leisure research, the terms *motivations* and *needs* are used interchangeably, or the studies of motivation and benefits are interpreted as providing information on needs (e.g., Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009; Shaull & Gramann, 1998), we adopted the perspective advocated by SDT that needs and motivations are unique concepts. Similarly to Sheldon et al. (2001), "we view(ed) needs primarily as necessary inputs rather than as driving motives, leaving open the possibility that particular motives may not satisfy organismic needs, even if they are attained" (p. 325). We also followed these authors' approach to measuring needs while adapting it to the different requirements of the paradigm in which our research was grounded. Specifically, Sheldon's et al. quantitative study derived a set of needs from a number of psychological theories and then examined feelings that represented those needs (i.e., participants responded to 30 descriptive statements that began with the same stem: "During this event I felt…"). Since SDT served as one of the sensitizing frameworks in our study, we looked for the narratives that would indicate satisfaction of the needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy. At the same time, however, we were open to the discovery of potential different needs that might be satisfied through sport participation and acknowledged that some needs proposed by the SDT may not find support in our findings.

In terms of the specific questions, the participants were asked about the motivations for signing up and the expectations for the program, feelings that accompanied their participation in the program, what helped them participate in the program (for example, whether they received equipment, support), their perception of coaches and teammates, the outcomes of the program, and their plans for future involvement in professional sports. Among other questions, the participants were asked "Why did you sign up for this program?" "Do you think that you made friends as a result of this program?" "What were your expectations for the program?" The administrators were asked about their involvement in the program, the goals of the program, and problems they had encountered in running the program. For instance: "What has been your role in the RBI program?" and "What type of support do you provide?" All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The process of data collection in grounded theory approach is inseparable from data analysis. Since the main goal of grounded theory is to develop a theory grounded in data, the process of data analysis starts from the beginning of the data collection, is constantly ongoing, and finishes when categories reach a point of theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, the analysis of the data, using constant comparative method, began after the first interview had been completed and lasted throughout the duration of the study. Constant comparative method that involves comparing data during each stage of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was performed by coding the data or developing the analytic frame (Charmaz, 2006). Several stages were followed during the process of data coding: initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). The analysis of data was finished when all of the researchers reached a consensus regarding categories reaching a point of theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To improve trustworthiness of the study, data were obtained from different sources (participants, organizers, and sponsors), transcripts have been shared with the interviewed stakeholders, low inference descriptors have been used in data presentation, negative case sampling was used to uncover cases that disconfirmed our initial expectations, and the opinions of an expert in the area of SDT and motivation were obtained. He was specifically queried about his extant work on basic human needs, development of SDT, and the unique role of the need for safety that was uncovered in this study.

Findings

The findings are divided into three sections corresponding to the objectives of the study. First, we examined the ways in which participation in RBI satisfied psychological needs among the youth. Second, we analyzed their motivations for involvement in the RBI program. Third, we explored facilitators that fostered participation in the RBI. Within each section themes that emerged from the interviews are discussed.

Satisfaction of Basic Needs through Participation in the Sport Program

I felt like I could be the best. The desire to become better players, to develop competence in baseball and to master different aspects of the game resonated clearly in the narratives of the minority youth. For example, Josh said, "I felt like I could play baseball, I felt like I could be the best." RBI further increased their belief that they could improve their skills, which strengthened their attachment to the game. Youth also expressed they felt effective in their activities and that participation in RBI has helped them attain or exceed their desired level of performance (Sheldon et al., 2001). For instance, Adam reflected on his skill improvement: "Because I developed, because at first I won't even catch the ball but practicing more made me get how I am playing now. " They improved their skills by constant practice, either individually or with friends after the game, with their coach, and at school. Darrell commented that this practice made him "a stronger hitter most likely and faster. [It made me] better and better each time." The belief in their ability to improve their skills made them feel capable of attaining excellence in the game. As Adam said, "I think if I keep playing and keep pushing myself, I can become one of the best players that steps foot on an RBI field."

We are one family and my coach is like my father. Participation in the RBI provided youth an important opportunity to interact with their teammates, coaches, organizers of the program, and fans. The participants discussed feelings of closeness, connection, comradeship, pride, and enjoyment they experienced while interacting with their teammates. As Joe described, "We are one team, we are one family. If one side is off, we all slack. Now we like to do stuff together."

Another interviewee, when asked how he felt about his teammates, replied, "When I am around them, I enjoy myself. They are the reason I play better, because when I see them play, I play, and they just have no problem with telling me what I do wrong." Several other participants mentioned that boys they met on the team had become their best friends. They met with them regularly after the game even if it meant traveling to nearby communities.

While the ties with friends and even fans seemed to be appreciated by the participants, a particularly important role was assigned to coaches. Many of the boys referred to their coaches as important, even parental authority figures to whom they felt strong attachment, admiration, and respect. Josh explained his feelings toward his coach in these words:

'Cause I didn't have a father to grow up with, so my coach was something like my father. He was the only man in my life who was telling me 'You gotta do good in school, it doesn't matter what other kids say, you are supposed to pay attention to the teacher and stay focused.' He calls me to tell me what to do before I go to school and asks me how my day went at the school.

Joe also felt that his coach was willing to "take us further" and was "like a second dad (who) hates to see us slack, hates to see us catch an attitude." Other boys provided examples of how their coaches not only helped them to improve baseball skills, but also supported them in everyday matters, including school work and problems with their families and friends. It was clear that coaches fulfilled the boys' need for relatedness to and support from older authority figures that was absent in their lives outside of sport.

We get to play ball and it's safe. The interviewees almost universally reported that they felt unsafe growing up in their communities, and that they were concerned about becoming victims of crime or turning to the life of crime themselves. They felt that playing baseball "kept them off the streets"; kept them safe from threats, particularly in dangerous inner-city neighborhoods; and provided them with alternative forms of leisure. The program itself provided them with a safe environment and helped them escape the troubles associated with living in the inner city. As Marcus said, "[It] keeps me out of the streets because there be a lot of violence happening in my neighborhood and anything can happen. So, it is better for me to stay out of the neighborhood, from the violence, the shootings."

The field house and the ball fields were seen as a safe environment that provided a refuge from crime taking place in the community. As Darnel said, "We get to play ball and it's safe. Otherwise we would be on the street, and that can be dangerous." Josh also referred to the time when the practices were held as the most dangerous time in his community. He said, "Most of the stuff is always happening during the day. And if I am at a baseball game, during a day, from 3 to 6 then I don't have anything to worry about."

Not only was the neighborhood perceived as dangerous, but many teenagers felt that if not for baseball, they might have become involved in crime themselves. Some commented that there were no other opportunities for recreation and without baseball they would have probably stayed at home or close to where their mothers worked. Darriel credited the RBI program for helping him to stay busy and safe, noting, "If I am at practice or at a game, I think I will stay out of trouble because I will not get out of practice till late and there is nothing else for me to do when I go home." Josh added that if not for the practices that kept him busy he would have "probably join[ed] the gang or sell drugs." Another boy added, "This [the RBI] has kept me out of trouble, because I couldn't depend on anything but baseball."

Motivations for Minority Youth's Participation in the Sport Program

Just for fun and I want to do something well. Youth who took part in the RBI reported a number of motivations to participate in the program. Among the most often mentioned were desire to have fun, enjoy the game, and relieve boredom. Other motivations included desire to feel better about themselves and to increase self-esteem. The majority of adolescents liked the game of baseball and their participation in the RBI was a combination of enjoyment from playing the game and desire to improve skills. Almost all of the participants commented that they signed up for RBI because they wanted to "get better" and "do something well." For example, Darnel said, "I wanted to learn more. I played baseball in school and I wanted to do it over the summer. I wanted to get better, I wanted to play more." Another participant, Matt, commented, "[I signed up for RBI] because I wanted to have fun, find more friends, see the competition." Justin summarized his motives by saying, "I signed up for RBI because I liked how they get you involved in the program, like they teach you the basics. It's just fun, you get to travel."

I want to go to MLB. A number of participants have also mentioned that they joined the RBI to improve their chances for future career in professional sport. Some of the adolescents named desire to be selected to play in high school or to be recruited to play professionally, and thus improve their socioeconomic position. Participation in the RBI was seen as furthering this opportunity as it helped them to increase their skills and allowed them to showcase their talents to scouts who attended the games. For example, Darriel expressed his hopes for being recruited to the major league: "It is just my dream. I want to go to the MLB and play. [At the RBI] They scout you, they look at you to see how well you're playing, so I came out here to play."

Some of the stakeholders also praised the program for giving participants "an opportunity for better life." For example, one of the administrators narrated,

> It makes me feel good when I see a couple kids who have some ability and [with] the right training and coaching to have a chance to do something with that. From that try-out, we found a kid who was a 6.6 runner in the 60-yard dash which is like [name of the player removed] fast. So we forwarded his name to our area scout, and he's going to watch him and we set him up with some people from the [name of the baseball academy removed] to work with. So it's a kid like Denzel who went and played college baseball, a kid named Diego who got a scholarship to [name of the university removed]. At the end of the day [it] really makes me feel good, makes everybody at the organization feel like it's money well spent. You just can't put a price tag on changing a kid's life.

Other interviewed stakeholders, however, expressed reservation about the children's chances of making it into professional sport, and commented that in reality the percentage of RBI participants who went on to play college and professional baseball was very low.

Because there ain't nothing else to do in the summer. Amotivation, or the inability to express specific interest and willingness to participate in an activity, could also be detected in some of the interviews. For participants such as Adam, Darriel and Josh, interest in baseball was combined with perceived lack of other leisure opportunities in the neighborhood, particularly during the summer months. As Adam said, "I signed up for this program because I heard it is a good program from my cousin, and I just wanted to play baseball for the summer 'cause I had nothing else to do." Josh added, "Because there ain't nothing else to do in the summer, so I've been playing this for the last of couple of years."

The Facilitators that Enhanced Minority Youth's Participation in the Sport Program

I kept pushing myself and keeping myself humble. There were a number of factors that facilitated youth involvement in the RBI. Many of the adolescents had a high level of confidence, self-efficacy, resilience, perseverance, and determination that helped them overcome constraints and fostered their participation in the program. For instance, Joe commented,

'Cause I like to push myself forward in baseball. I have been around this program for years, so I thought, "Why should I quit now?" So I guess I kept pushing myself and keeping myself humble. (…) Now I got to work on myself to keep myself steady, to do the best of my ability.

An interview with Marcus showed his determination to improve his skills:

I remember when I first started playing baseball at the age of 14, I couldn't do nothing, and this year at 15 I just got better because I just practice. When we didn't practice I just asked one of our coaches to come out here, hit ground balls at third. I just wanted to make myself better and ever since then I just became a better baseball player.

Marcus later expressed his disappointment that at the age of 15 he was not assigned to the 16-to18-year-olds "Because they are throwing harder, they are fielding, they are catching, because they are doing better and I just want to go out and see if I can do the same thing like I am doing now." Darrell expressed a similar sense of self-determination: "I will become a stronger hitter and I should be faster. Better and better each time, more practice that's all I gotta do. Work myself harder and harder, strive for excellence."

Self-confidence was also clear in the interview with Darriel who talked about conflict with some of the teammates that "brought confidence of other people down... but it didn't bring me down 'cause I know what I'm good at" and with Rasul who felt he deserved to go on an away trip to Minnesota as he was "one of the best players out here."

He taught me about life. The support and encouragement from coaches and program staff were important factors that facilitated youth involvement in the program. The coaches were credited with helping boys improve their skills, providing constant support and ensuring a positive atmosphere on the team. Of all the interviewed participants, only one spoke of his coach in negative terms. The others commented that their coaches "help[ed] us get there," "help[ed] us bat," "made us work hard," "taught us a lot of skills," "treat[ed] everybody fairly," "hardly ever raise[ed] voice," and "always got things for us when we needed them." Adam referred to his coach as a teacher, saying, "The coach is a teacher. Respect, respect yea! He [is] cool! He needs to make us work hard, 'practice more,' 'practice more' that's all I say. 'Work harder!'" Another boy described how his coach taught him about life, saying, "It's about life to us, [he] teaches you more than just mechanics; [he] teaches you how to succeed in life and how to approach people." Not only coaches, but other RBI staff were also praised by the participants for their positive attitude and for the support they provided to the youth. As Adam commented, "They [people who work for the RBI] stay as positive as they can. Like they'll never say, 'Oh man, you are not that good.' They always say something positive. They really help you."

Interestingly, the majority of the stakeholders considered RBI coaches to be the weakest link in the program. They described them as volunteers who frequently lacked skills to teach baseball and who were often not reliable enough to supervise youth. In particular, incidents of coaches not showing up to practice or quitting shortly after the start of the season were brought up. Only one of the interviewed park district employees spoke about the RBI coaches in positive terms.

In general, however, the discrepancy in the evaluation of the role and qualification of coaches between the program participants and organizers was striking.

My teammates have got my back. The interviewed participants also attributed their improvements in the game to the support of their team members. In particular, they credited them for the supportive attitude and their help in overcoming obstacles in the game. For example, Darriel mentioned,

> I see them as teammates because they're my teammates, but I also see them as friends because they've got my back, they are always there, they help me through stuff. When you go out there and strike out they don't be like, 'Oh, you weak,' they be like, 'Man, you got next time,' clap your hand, and when you hit the ball they get excited.

Several participants also mentioned that their brothers and cousins were in the RBI and that they provided the support and encouragement they needed to play on the team. For example, Alex commented, "All the siblings on the team had influenced me... especially that this is my first year on the RBI with bigger kids. They would say, 'If you strike out don't worry about it, your team will pick you up.'"

Support your kid. Interestingly, support from parents and families was never mentioned by the interviewed youth. However, the organizers claimed it was "pretty limited." Some of them commented that the times of practices and games were not suitable for working parents, that it was "not in the culture" of African Americans to come to their children's sport practices, or that African Americans were generally not interested in baseball. A representative of the park district believed that many African American parents were not involved in their children's sport despite the outreach of park district employees, program organizers, and even local police. He commented,

> There was a guy I worked with that was a cop for 30 years, and he really was entrenched in these neighborhoods, and he kind of knew and he tried to push... he could work with adults in a way where he would say, 'Hey, support your kid, be out there for your kid.'

The same park district employee complained that parents who showed up to the games were not very supportive, that fights often broke up on the sidelines, and that "sometimes the parents that do come are like you wished they didn't come." He added, "With inner city... there are a lot of problems. All of a sudden, you'll see lawn chairs and people coming, but that's the exception not the rule." Some of the stakeholders attributed lack of support from parents to their low income and to the fact that the games were not very competitive. They contrasted lack of support from parents in this community with more affluent neighborhoods where parents "are out there, they are involved, and even contribute substantial amount of money to help traveling teams."

I got a chance to meet a big leaguer. The MLB franchise, the park district, and the organization sponsoring the RBI provided a number of services, items, and in-kind donations that helped facilitate youth participation in the program. They included coaching, equipment, facilities, food, gifts, special events, and education sessions. The MLB franchise paid for the children's uniforms and transportation and helped to train the coaches. Moreover, they organized sessions where players met with the RBI participants, signed autographs, and did "pitch and run competitions with the kids." As the interviewed MLB representative commented, "Every single kid there is going to remember 'I met [name of the player removed]. I got a chance to do a pitch and a run competition with him.' I never got a chance to meet a big leaguer when I was a kid growing up." In collaboration with the local Youth and Children Services, MLB also provided a free

lunch program for the participants. The meals included sandwiches, fruit, and milk. As the MLB representative commented,

> Our participants are able to get a free lunch every single day, which I know some kids probably just show up because they're getting fed consistently. The meals are healthy, so we know that our kids are at least getting some nutrition throughout the day which might be their most balanced meal that they're getting on a daily basis.

The park district offered facilities and coaches, while one of the sponsoring organizations provided education and leadership training sessions for the youth. The sessions were organized several times during the summer at the baseball park of the MLB franchise. They focused on the importance of education, financial planning, and "doing simple things like household budget." A member of the sponsoring organization described the importance of such sessions, saying, "We try to give them a little broader perspective of what the future going to bring them and how they can become much more successful individuals by thinking about their future."

Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to explore factors affecting minority youth participation in an organized sport program. As conceptualized by the socioecological framework (Humpel et al., 2002), these factors included those at an individual level (innate needs for relatedness and competence, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and amotivation, and intrapersonal facilitators) and those related to the social and physical environment (interpersonal facilitators related to the effect of significant others, and structural facilitators related to the availability of programs and facilities). Thus, the findings of the study underscore the fact that organized sport participation among minority youth should be considered as an outcome of a long process involving factors at the individual, family, and community levels.

With respect to individual factors, satisfaction of basic needs through sport participation seemed to follow unique patterns among minority participants. Interestingly, the interviewed youth reported the needs for competence and relatedness to be more important than the need for autonomy. In fact, the need for *autonomy* was not directly mentioned by the participants at all. However, one can argue that the mere choice to join the program for many boys meant self-initiated behavior that was evoked by their interest in sport. Moreover, it is possible that the relative importance of the needs identified in SDT vary cross-culturally (Kleiber et al., 2011; Walker, 2010) and the need for autonomy is lower on the priority list among African American and Latino youth of this age group. On the other hand, one may claim that the need for *competence*, clearly apparent in the theme "*I felt I could be the best*" may be typical to most youth participating in sport regardless of their ethnic and racial background. It may take on additional meaning for minority children who are often marginalized and who may experience obstacles in excelling in areas other than sport. They are likely to attach a particularly important role to sport as an opportunity for self-actualization, to improve self-esteem, gain peer approval, define identities, and provide access to privileged social groups (Harrison & Bimper, 2014).

Besides the need for competence, *relatedness* was another need discussed by Deci and Ryan (2002) and clearly exemplified in the theme "*We are one family and my coach is like my father.*" Many interviewees joined the RBI because they already had friends on the team or wished to find new ones. They also claimed that they felt deeply connected to members of their team, fans and staff. One of the major findings of this study was related to the special role coaches played in fostering minority youth participation in sport and in their overall well-being. Interviewed

boys referred to their coaches as "father figures" and "teachers" who did much more than help them hone their sport skills. They encouraged children to stay in school, discussed their family problems and issues they were struggling with, and served as role models for the young boys. Similarly, the almost motherly role of female coaches among African American girls who played basketball was discussed by Olushola et al. (2013). This finding is perhaps related to the fact that the level of single-parent families among the African American population is high (32% as compared to 10% among non-Hispanic Whites and 14% among Hispanics) (Blackwell, 2010). Thus, the strong need to create bonds with older authority figures may perhaps be due to the absence of positive role models in the lives of some minority children and the fact that they grow up in single-parent households. While previous research considered how attitudes and atmosphere fostered by coaches affect youth motivation and engagement in sport (Keegan et al., 2010; Ntoumanis, 2005; Pelletier et al., 2001), research that would examine the uniquely personal and parental role coaches play in the lives of minority youth is underdeveloped. We argue that this topic should be further investigated in future research and considered by practitioners who prepare coaches working in minority communities.

The theme of participation in the sport program that provided children safe places in the community and helped them "stay out of trouble" resonated very clearly in the narratives of participants and administrators. Interestingly, although the need for safety was included in Maslow's (1943) original hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1969, 1987) himself later claimed that it is largely "irrelevant in modern society," and that an average adult in the West has about 70% of his or her safety needs satisfied. In contrast, our findings clearly point out that the desire to be safe was among the most important factors driving behavior of minority youth. This may find confirmation in Schutte and Ciarlante's (1998) work that claimed that safety and security needs are innate among more collectivistic people.

The majority of previous studies in the fields of leisure and public health documented that fear of crime may lead to decreased participation in active recreation in outdoor environments (Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, & Popkin, 2000; Stodolska, Acevedo, & Shinew, 2009). Unlike these studies, however, our research showed that people may actually engage in certain recreation behaviors to avoid threats elsewhere. In particular, the desire to satisfy the need for safety may actually motivate some youth to increase participation in organized and supervised sport programs that provide safe havens in urban impoverished communities. Thus, this grounded theory study suggests that along with competence, autonomy, and relatedness, the need for safety should perhaps be included in future theoretical models (Deci, personal communication, 2011). It also provides some support to Walker's (2014) argument that needs and their relative importance might be dependent on one's cultural background and, perhaps, some environmental characteristics. The way we define threat and safety needs also should be taken into account, as previous studies often conceptualized them not so much in terms of fear of crime but rather one's life being structured and predictable, being able to follow routines and habits and being safe from uncertainties (Sheldon et al., 2001).

Satisfying youths' basic needs for competence, relatedness, and safety, the RBI program offered opportunities for their participation in sport. Due to the satisfaction of these needs, the motivation reported by most of the participants was mostly intrinsic. These intrinsic motivations, exemplified in the theme *"Just for fun and I want to do something well,"* included desire to have fun, enjoy the game, relieve boredom, increase self-esteem, and improve skills. Such intrinsic motivations have been shown to lead to more positive outcomes (Alexandris, Funk, & Pritchard, 2011; Vallerand, 2001) and can potentially lead to long-term youth involvement in

the sport. Extrinsic motivations for participation, however, were also clearly present, and they were exemplified in the theme *"I want to go to MLB."* Although many youth saw participation in baseball as an avenue for becoming recruited to the major league, some of the program organizers were quite skeptical about their chances of making the professional teams. Discussed at length in previous literature (Hartmann, 2000), it is debatable if such extrinsic motivations for involvement in sport among minority youth truly offer avenues for individual success and advancement of racial justice or, conversely, serve as mobility traps and reinforce and reproduce racialized stereotypes, ideas, and social practices. Interestingly, the minority youth only made references to external regulation and none of their narratives provided examples of introjected, identified, or integrated motivation. It remains unclear as to whether this can be attributed to cultural differences, socioeconomic status, age of the respondents (some research suggests that youth of that age are not capable of internalizing external motivations [e.g., Baldwin & Caldwell, 2003]), or some other factors.

In general, as Kleiber et al. (2011) (following Walker [2008]) suggested, "There appear to be important motivational differences across everyday life domains as well as within the leisure domain itself" (p. 163). It is likely that the findings of our study with respect to unique motivational patterns among minority adolescents are a reflection of the intertwined effects of the leisure activity in question (recreational sport), race and ethnicity (African American and Latino), socioeconomic status (working class), age (13–15 years old), gender (boys), and residence (urban, inner-city minority communities).

The findings of the study also suggest that a number of facilitators made youth participation in the RBI program possible and enjoyable. They included individual-level intrapersonal facilitators such as confidence, self-efficacy, resilience, perseverance, and determination; interpersonal facilitators such as strong support of coaches and team members; and structural facilitators such as support provided by the MLB franchise, local park district, and a sponsoring organization. However, one of the most important facilitators of youth sport participation that is often discussed in the literature (Dixon et al., 2008; Partridge et al., 2008) has not been identified in this study. The apparent lack of parental support, exemplified in the theme *"Support your kid,"* was brought up by almost all of the interviewed program organizers. While according to previous studies, parents provide not only tangible help but also create a healthy environment that facilitates youth involvement in sport, support and encouragement from parents were things that our study participants seemed to be lacking. This finding runs contrary to the concept of involved fathering (Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012; Kay, 2009), but may support the argument of Lareau (2002), who claimed that parents of lower socioeconomic status and members of some minority groups are often less involved in their children's sport participation than parents of a more middle-class status. While previous research has attributed this seeming lack of parental support for minority children's involvement in sport to diverse parenting values and structural constraints such as lack of time and resources (Lareau, 2002), this topic requires further investigation. Moreover, it needs to be examined whether unique cultural values are behind the apparent differences in the level of support for children's sport or if they are more related to the effects of socioeconomic status and family structure among some populations (Lindquist et al., 1999).

Drawing on the results of this study and the original sociopsychological leisure participation model (Figure 1) (Kleiber et al., 2011), we developed the needs-motivation-facilitators model (Figure 2). The model includes several factors affecting youth participation in sport programs, including satisfaction of basic needs, motivation for participation, and facilitators to participation. Unlike Kleiber et al.'s model, the needs-motivation-facilitators model does not
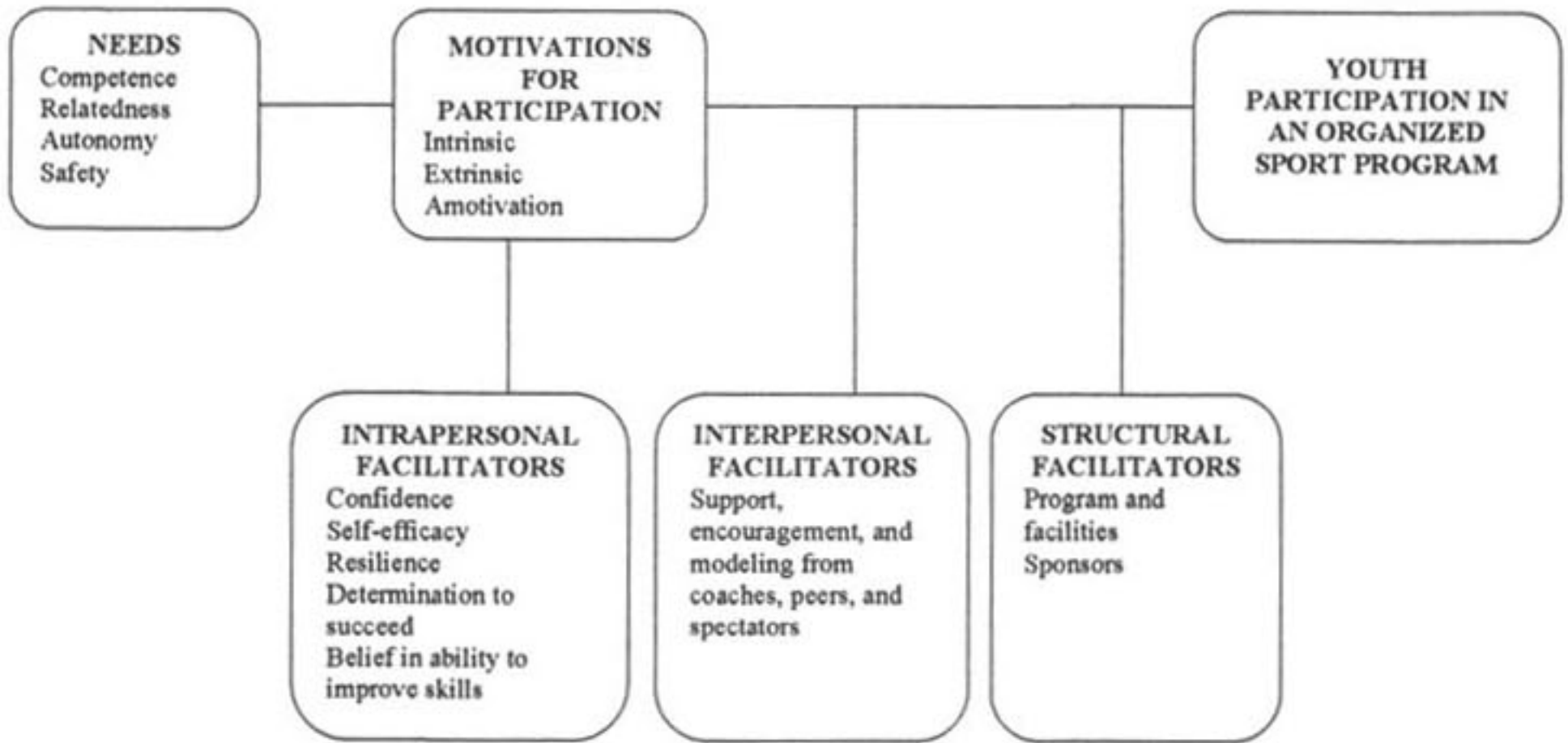
Figure 2. Needs-Motivation-Facilitators Model of Youth Sport Involvement

include concepts of personality (some of them are integrated into intrapersonal facilitators), elements of the theory of planned behavior, and interpretation of experience, as these factors had not surfaced in the grounded theory process. Also constraints and constraint negotiation were beyond the scope of the project. However, this study helped us identify a number of interpersonal, intrapersonal and structural facilitators that should be taken into account when analyzing youth's ability to initiate and sustain participation in sport programs.

Conclusions

The goal of the study was to increase understanding of the broad range of factors that affect minority adolescents' participation in organized sport programs. The study focused both on the innate needs and motivations that moved them to participate in sport as well as facilitators which made their sport involvement possible. By focusing on both individual-level correlates, as well as those related to the social and physical environment, we were able to identify a range of unique factors conditioning involvement in sport among minority youth. Although this study focused on a selected program (RBI) in one urban Midwestern community, we believe that some of these factors are likely to play an important role in conditioning sport participation among minority adolescents across the U.S. We argue that it is important for those providing sport programs to minority youth to understand the social conditions that may affect their sport participation (e.g., unique family circumstances and potentially different roles that minority families play in their sport engagements, characteristics of the communities in which they reside). One could also ask, based on what we found about the unique needs, motivations, and facilitators among this group of adolescents, how can we design recreational and sport programs that will best meet their needs? First, provision of safe environments for recreation in communities with high crime levels should be a priority. Second, program administrators need to recognize the important role coaches play in the development and well-being of underprivileged youth. Thus, coaches and program administrators should receive appropriate training and opportunities for interaction with their mentees in environments that extend beyond the immediate contact related to sport.

Last, coaches and administrators should be sensitive to some of the reasons minority youth may desire to excel in sport and should offer realistic assessments of their chances for success in professional sport and stress the need for the holistic development of children.

This study, although it offered a number of interesting results, also had some important limitations. First, the difference in ethnic/racial background and SES between some of the interviewers and the interviewees could have led to lack of trust and reciprocity. Second, our findings were based on self-reports that could have led to potential deference effect (participants telling the interviewer what they think he/she wants to hear) (Bernard, 2000). Third, lack of ability to follow up with program participants prevented us from asking additional questions and potentially uncovering more details regarding their needs for autonomy and safety and parental role in youth sport participation. Fourth, since the majority of the participants in the RBI were male (there were only two girls among all the players involved that year), only boys were interviewed in this project. Lastly, in a qualitative study such as this one, at times it is difficult to interpret whether some factors were the "relatively stable factor(s) that compel[ed] people to seek out specific leisure activities and experiences" (Kleiber et al., 2011, p. 156), or direct motives that "gave impetus to achievement behavior" (Roberts, 2001, p. 4). In order to differentiate the needs from motives in our analysis, we considered a child's answer as a motive if it came as a response to a direct question such as, "Why did you sign up for the program/want to play baseball as part of RBI?" We interpreted answers as needs if the narrative suggested that they satisfied a more deeply held desire among the participants and, in particular, if the children described specific feelings that accompanied the event. We recommend that future research should explore this topic more in-depth by employing different methods or by using a more prolonged engagement with study participants.

We also believe that future research should examine more in-depth issues such as desire for safety as an important innate need and motivation for involvement in recreation programs, the role of coaches in fostering minority youth's sport participation, and the factors affecting parental involvement in minority youth sport. Moreover, previous research shows that depending on a number of factors, sport participation may have both positive and detrimental effects on health, well-being, and overall development of youth (Holt, 2008; Larson, 2000; Mahoney et al., 2005). Numerous cases of negative psychological and physical health outcomes of sport such as burnout, injuries, steroid use, and high level of stress have been documented (Eitzen & Sage, 2008). Thus, we believe future research should critically examine both positive and negative outcomes of sport participation among minority boys and girls. Lastly, we believe it would be desirable if future studies worked to integrate the two models (Figure 1 and Figure 2) presented in this study and, in particular, examine how facilitators to leisure are interrelated with the components of the theory of planned behavior, constraints on leisure and constraint negotiation process.

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