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Social Problems in Major League Baseball: Revisiting and Expanding Talamini's Analysis Twenty Years Later

Mark Vermillion, G. Clayton Stoldt, & Jordan Bass

KEYWORDS:

baseball, Major League Baseball, deviance, social problems, sport sociology

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to review, revisit, and expand Talamini's social problems within Major League Baseball (MLB). Talamini's categories, which include gambling, player/managerial violence, spectator violence, cheating, crime, and greed are reviewed and applied to social problems in MLB since the original publication in 1987. In order to better understand social problems and deviant behavior within MLB, the original categories are related to specific deviance theories to better understand causation of deviance. Theories are then organized by Shoemaker's proposed integrated model, which organizes causes of deviance on the structural, social-psychological, and psychological levels. Relating Talamini's social problems categories to sociology of deviance theories, and then organized by Shoemaker's proposed integrated model aids in better explaining MLB deviance. Recommendations are made to sport management practitioners, students, and scholars regarding how to ameliorate the aforementioned social problems.

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Introduction

In 1987, John T. Talamini penned an article in the May issue of the journal *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*. Using a self-developed social problems framework, Talamini (1987) addressed socially-relevant issues within Major League Baseball (MLB) illustrating that “[b]aseball ... like other human activities is Janus-faced” (p. 65). Talamini (1987) argued his analysis was sociologically relevant because, up to that point, baseball was lauded for its structural aspects and few discussions were entertained outside of the popular press regarding the negative attributes of MLB. The structural aspects of MLB so widely admired included: 1) the rules of the game resembling a moral philosophy; 2) the object of the game representing order and stability; 3) the league's

organization having a low tolerance for deception and unbiased statistical gathering; and 4) the harmonious social dynamics and rituals involved within the game (Talamini, 1987). Finally, Talamini (1987) challenged the popular perceptions that baseball players were “participating solely for the love of the sport and often, in team sports, as sharing a spirit of powerful group morale,” while off the playing field, they were “humble, selfless, and exemplars of conventional virtues” (p. 65).

In an effort to critically highlight that social problems exist within the arena of sport, Talamini (1987) provided a review of relevant academic and popular literature and offered examples illustrating the presence of various social problems in MLB. To organize his analysis, Talamini

(1987) provided a categorization of the social problems within MLB. These typological categories included: gambling, player, managerial and spectator violence, cheating by players and officials, crime by athletes, and the greed of owners and players.

The purpose of this article is to revisit Talamini's analysis of MLB 20 years after his initial examination. The article will first review each typological category utilized by Talamini and summarize the examples cited at the time. It will then provide recent examples of incidents relating to each category. Next, Shoemaker's (2000) proposed integrated model explaining delinquency and deviance will be introduced as a tool for expanding on the analysis of social problems in MLB. Finally, to provide a synthesis of practical and theoretical ideas, known as praxis, this research will relate each category to a specific sociological theory of deviance or idea to provide scholars, students, and practitioners with an understanding of how these acts of deviance can be remedied.

One should note that the purpose of this article is not to single out one issue as particularly more salient than another, but rather to expand on Talamini's typologies and illustrate how collectively students, practitioners, academics, and policy makers can utilize such a framework. By increasing and strengthening theoretical explanations, scholars and practitioners alike may combine elements of psychology, sociology, and criminology to produce a relevant framework for examining modern phenomena in MLB and MLB sanctioned events. Indeed, in the criminological tradition, this article uses theories for practical applications, i.e., translating theory's contributions directly to practitioners in the field. Identifying social problems within professional sports is important, because recognition of problem facilitates solutions that address the core of the problems, not merely their symptoms.

ORIGINAL CATEGORIES: A REVIEW

Talamini's (1987) original research advocated identifying social problems within MLB utilizing a traditional social problems framework. The social problems framework was useful for developing the categories of deviant behavior within MLB. These typological categories included: gambling; player, managerial, and spectator violence; cheating by players and officials; crime by athletes; and the greed of owners and players.

Gambling has remained an issue of concern to MLB for many years. Talamini (1987) noted that gamblers' interest in baseball pre-dated the Civil War, and more bets were placed on MLB games than any other sport. Talamini (1987) observed that only a few instances had come to light in which players or coaches had committed gambling-related offenses. The most notable exception was the infamous Black Sox Scandal in which several members of the Chicago White Sox admitted to taking bribes from gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series.

Talamini (1987) also addressed player and managerial violence. Specifically, he noted current events, such as a 1984 brawl between the Atlanta Braves and San Diego Padres, and stated that baseball is a sport that attempts to govern itself with unwritten rules of the game that often contradict fair play and sportsmanship. Some of these informal norms that contradict official rules but involve game strategy include: 1) hard (aggressive) slides into second base to break up a potential double play, 2) the brush-back pitch, and 3) playing bean ball (a pitching strategy that occurs when one team's pitcher intentionally throws a pitch that strikes an opposing batsman in retaliation for the opposing pitcher hitting one of his team's batsmen previously; this dynamic can go back and forth in a single game or in various games throughout a season). Talamini (1987) also acknowledged the sport of baseball's "macho

ideal” of “being able to take it and dish it out” (p. 68).

Spectator violence was also an area of concern for Talamini (1987), who stated that despite the gentleman’s sporting ideal, baseball was largely contributing to public disorder. Talamini pointed to three notable incidents that occurred in the last 15 years. In 1974, the Cleveland Indians hosted a Beer Night promotion in which beer was sold for 10 cents a cup. During the game, fans showered the visiting Texas Rangers team with cherry bombs and cups of beer before the game was eventually forfeited to the Rangers. The second event Talamini references is the 1977 Disco Demotion Night promotion hosted by the Chicago White Sox in which fans rushed the field, set fires, and destroyed the batting cages. Finally, Talamini (1987) pointed to the celebration following the Detroit Tigers’ capture of the 1984 World Series in which fans destroyed police cars and ripped sod from Tiger Stadium.

Talamini (1987) postulates that cheating is part of MLB and is another one of the categories vital to analysis of MLB social problems (Talamini, 1987). Talamini (1987) also noted numerous deceptive and illegal activities that some baseball players use to gain an advantage. Incidents mentioned include: 1) Kansas City Royals’ George Brett and the Pine Tar Incident of 1983, 2) corking or other alterations of bats, scuffing or altering the baseball by pitchers to gain more grip and therefore, an advantage, and 3) corporate, off-the-field cheating in unfair competitive trade practices, such as the 1981 incident in which NIKE officials had baseball players cover up competitors’ shoe symbols with NIKE symbols. These examples help Talamini (1987) illustrate the wide variety of cheating that occurred within MLB.

Crime and its relationship to baseball were narrowly examined within Talamini’s original

research. While Talamini (1987) admitted that professional baseball players have “had difficulties with the law as with other segments of society” (p. 69) and even cited some anecdotal examples such as child molestation, attempted rape, assault, and involuntary manslaughter, the bulk of his analysis is spent on cocaine consumption by baseball players. This discussion was highly relevant to the time period in which the article was written and related to the broader social phenomenon of cocaine use during the 1970s and 1980s. Talamini’s discussion once again illustrates how social problems in sport are often reflective of the current social climate of the larger culture in which sport is embedded, i.e., sport is a microcosm of a society (Coakley, 2007).

Regarding the category of greed, Talamini (1987) indicted MLB owners and players for their increasing willingness to leverage fan loyalty for their own financial gain. He cited owners who threatened to move their franchises if they did not receive new or upgraded stadiums and players who had become like mercenaries since winning the rights to free agency in 1976. As a result, labor relations became of interest to the media and proposed legislation, which would have increased regulation on professional sport leagues, failed to pass.

Talamini (1987) was the first scholar to explicitly identify these social problems/deviant behaviors within MLB. The next section will provide recent updates of the aforementioned categories to illustrate they are still relevant today.

UPDATING THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS ANALYSIS

Evaluating the utility of Talamini’s (1987) original social problems in MLB and the resultant framework is an important step for developing a social problems framework

(or a common vocabulary) that can assist in the collaboration between scholars and practitioners. Talamini's original framework included: gambling, violence (player, managerial, and spectator), cheating, crime, and greed.

Gambling

The issue of gambling is a multifaceted problem that influences both society and sport. Betting on sports is arguably the most widespread form of gambling in America ("National Gambling Impact Study Commission," 1999). Legal sports betting in Las Vegas totaled \$2.48 billion in 1996, but that number has since declined given the prevalence of gambling via the Internet ("Leaving Las Vegas," 2004). Government officials estimate that \$12 billion is annually wagered online (Ahrens, 2006). In light of the burgeoning online gaming business, the United States Government passed the Illegal Internet Gambling Enforcement Act in 2006, prohibiting financial service providers from processing payments to online gambling companies (McCarthy & Swartz, 2006). The new law complemented previously existing laws against sports betting, including the Federal Wire Act of 1961 and the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) of 1992.

Despite existing laws, legalizing sports betting remains an issue that arises on an isolated basis periodically. In 2007, Delaware officials received a recommendation from a consultant that the state legalize sports betting (Chase, 2007). The consultant noted that Delaware was one of four states (along with Nevada, Montana, and Oregon) with a grandfathered exemption to PASPA and projected that Delaware could garner an additional \$70 million in state revenue as a result of increased gambling at state casinos. State officials in New Jersey have also recently considered legalizing sports gambling, even though that state does

not have an exemption to PASPA (King, 2004).

While MLB opposes legalized betting, it has not chosen to completely disassociate itself from gambling. League franchises accept advertising from casinos, and the Las Vegas market has generated some interest as a potential site for a MLB franchise (King, 2004). Further, many MLB franchises are licensing the use of their marks on instant-win lottery tickets, including a Massachusetts game featuring the Boston Red Sox logo that generated \$200 million in revenue in its first year (Lefton, 2007).

Violence: Player, Managerial, and Spectator

Player and managerial violence is an important category because of the high-profile nature of professional athletes, especially as role models for the youth (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). Recent examples of player or managerial violence include a variety of violent actions, such as sliding into bases and the perpetuation of bean ball or other forms of retaliation. Additional forms of violence include fights between teams, such as the bench-clearing brawl between the Baltimore Orioles and the Seattle Mariners in 1993 ("Brawltime," 1993) or the more recent 2008 incident of a minor league player throwing a baseball at the opposing team's dugout, but missing and hitting a fan in the face ("Minor league pitcher," 2008).

Spectator violence is an important concern for sport organizations in general. Since 1987, Major League Baseball has endured several high-profile violent incidents involving fans fighting with each other and with baseball players, managers, or coaches. For example, in 2002, Tom Gamboa, the first-base coach for the Kansas City Royals, was attacked during a game with the Chicago White Sox in Chicago by a 34-year-old fan and his 15-year-old son who attacked Gamboa from behind when the two rushed onto the field ("I was stunned," 2002). Other incidents of spectator violence

in MLB include: 1) a fan charging Chicago Cubs pitcher Randy Myers on the field in 1995, 2) a fan attacking first base umpire Las Diaz during a 2003 Chicago White Sox/Kansas City Royals game (“Incident was the night’s fourth,” 2003), and 3) a homicide at a 2003 Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game (Wakefield & Wann, 2006).

Cheating

Conceptually, the term cheating is extremely flexible and can encompass both on- and off-the-field examples of deceptive actions. Lumpkin, Stoll, and Beller (2006) conceive of cheating as “violating a promise” (p. 35) and a form of dishonesty, all of which affect the perception of baseball throughout social culture and can negatively influence youths. As strategic tactics evolve, cheating in MLB is still an issue of concern for sport managers, MLB administrators, and the public.

When considering the aforementioned definition offered by Lumpkin et al. (2006), cheating appears to still be part of the MLB landscape. For example, in 2003, The Plain Dealer newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio, published a story in which the subject of cheating in baseball was discussed with 19 hitters and 13 pitchers in MLB. Forty-two percent of the hitters said they would use a corked bat to hit the winning run in the World Series, while 17% of pitchers said they would doctor a ball to get the final out in the World Series. As one anonymously quoted player stated: “It’s always been part of the game” (Manoloff, 2003, p. D2).

When former MLB American League Most Valuable Player and six-time all-star Jose Canseco released his 2005 book *Juiced: Wild Time, Rampant ‘Roids, Smash Hits, and How Baseball Got Big*, he claimed to not only openly use steroids during his MLB career but also that he showed other teammates how to use these performance enhancing substances. While Canseco’s book was not

the first or only revelation of cheating within MLB, it did refocus attention on it. Other notable examples of cheating in MLB since 1987 include the suspected use of performance enhancing substances by high-profile players (e.g. Mark McGwire, Jason Giambi, Barry Bonds, Alex Rodriguez), which has brought their accomplishments into question. With seven-time Cy Young Award winner Roger Clemens under investigation for using HGH and potential perjury to the Clemens-McNamee congressional hearing (“Top Republican’s report,” 2008), discussion of cheating in MLB is at an all-time high.

Crime

Since Talamini’s (1987) original analysis touched upon crime, distinction between the types of crimes in which MLB employees are allegedly involved becomes useful. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) generates statistics within their Uniform Crime Report (UCR) based upon two categories of crimes: 1) violent crimes against persons (such as rape and assault), and 2) property crimes (such as theft and arson) (Barak, 1995; Leonard, 1998). These categories are useful for identifying the types of crimes associated with professional baseball players since 1987. Relatively few professional baseball players are involved in reported property crimes (Leonard, 1998), likely due to the upscale lifestyle afforded by lucrative salaries associated with professional baseball, which afford players the abilities to purchase and maintain many material possessions. As a result, the majority of MLB employees associated with criminal activity stem from alleged involvement in crimes against persons.

Leonard (1998) notes many athletes are accused of domestic violence or some form of battering every year in the United States and cites MLB players Barry Bonds, Jose Canseco, and Darryl Strawberry as examples from that era. Parrish (2000) notes even more examples of MLB players who were accused of assault,

battery, or rape, including Wil Cordero, Dwight Gooden, David Cone, Bobby Chouinard, Albert Belle, Ricky Henderson, and Vince Coleman.

The wealth and status of MLB players can also influence their involvement in alleged criminal activity or criminal victimization. Swift (2005) notes how Venezuelan MLB players are at a greater risk of being victimized (or having their family victimized) in their country because of their wealth and status. For example, former shortstop Gustavo Polidor was killed in a 1995 robbery, while in 2002, Texas Rangers outfielder Richard Hidalgo was shot in the arm during an attempted theft of his car (Swift, 2005). Additionally, former pitcher Ugueth Urbina's mother was kidnapped and held for ransom in 2005 (Swift, 2005). Two years later, however, Urbina, was involved in an incident with five of workers on his family's ranch in Venezuela and was eventually sentenced to a 14-year prison term for the attempted murder of these workers ("Former Major Leaguer," 2007). These examples illustrate the complex relationship of MLB personnel and criminal activity.

Greed

In the 20 years since Talamini's critique regarding greed in MLB, owners and players have become even more adept at garnering revenue gains. Only one MLB franchise has relocated in the last 20 years; in 2005, the Montreal Expos were purchased by MLB and moved to Washington, D.C., where they became the Washington Nationals (Bloom, 2004). Despite that relocation, MLB owners have successfully secured 20 new stadiums since 1987, the vast majority of which have been funded at least in part by public monies (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Additionally, numerous franchises that have not received new facilities have been benefited from stadium

renovations that provide them with additional revenue sources (e.g., suites, club seats). On the whole, the average total revenues generated by MLB teams grew from \$52 million per franchise in 1990 to \$170 million in 2006 (Fort, 2007a). Accordingly, average franchise values increased from \$116 million in 1990 to \$431 million in 2007 (Fort, 2007b).

The players have also fared well since Talamini's (1987) analysis. The average annual salary of a MLB player increased from \$513,000 in 1989 to \$2.9 million in 2006 (Fort, 2007c), an increase of 465%. By contrast, mean household income in the United States was \$37,000 in 1989 and \$63,000 in 2005 (United States Census Bureau, 2007), an increase of 70%.

Not surprisingly, owners' pursuits of increased revenue and escalating franchise values and the players' pursuit of salary increases have frequently clashed. MLB and the MLB Players Association have endured an acrimonious relationship for most of the last 20 years. The game has endured two work stoppages since 1987. A players' strike in 1990 ended prior to the loss of any regular season games, but another strike in 1994 and 1995 resulted in the loss of 669 regular season games and the entire 1994 post-season (Stoldt, Dittmore, & Bravold, 2006).

The impact of all this on the popularity of the game among fans is debatable. Television ratings for MLB, like most all sport properties, have declined over the last 20 years (Ourand, 2007). However, attendance at MLB games has grown during that time from an average of 1.8 million fans per franchise in 1986 to 2.5 million fans per franchise in 2006. Not only are more fans attending, they are also paying more to attend games. The Fan Cost Index, a measure of the costs incurred by a family of four to attend a single game (including tickets, parking, concessions and souvenirs), has grown from a league average of \$80 in 1991 to \$171 in 2006,

an increase of 114% (Team Marketing Report, 2006).

From the previous discussion, the social problems that Talamini (1987) identified in the MLB in the late 1980s are still as prevalent 20 years later. Since Talamini's (1987) category structures appear useful, organizing these categories into a more cohesive framework becomes imperative to extend understanding as applied to the modern MLB game. Shoemaker's (2000) integrated model of deviance will help expand the usefulness of not only each category but also the social problems framework in general.

EXTENDING TALAMINI'S ANALYSIS

The purpose of this research is to organize and extend Talamini's (1987) original social problems framework by integrating it with traditional criminological (i.e. juvenile delinquency explanations) and sociology of deviance theories in order to provide greater clarity of the types of deviant behavior in which MLB employees (i.e. players, administrators, managers) and team owners engage. Shoemaker's (2000) proposed integrated model of deviance establishes links between differing analytical levels of the deviance theories and provides a framework with greater utility. Once this focus is provided, then sport managers, academics, and students are better able to: 1) identify the types of problems facing MLB, and sport in general, 2) develop a deeper understanding of the types of problems, and 3) find ways of ameliorating these social problems within MLB. By increasing and strengthening theoretical explanations, scholars and practitioners alike may combine the aforementioned elements of psychology, sociology, and criminology in order to produce a useful framework for examining modern phenomena, especially deviant behavior, in MLB.

Criminological and Sociology of Deviance Theories

Integrating the varied social problems associated with deviant behavior within one theoretical framework becomes a challenging endeavor. However, Shoemaker (2000) proposed an integrated model explaining delinquency and deviance that incorporates "three levels of conceptualization, structural (that is, pertaining to societal conditions), individual (biological and psychological), and social-psychological (social controls, self-esteem, and peer associations)" (p. 268). Shoemaker (2000) notes that the analytical levels within the proposed model (i.e. structural, individual, social-psychological) oftentimes coordinate with specific theories of delinquency or deviance. Table 1 illustrates the relationships between the proposed model's analytical level and the corresponding delinquency theory.

The structural level, according to Shoemaker (2000) involves institutional arrangements and society-wide processes. The associated delinquency theories of anomie and social disorganization focus on larger normative structures, such as disruptions or decreased access to legitimate (e.g. economic, status, expectations) activities (Shoemaker, 2000). According to these theories deviant behavior by athletes or other sport organization personnel (e.g. administrative staffs, scouts, officials, umpires) occurs because society or sport's influence over individuals is not strong enough to constrain their behavior (Shoemaker, 2000).

Radical and neo-Marxist theories, which more explicitly focus on economic factors, see deviant behavior as the result of conflicting group interests (Shoemaker, 2000). Essentially, the distribution of wealth and power within sport is inequitable, and the conflicting interests of differing groups (e.g. athletes vs. franchise owners) influences the definition of what is considered as deviant behavior. Analysis of the structural level in society is crucial for understanding how larger institutional or

social factors influence individual actors, i.e., how issues in society affect the structure and individuals in sport.

The social-psychological level includes cultural and social control mechanisms and focuses on social factors and their influences upon individuals. Of specific importance is the role of culture or sub-cultures and social connections, such as peer groups or agents of social control. Social bond theory focuses on why individuals conform to social norms (as opposed to violating them) and is analyzed based on how attached, involved, committed, and how much belief an individual has in rules and norms. The four aforementioned social bond components—involvement, commitment, attachment, and belief—influence how much control society's rules have upon the individual and can be used to explain certain social trends, e.g., if sport participation promotes or inhibits delinquency (Vermillion, 2007). Containment theory is very similar and explicates the role an individual's self-concept has on delinquency.

Differential Association and Drift Theory are interpersonal explanations that focus on the power of context and groups. Differential Association identifies the importance of learning deviant behavior from close-knit peer groups, while Drift Theory emphasizes the individual's choice to engage in deviance, which depends largely upon social context (or situation). Since baseball takes place in a social setting that includes opponents, teammates, and organizational personnel, understanding the influence of other actors is crucial for understanding and controlling deviant behavior within MLB. The social-psychological level is important for understanding how sport deviance, while manifesting itself in the form of individual behavior, can be influenced by relationships or a lack of relationships with cultural norms and other actors.

Finally, the individual level of deviant behavior includes a wide variety of biological

or environmental factors which, when combined with specific psychological states, can influence deviant behavior. While psychological abnormalities exist and are prevalent, for our purposes, personality configurations will be the focus of the individual level. Specifically, if deviant behavior presents itself, then this negative behavior is preceded by a negative trait, which influences the deviant's overall outlook and disposition (Shoemaker, 2000). While this analysis primarily focuses on the social foundations of sport-based deviance, individual traits (such as their core personality) and the influence that these traits have on behavior and relationships with other people are important to understand.

Table 1

Shoemaker's (2000) Integrated Model for Deviance and Traditional Deviance Theories

<i>Analytical Level</i>	<i>Associated Delinquency Theory</i>
Structural	Anomie Social Disorganization Radical Theories Neo-Marxist Delinquency Theories
Social-Psychological	Social Control Theory (Social Bond) Containment Theory Differential Association Drift Theory
Individual	Biological Explanations Psychological Explanations (Personality Configurations)

Table 2

Application of Shoemaker Model to Social Problems Identified by Talamini

Social Problem	Associated Analytical Level	Associated Delinquency Framework(s)	Comment
Gambling	Social-Psychological	Differential Association Drift Theory	Despite prohibitions, MLB personnel may view gambling as culturally acceptable based upon individual rationalizations.
Player & Managerial Violence	Social-Psychological	Differential Association	On-field violence, like other social processes, is a learned activity from close-knit peer groups.
Spectator Violence	Individual	Psychological Explanations	Addressing specific and/or individual disruptions within a crowd setting can prevent collective disturbances.
Cheating	Structural	Anomie	Cheating results from a state of "normlessness" where athletes see the goal of winning as more important than the means of achievement.
Criminal Activity	Social-Psychological	Drift Theory	Athletes do not see themselves as criminals, but as individuals taken advantage of by many groups, including women. The unique lifestyles of MLB players influence their rationalizations of their behaviors.
Greed	Structural	Radical theory, Marxism, Neo-Marxism	Commercialized sport is predicated upon economic gain and profit maximization. Those that own sport properties receive a disproportionate amount of the revenue generated.

Utilizing the Deviance Model to Analyze Problems in MLB

The Shoemaker (2000) model is particularly useful for understanding the variety of social problems and deviant behavior that Talamini (1987) identified within MLB. Table 2 illustrates this relationship, and the following narrative elaborates on the application.

Historically, gambling is a victimless crime often perpetrated within sub-cultures, which are extremely influential upon whether or not the individual engages in many forms of deviant behavior (Hughes & Kroehler, 2007). To understand sport gambling, one must focus on the power of learning sub-cultural behaviors and the notion that gambling, like

other deviant behaviors, is a learned activity. Differential Association (DA) is a cultural transmission theory that examines, in particular, the role of peers in socializing individuals how to engage in a particular behavior (Hughes & Kroehler, 2007). Additionally, Shoemaker (2000) notes DA is a situational explanation of crime and deviant behavior, which illustrates how individualistic experiences are the result of current and situational contexts.

While players, managers, and other personnel are aware of MLB's official stance on gambling, they still may pursue gambling activities, which they do not see as violating larger normative structures. Specifically, with the increase in gambling's popularity in society, coupled with MLB's lack of disassociation with gambling-related activities, any MLB personnel's involvement in gambling should not be viewed as surprising. Indeed, Alan Marr, the top scout for the Baltimore Orioles, was fired after MLB's investigative unit, in conjunction with the New York Police department, linked him to a gambling investigation ("Report: Orioles scout," 2008). The firing of Marr is part of an ongoing MLB investigation of scouts and their relationship with gambling activities. Teams with scouts under investigation have not fired the other scouts linked to Barr in the 2008 New York City police investigation into gambling. In fact, MLB has officially reprimanded no scouts or teams ("Seven or eight' scouts linked to gambling investigation," 2008). What becomes evident is that multiple scouts are under investigation, illustrating that this deviant activity is not isolated to single individuals within MLB, but involves multiple parties who have administrative controls over the game and who may have had communication and interaction. Understanding how close the aforementioned scouts were can be useful for limiting further gambling activities of MLB personnel.

Combined with DA, Drift theory focuses on

both situations and individuals within a deviant situation, which theorizes that individual feels they are good people, but they might drift into and out of deviant behaviors (Matza, 1964). Additionally, using techniques of neutralization, offenders are able to justify their behaviors as not overtly deviant (Sykes & Matza, 1957). The ideas from DA and Drift theory better help to understand reinforcements, which are crucial for developing the MLB culture that accepts gambling while simultaneously justifying the fact that MLB personnel still engage in a behavior explicitly prohibited by the organization.

DA is also an important theory for understanding how types of violence become routine within MLB. Specifically, DA's focus on peers' importance within the socialization process of deviant behavior is applicable in this situation. As young ballplayers at various levels of competition (including MLB) become immersed in their respective organizations, they learn certain unwritten rules of baseball, which often include a normative understanding of accepted risks and violence within the daily occurrences of the game. Once the deviant behavior is learned, it can then be socialized to future ballplayers that may eventually become managers and sport organization personnel. While players and managers know such deviant acts violate the rules, the practice of engaging in these acts game after game by player after player helps to reinforce not only the behavior, but also the participants' membership in such an elite fraternity (i.e. MLB, or professional baseball, in general). What may result is the loyalty to the group (i.e. their team) becomes more important than the prevailing rules or structure of the game, especially regarding violent behavior engagement on the playing field.

Sometimes employing an individual level of analysis is useful for understanding spectator violence. Wakefield and Wann (2006) conducted

a study focusing on dysfunctional fans at sporting events. Social dysfunction is important to sport spectators, because “social dysfunction often leads to other forms of aggressive behavior and violence. These persons are often loud and obnoxious at sporting events, freely and readily directing their anger toward other fans, players, and officials” (Wakefield & Wann, 2006, p. 170). This individual (or psychological) focus is important for understanding how single fans (or very small groups) become disruptive. Since Shoemaker (2000) notes how psychological determinants influence deviant behavior, one can posit that identifying single disruptions and finding ways to curb individual disruptions help prevent collective violence before it becomes widespread at the sporting event.

Employing a more structural level of analysis, a useful way to examine cheating is by employing Merton’s Anomie theory. Anomie theory is helpful for identifying how some cheating in MLB occurs. According to Merton’s theory, a cheater is considered to be an innovator who knowingly steps outside the bounds of society’s prescribed means for achievement to seek a specific goal or reward (Leonard, 1998). If the goal in baseball is winning and prescribed means (theoretically) include fair play, then players taking performance-enhancing substances are innovators operating outside of current game’s rules and regulations. Indeed, Leonard (1998) lists several other examples of how professional baseball players can be considered as innovators. For example, infielders that fake a double play by using “sleight-of-hand (and foot) tactics” deceive umpires and as a result can be labeled as cheaters (Leonard, 1998, p. 148). Utilizing this theoretical framework can help to not only better understand who cheats in MLB, but also explain why individuals might engage in such deceptive acts. Indeed, Merton’s innovator concept may be useful for

examining the suspected increase in players’ using performance enhancing substances, thus exemplifying the adage of utilizing “any means necessary” to achieve fame, fortune, or a competitive advantage.

Understanding criminal behavior is difficult to do without examining the individual and environmental contexts simultaneously. Matza’s (1964) Drift theory identifies deviant behavior as associated with specific situations and is a useful social-psychological level theory for examining crime in MLB. More specifically, Sykes and Matza’s (1957) techniques of neutralization, often utilized with Drift theory, are important for understanding how individuals develop justifications or rationalizations for their behaviors. The unique lifestyles of MLB personnel undoubtedly influence how they view the world, including determining concepts of right and wrong. Athletes often act based upon the masculine culture of professional sports. For example, by conforming to higher loyalties (those of the MLB fraternity) these individuals may see women as targeting athletes in order to exploit them for personal gain, thus, further institutionalizing the secret society mentality within professional sports (Coakley, 2007). Developing an understanding of athletes who do not seem violent but engage in domestic violence or other person-related crimes is challenging, but Drift theory and techniques of rationalization provide useful explanations regarding these individuals’ engagements in criminal activities because it helps to clarify how individuals, who seem law abiding may engage in criminal or deviant activities.

Summarily, greed, economics, and structural analysis are seemingly intertwined with MLB. Shoemaker (2000) notes that Radical theorists (or Neo-Marxists) view economics, capitalism, and class struggles as precipitating factors influencing deviant behavior. For purposes of this discussion, a traditionally Marxist

view explains how those that control the means of production (i.e., franchise owners) have the ability to exploit the workers (i.e., athletes, staff). Additionally, the exploitation of municipalities regarding public subsidies of stadiums illustrates the inequities in power and economic influence. Local advocates of multimillion-dollar sport venues oftentimes rely on rationalizations such as increasing jobs or increasing tourism dollars within the city to justify subsidizing these facilities (Howard & Crompton, 2006). As a result, the economic power franchise owners possess empowers them to embrace greed (deviant behavior) and further expand their wealth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the social problems in MLB as identified by Talamini (1987) and the relevant associated analysis proposed by Shoemaker (2000), the authors offer the following recommendations regarding how MLB may best address the social problems affecting the game of professional baseball today.

Gambling

Since gambling behavior is fundamentally affected by perceptions of norms within the larger society (i.e. anomie) and MLB in particular, the league should move to further distance itself from associations with gambling enterprises. This would mean refusing to accept advertising from casinos and refusing to partner with state lotteries. Further, MLB should move to aggressively investigate and, when appropriate, punish anyone within the game that has violated rules pertaining to betting on baseball, thereby legitimating rules and showing MLB personnel how these normative structures apply to them.

Player & Managerial Violence

Since on-field violence is a learned activity, the socialization process of players at all levels becomes crucial for eliminating violent

behaviors and is an outgrowth of the tenets of Differential Association, i.e., the concept that violent or deviant activity is learned. Specifically, the unwritten rules and self-policing that occurs amongst MLB players appears related to two ideas: 1) structure/organization of the game, and 2) masculinity. One prime example of a manager openly admitting that he encourages on-field violence is Chicago White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen, who stated in 2008 that he has ordered pitchers on his team to hit the opposing players because he had a duty to protect his players ("Ozzie admits," 2008). The comments were a reaction to a White Sox incident with the Kansas City Royals in which a Royals player was hit by a pitch and charged the mound. Guillen also added that if hit someone is "going to bring in (his) best guy and make sure he gets it done." Guillen reiterated his old-school thinking by finishing with, "(t)hat's Major League Baseball. That's baseball. That's the baseball I grew up with. Not the (expletive) they play right now" ("Ozzie admits," 2008, 10).

MLB can discourage player violence by reprimanding managers or even removing players that engage in such conduct, thereby changing the culture of accepting on-field violence. MLB, in turn, would need to monitor managers on a yearly basis through increase supervision to mandate that such a cultural shift would occur. To mandate compliance to MLB policy, MLB could institute a strict and punitive policy similar to the NBA's bench rule, which dictates that players who leave the bench area to become involved in a brawl, fight, or disagreement be automatically suspended. In cases of fights on the baseball diamond, MLB could dictate subjection to suspension to anyone—player or manager/coach—who leaves the dugout or bullpen areas.

When making ethically relevant decisions, such as administering suspensions or fines, MLB could follow some of Simon's (1991) guidelines for sound moral reasoning. Two of

these guidelines include: 1) remaining impartial during the evaluation of offenses and 2) being systematically consistent. To remain impartial, punishments should be categorized beforehand, done in consultation with the MLBPA, agreed upon by all parties, and have clearly established enforcement guidelines proportionally established beforehand to accommodate various offenses.

Spectator Violence

American sporting events generally do not suffer from the same types of crowd misbehaviors as other sporting events around the world (e.g., soccer hooliganism). Nonetheless, identifying individual disruptions before crowd disturbances erupt remains crucial. Developing event management strategies aimed at individual fans aids in preventing larger, collective disruptions. According to Wakefield and Wann (2006), security or event management strategies could include pre-game, game-day, and post-game procedures; pre- and post-game procedures could include limiting attendance and implementing audio-visual equipment to monitor high-risk spectator areas. Game-day procedures could include: 1) limiting and controlling alcohol, 2) increasing undercover security in the stands, and/or 3) having other fans assist in identifying disruptive fans (Wakefield & Wann, 2006). Wakefield and Wann's (2006) recommendations illustrate how a psychological or individual focus regarding spectator violence aids in developing security and event management strategies.

Cheating

The long-standing tradition of cheating in MLB is highly variegated. Cheating occurs on many levels, ranging from trying to influence umpires' decisions to using performance-enhancing substances. Regarding process, however, these acts are similar, and the anomie theory's contributions are useful to MLB administrators. Athletes, managers, and even

organizational personnel have internalized the win-at-all-costs mentality, which relates to the anomic situation resulting from weak social structures. With so much at stake, including multi-million dollar salaries, the penultimate goal of sport success (baseball in this case) becomes increasingly important. Appropriate ways to achieve this goal, however, are being circumvented by many individuals. Even in non-sporting strata of society, high-profile examples of businesses engaging in unfair or illegal practices help to influence how players, managers, and organizational personnel view their game. MLB must set a standard for monitoring and sanctioning all forms of cheating. With the high-profile nature of cheating, MLB, working in conjunction with MLBPA, must respond by aggressively monitoring and severely penalizing the most egregious forms of cheating such as performance-enhancing drugs.

Crime

According to Drift theory, athletes and others in MLB may be primarily law abiding while possessing the potential for deviant behavior. As a result, these individuals drift into or out of negative or deviant situations, depending upon the individual's mood or context (Shoemaker, 2000). The athlete's mood, however, is an important focal point. As Coakley (2007) notes, some elite athletes develop hubris, a sense of pride-driven arrogance, which can result in a feeling of invulnerability or an attitude that society's laws and rules do not apply to them. While this might not always occur, some athletes engage in criminal behavior as a result of such feelings of independence from normative standards or laws. Understanding the contexts in which MLB athletes or personnel are situated becomes important for ameliorating the criminal activity.

MLB officials need to make sure that its athletes and employees recognize their preferred status in society comes with

obligations to (at minimum) comply with society's laws. MLB needs to provide additional educational opportunities that inform players (and minor league players as well) of their unique lifestyle challenges which result from their status and wealth. The MVP (Mentors in Violence Prevention) program, which is associated with the Center for the Study of Sport in Society (www.sportinsociety.org), is an example of a program designed to address domestic violence; this program is currently utilized by the Boston Red Sox. MLB could institute similar initiatives (or this program specifically) as a way to educate all MLB employees and inform them how their unique lifestyles can contribute to involvement in criminal activity, especially crimes against persons.

Beyond crime prevention, advancement of corporate social responsibility initiatives that directly engage MLB players and other organizational personnel with others in their communities (particularly citizens from disadvantaged backgrounds) may serve to diminish the isolation that contributes to hubris. Conducting youth baseball clinics, serving holiday meals to those in need, and working on community improvement projects diminish the insulation of MLB personnel from their social worlds. Additionally, increasing the social networks of many MLB personnel assists in developing life-skills for these individuals.

Greed

Radical or Neo-Marxist theorists focus on the economic aspects of sport properties. As previously mentioned, MLB has enjoyed unprecedented growth and economic prosperity (for both athletes and owners), despite frequently enduring work stoppages due to labor disputes. Issues of public subsidies for stadiums are another important component to this issue. MLB has done well to recover economically from the 1994 work stoppage. However, MLB needs to continue to make its

product more fan and consumer friendly. Being sensitive to economic hardships facing fans, such as lowering ticket prices in select sections, containing food/beverage prices, and working in equitable ways with city officials when building newer facilities, are important ways for MLB to remain profitable while not alienating its fan base in the process.

Conclusion

Talamini's (1987) work identified social problems in MLB, and this current research work revealed that these social problems were still evident 20 years later; updated the framework by extending the analysis to include traditional criminological theories as explanations while conceptually connecting with Shoemaker's (2000) integrated model; and provided practitioner recommendations based upon the aforementioned concepts. The ideas presented herein are an attempt to amalgamate theoretical concepts and applied strategies for decreasing persistent social problems in MLB. Essentially, by strengthening theoretical explanations for deviance within MLB, scholars and practitioners alike may combine elements of psychology, sociology, and criminology to produce a relevant framework for better addressing modern phenomena in MLB and MLB-sanctioned events. While some limitations are present, the research is the first attempt to bring together such a wide range of ideas.

Finally, with MLB's Mitchell Investigation and the FBI's probe into online pharmaceutical distribution of performance-enhancing substances (Nightengale, 2007), cheating and the larger context of general social problems have the potential to significantly impact the future of MLB. Eitzen and Sage (2003) note sport's power for socializing the youth of society. If MLB players and personnel not only engage in various aspects of deviant behaviors but also allow those behaviors to be condoned by the baseball culture itself, sport may be counterproductive in the socialization process,

which contradicts the notion of sport's ability to instill positive characteristics in children (Edwards, 1973). For baseball to maintain its influence and prestige as America's pastime (particularly at the major league level), MLB must directly and effectively address many of the aforementioned social problems to preserve itself as a viable social institution.

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A SYSTEMS-BASED THINKING & LEARNING JOURNAL

Social Problems in Major League Baseball: Revisiting and Expanding Talamini's Analysis Twenty Years Later

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The purpose of this research was to review, revisit, and expand Talamini's social problems within Major League Baseball (MLB) in such a way that it leads to theory-based recommendations regarding how to address those problems. Talamini's categories, which include gambling, player/managerial violence, spectator violence, cheating, crime, and greed, are reviewed and applied to social problems in MLB since the original publication in 1987. To better understand social problems and deviant behavior within MLB, the original categories are connected to specific deviance theories to better understand causation of deviance. Theories are then organized according to Shoemaker's proposed integrated model, which classifies causes of deviance on the structural, social-psychological, and psychological levels. Relating Talamini's social problems categories to sociology of deviance theories, then organizing them according to Shoemaker's proposed integrated model aids in better explaining MLB deviance. Recommendations are made, based upon the model, to sport management practitioners, students, and scholars regarding how to ameliorate the aforementioned social problems.

Issues

In 1987, John T. Talamini penned an article in the May issue of the journal *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*. Using a self-developed social problems framework, Talamini (1987) addressed socially-relevant issues within Major League Baseball (MLB) illustrating that "[b]aseball ... like other human activities is Janus-faced" (p. 65). Talamini (1987) argued his analysis was sociologically relevant because, up to that point, baseball was lauded for its structural aspects, and few discussions were entertained outside of the popular press regarding the negative attributes of MLB. Talamini's (1987) original research advocated identifying social problems within MLB utilizing a traditional social problems framework. The social problems framework was useful for developing the categories of deviant behavior within MLB. These typological categories included: gambling, player, managerial, and spectator violence, cheating by players and officials, crime by athletes, and the greed of owners and players.

Gambling has been an issue of concern to MLB for many years. Talamini (1987) noted gamblers' interest in baseball pre-dated the Civil War, and more bets were placed on MLB games than any other sport. More recently, statistics show that over \$12 billion is placed in online wagers each year (Ahrens, 2006). While MLB does not condone gambling, it still accepts advertising dollars from casinos and has even considered placing a franchise in Las Vegas. A 2008 case involving a Baltimore Orioles scout that was tied to a gambling ring has brought baseball's gambling problem back to the forefront.

Talamini (1987) also addressed player and managerial violence. He stated baseball is a sport that attempts to govern itself with unwritten rules of the game that often contradict fair play and sportsmanship. Examples of player or managerial violence include a variety of violent actions, such as hard slides into bases and the perpetuation of bean ball or other forms of retaliation. An extreme recent case happened in 2008 when a minor league player throwing a baseball at the opposing team's dugout missed and hit a fan in the face ("Minor league pitcher," 2008).

Spectator violence was also an area of concern for Talamini (1987). Talamini (1987) stated that despite the gentleman's sport ideal, baseball was largely contributing to public disorder. Since 1987, MLB has seen several high-profile violent incidents involving fans fighting with each other and with baseball players, managers, or coaches. For example, Tom Gamboa, third base coach for the Kansas City Royals, was attacked in 2002 at a game in Chicago by a 34-year-old fan and his 15-year-old son ("I was stunned," 2002).

Cheating is part of MLB and another one of the important categories to a social problems analysis of MLB (Talamini, 1987). Talamini (1987) noted a number of deceptive and illegal activities that some baseball players use to gain an advantage, such as corking bats, and scuffing or altering the baseball by pitchers. Cheating appears to still be part of the MLB landscape, whether it involves performance-enhancing substance use (Nightengale, 2006) or more traditional forms of cheating. Regarding more traditional forms of in-game cheating, for example, in 2003, Cleveland, Ohio, newspaper The Plain Dealer published a story in which the subject of cheating in baseball was discussed with 19 hitters and 13 pitchers in MLB. Forty-two percent of the hitters said they would use a corked bat to hit the winning run in the World Series, while 17% of pitchers said they would alter (doctor) a baseball to get the final out in the World Series. As one anonymous player stated, "It's always been part of the game" (Manoloff, 2003, p. D2).

Criminal activity against persons has continued to be an area of concern for the MLB since 1987. Leonard (1998) notes many athletes are accused of domestic violence or some form of battering every year in the United States and cites MLB players Barry Bonds, Jose Canseco, and Darryl Strawberry as examples from the late 1990s. Parrish (2000) notes even more examples of MLB players who were accused of assault, battery, or rape, including Wil Cordero, Dwight Gooden, David Cone, Bobby Chouinard, Albert Belle, Ricky Henderson, and Vince Coleman.

Regarding greed, Talamini (1987) indicted MLB owners and players for their increasing willingness to leverage fan loyalty for their own financial gain. In the past 20 years, MLB owners and players have become even more adept at garnering revenue gains. Only one MLB franchise has relocated in the last 20 years when the Montreal Expos were purchased by MLB and moved to Washington, D.C. and became the Washington Nationals in 2005 (Bloom, 2004). Despite that, MLB owners have successfully secured 20 new stadiums since 1987, the vast majority of which have been funded at least partially by public monies (Howard & Crompton, 2004). MLB's players have also fared well since Talamini's analysis, with the average annual MLB player salary increasing from \$513,000 in 1989 to \$2.9 million in 2006 (Fort, 2007c), an increase of 465%. By contrast, mean household income in the United States was \$37,000 in 1989 and \$63,000 in 2005 (United States Census Bureau, 2007), an increase of 70%.

Discussion, Integration, & Recommendations

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this research is to organize and extend Talamini's (1987) original social problems framework by integrating it with traditional criminological (i.e., juvenile delinquency explanations) and sociology of deviance theories in order to provide greater clarity of the types of deviant behavior in which MLB employees (i.e., players, administrators, managers) and team owners engage. Shoemaker's (2000) proposed integrated model of deviance establishes links between differing analytical levels of the deviance theories and provides a framework with greater utility. Once this focus is provided, then sport managers, academics, and students are better able to: 1) identify the types of problems facing MLB and sport in general, 2) develop a deeper understanding of the types of problems, and 3) find ways of ameliorating these social problems within MLB.

Criminological and Sociology of Deviance Theories

Integrating the varied social problems associated with deviant behavior within one theoretical framework is challenging. However, Shoemaker (2000) proposed an integrated model explaining delinquency and deviance that incorporates “three levels of conceptualization, structural (that is, pertaining to societal conditions), individual (biological and psychological), and social-psychological (social controls, self-esteem, and peer associations)” (p. 268). Shoemaker (2000) notes that the analytical levels within the proposed model (i.e. structural, individual, social-psychological) often coordinate with specific theories of delinquency or deviance. Table 1 illustrates the relationships between the proposed model’s analytical level and the corresponding delinquency theory.

The structural level involves institutional arrangements and society-wide processes. The associated delinquency theories of anomie and social disorganization focus on larger normative structures, such as disruptions or decreased access to legitimate (e.g. economic, status, expectations) activities (Shoemaker, 2000, p. 92). According to these theories, deviant behavior by athletes or other sport organization personnel (e.g. administrative staffs, scouts, officials, umpires) occurs because the influence of society or sport over individuals is not strong enough to constrain their behavior. Radical and neo-Marxist theories, which more explicitly focus on economic factors, explain deviant behavior as the result of conflicting group interests (p. 216). The distribution of wealth and power within sport is inequitable, and, accordingly, the conflicting interests of differing groups (e.g. athletes vs. franchise owners) influences the definition of what is considered as deviant behavior.

The social-psychological level includes cultural and social control mechanisms, and it focuses on social factors and their influences upon individuals. Of specific importance are the role of culture (or sub-cultures) and social connections (such as peer groups or agents of social control). Social bond theory focuses on why individuals conform to social norms (as compared to violating them) and is analyzed based on their attachment, involvement, commitment, and beliefs toward rules and norms. The four aforementioned social bond components influence how much control society’s rules have upon individuals and can be used to explain certain situations, e.g., if sport participation promotes or inhibits delinquency (Vermillion, 2007). Containment theory is very similar and explicates the role of individual self-concept on delinquency.

Differential Association and Drift theory are interpersonal explanations that focus on the power of context and groups. Differential Association identifies the importance of learning deviant behavior from close-knit peer groups, while Drift theory emphasizes individuals’ choices to engage in deviance, which depends largely upon social context (or situation). Since baseball takes place in a social setting (which includes opponents, teammates, and organizational personnel), understanding the influence of other actors becomes crucial for understanding and controlling deviant behavior within MLB.

Finally, the individual level of deviant behavior includes a wide variety of biological or environmental factors, which, when combined with specific psychological states, can influence deviant behavior. While psychological abnormalities exist and are prevalent, for our purposes, personality configurations become the focus of the individual level. Specifically, if deviant behavior presents itself, then this negative behavior is preceded by a negative trait, which influences the deviant’s overall outlook and disposition (Shoemaker, 2000, p. 59). While this analysis primarily focuses on the social foundations of sport-based deviance, understanding of individual traits such as core personality and the influences that these traits have on behaviors and relationships with other people becomes critical.

Recommendations

The Shoemaker (2000) model is particularly useful for understanding the variety of social problems and deviant behaviors that have been identified within MLB. Based on the social problems in MLB as identified by Talamini (1987) and the relevant associated analysis proposed by Shoemaker (2000), the authors offer the following recommendations regarding how MLB may best address the social problems affecting the game today.

- 1) **Gambling:** Since gambling behavior is fundamentally affected by perceptions of norms within the larger society and MLB in particular, the league should move to further distance itself from associations with gambling enterprises. This would mean refusing to accept advertising from casinos and refusing to partner with state lotteries. Further, MLB should move to aggressively investigate and, when appropriate, punish anyone within the game who has violated rules pertaining to betting on baseball.
- 2) **On-field Violence:** Since on-field violence is a learned activity, the socialization process of players at all levels becomes crucial for eliminating violent behaviors. MLB could institute a strict and punitive policy similar to the NBA's bench rule involving automatic suspensions for individuals who leave the bench area to involve themselves in fights.
- 3) **Spectator Violence:** Identifying individual disruptions before crowd disturbances erupt becomes crucial to maintaining order within stadiums. Developing event management strategies aimed at individual fans aids in preventing larger, collective disruptions. Examples include limiting alcohol sales and having hotlines for fans to call to report unruly fan behavior.
- 4) **Cheating:** Cheating occurs on many levels, from trying to influence umpires' decisions to using performance-enhancing substances. MLB must set a standard for monitoring and sanctioning all forms of cheating. MLB, working in conjunction with MLB Players Association, should respond to circumstances of cheating by aggressively monitoring and severely penalizing the most egregious forms of cheating such as performance-enhancing drugs.
- 5) **Crime:** Some individuals (such as athletes, managers, coaches, etc.) engage in criminal behavior as a result of disregard for normative standards or laws. Understanding the contexts or situations these athletes or MLB personnel is important for ameliorating criminal activity. MLB officials need to make sure that athletes and all MLB employees recognize that their preferred/elevated status in society comes with minimal obligations to comply with society's laws. MLB must provide additional educational opportunities that inform major league (and minor league) players of their unique life-style challenges, which result from their status and wealth.
- 6) **Greed:** MLB must continue to make its product more fan-friendly. Measures that reflect sensitivity to economic hardships facing fans, such as lowering ticket prices in select sections, containing food/beverage prices, and working equitably with city officials when building newer facilities, will become important ways for MLB to remain profitable while avoiding any alienation of its fan base in the process.