‘Integrity, Sportsmanship, Character’: Baseball’s Moral Entrepreneurs and the Production and Reproduction of Institutional Autonomy

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FORTHCOMING AT *THE SOCIOLOGICAL QUARTERLY*

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Abstract: Sociologists have long argued that institutions like religion or economy can become relatively distinct spheres that facilitate and constrain action, goal setting, and decision-making. But, few empirical studies have looked closely at how institutions become relatively distinct cultural and structural domains. This paper examines how institutional entrepreneurs—in this case, Major League Baseball (MLB) sportswriters—build and sustain institutional boundaries by considering how they create a distinct cultural discourse that infuses baseball places, times, and events with culturally distinct meanings. Drawing from sportswriters’ columns, documentaries, and monographs written on baseball, we show that MLB entrepreneurs have developed and disseminated a discourse oriented around the generalized medium of sport exchange, interaction, and communication: *competitiveness*. Using these data, the paper below examines how this medium becomes quantified and embodied in tangible and intangible forms. Additionally, the paper draws on sports columns that illustrate how MLB entrepreneurs protect the autonomy of a sacred core (the Hall of Fame) from internal threats (gambling and performance-enhancement drugs) and external corruption (the influence of money). The paper ends with a discussion of implications for the applicability of the findings to other sports and institutional domains.

Keywords: baseball; institutions; moral entrepreneurship; cultural sociology; sport

INTRODUCTION

It has long been a sociological assumption that societies vary across time and space in terms of how distinct the major institutional domains or spheres of social life are from each other (Durkheim 1887 [1993] ; Weber 1946a; Habermas 1973 [1976]; Merton 1979). In particular, this line of thought was fundamental to structural-functional accounts (Parsons and Smelser 1956; Parsons 1971), and continues to inspire theoretical insights on institutions or institutional spheres (Turner 2010; Abrutyn 2009, 2014; Turner and Abrutyn 2017), their level of self-reflexivity or autonomy (Luhmann 1995), and the uniqueness of their “logic” (Friedland et al. 2014). On the macro-level, the idea that units of analysis like institutional spheres can become (relatively) discrete structural and cultural spaces underscores a fundamental source of societal variation found across time and space, while at the micro level different types of autonomous spheres imply variation in the ways in which actors orient their emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Thus, how institutional spheres become relatively discrete structural and cultural entities matters for understanding how they penetrate the realities of a significant proportion of the population (Abrutyn 2016).

Nevertheless, sociologists rarely empirically interrogate these theoretical assumptions beyond considering the historical processes driving political (Eisenstadt 1963), religious (Eisenstadt 1982), and economic (Parsons and Smelser 1956) autonomy. Thus, while historical evidence documents how political goals, 5000 years ago in China, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, came to be perceived “as different from other types of goals of other spheres [like kinship or religion]” in that their “formation, pursuit, and implementation became largely independent of other groups, and were governed mostly by political criteria and by consideration of political exigency” (Eisenstadt 1963:19), it remains an open question as to how we can ascertain autonomy in other institutions—like sport or medicine. To begin to remedy this gap, and because investigating an entire institutional sphere would be beyond the scope of this type of forum, the study below considers one particular “field” within the sport institution (Major League

Baseball, or MLB), to illustrate some of the central dimensions of institutional autonomy. Of all the organized sports leagues, MLB is the oldest, continuously run league. As such, past research has highlighted that its success and longevity encouraged isomorphism in the three other North American sports leagues and various manifestations of soccer leagues (Leifer 1998). In addition, a Weberian line of thought emphasizes the role real collective actors, or what we call institutional entrepreneurs (Eisenstadt 1980) play in erecting and defending structural and cultural boundaries. MLB is distinguishable by the fact that its entrepreneurs—in particular, the sportswriters responsible for developing, applying, and disseminating distinctive themes of discourse and the medium of communication, interaction, and exchange—are the oldest, self-reflexive sport entrepreneur in the world (c. 1908); like the organizational form, baseball writers' influence has had isomorphic consequences for other sports (Schiff 2008).

To lay bare the process by which autonomy is constructed and maintained, the analysis leverages data drawn from baseball writers—primarily those who are members of the BBWAA, but also those who have written books on the subject and contributed to historian Ken Burns' documentary on the MLB and America. Following a brief conceptual discussion meant to frame the theoretical argument and describe the case in greater detail, we turn to an analysis of the generalized medium of sport exchange, interaction, and communication—*competitiveness* (Abrutyn and Turner 2011; Abrutyn 2014)—to illustrate how a distinct logic and cultural discourse is used to shape the goals, lines of action, decisions, and such that athletes and fans alike employ to make sense of the beliefs and practices undergirding sport activities. From there, we consider how sports entrepreneurs constructed a sacred physical space (the MLB Hall of Fame) that resides in what Mircea Eliade (1959) referred to as *illoc tempore*, or mythic, sacred time before time and how the debate over performance enhancement drugs, gambling, and election into the Hall of Fame highlight the autonomous nature of baseball. The paper concludes by considering how autonomy works by examining the corrupting and polluting affects

of money and economy and the efforts to safeguard baseball from corruption as further evidence of the structural and cultural distinctness of the field of baseball. The discussion highlights the theoretical and empirical implications of the analysis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME

Institutions or institutional domains are the macro-level structural and cultural spaces in which the vast majority of societies and the activities of their members are organized.¹ Historical, ethnographic, and archaeological evidence reveal a process by which different institutions become more autonomous as societies grow larger and more complex (Nolan and Lenski 2010; Abrutyn 2014). In short, institutions pattern and reproduce feelings, thoughts, and behaviors by delimiting *and* facilitating how individuals and groups subjected to them set goals, choose between competing lines of action, orient their attitudes, and so forth (Turner 2010; Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012). Institutions do so through structural forces (e.g., hierarchicalization and legitimating authority) and cultural forces (e.g., generalized symbolic media of exchange) (Abrutyn 2014). As an institution becomes more autonomous it comes to penetrate the realities of a greater number of people, such that they come to see it as discrete vis-à-vis other domains of social action.

For most of human existence, the kinship institution dominated everyday life, permeating the political, legal, religious, and economic domains of these societies, and therefore the texture and tone of political, legal, religious, or economic goals and decisions (Turner and Maryanski 2009). That is to say that most humans set goals, interpreted events and action, and made decisions through the “lens” or discourse of loyalty (Levi-Strauss 1969) and, in some times and places, love (Friedland et al. 2014). These

¹ The definition of “institution” is rather murky, despite its centrality in sociology since Durkheim and Spencer. For the purposes of the discussion, institutions are considered macro domains that vary in terms of how distinct they are from each other (Abrutyn 2014). Though abstract and invisible, as they grow more autonomous we can see their outlines in the way they change physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space.

two “media” of exchange, interaction, and communication were/are the underlying “logic” of marriage, divorce, political decisions, economic production and reproduction, and so forth. But, as societies have grown in size and scale, more and more spheres of social action have grown autonomous (Abrutyn 2014), leading to different sets of goals and orientations (Turner and Maryanski 2009). The earliest large-scale societies, for instance, differed from their hunter-gatherer brethren in that polity and then religion grew autonomous as illustrated by the reconfiguration of physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space (Abrutyn 2016). Though these historical processes are often examined at the macro-level, bereft of agency and historicity, compelling arguments have been made that we need to pay closer attention to the collective agents capable of carving out autonomous institutions and sustaining them over indefinite periods of time (Weber 1946b; Eisenstadt 1980).

Drawing from Weber’s (1946b) notion of charismatic carrier groups, institutional entrepreneurs are, in essence, specialized collectivities that work to leverage structural opportunities to gain some degree of independence vis-à-vis other collectivities (Eisenstadt 1980; Abrutyn and Van Ness 2015). If successful—and, that is a big “if” rooted in numerous contingencies—they are able to develop what Shils (1975:36-7) called an institutional core, or a “‘center of gravity’ within itself [comprised of] its own system of authority, within its own boundaries [as well as] its own culture [consisting of] beliefs about the history and nature of the [institution]” and its central values. Presumably, the more self-reflexive the culture, the more bounded the institutional domain and, therefore, the more autonomous it is vis-à-vis other domains. Building on this argument Luhmann (1995) has argued that self-reflexivity is observable in the dominant themes of discourse that come to organize the system itself, organizational forms, and in the ephemeral encounters that phenomenologically come to reproduce the system on a day-to-day basis. This point is not that radical, as Bourdieu (1991) talks of the “official” language that shapes the boundaries of a field and constrains the rules of the game. This language or discourse is constructed by entrepreneurs and, where successful, imposed on any actors seeking to access the institution’s core

and, thereby, the institution-specific resources (including, whatever solution to the concern or set of concerns entrepreneurs claim to monopolize)—e.g., the laity must adopt religious discourse surrounding sacredness, morality, and piety if they are to interact with religious elite and gain access to a variety of “goods” and services offered only by religious actors and organizations.

Defining sport. Sport is intimately tied to play and games (Goffman 1968), but is distinct in that it consists of a formalized system of individuals (athletes) embedded in collectives (teams), and collectives embedded in collectives of collectives (leagues or supra-organizations like FIFA).² In Weberian terms, sports are rationalized entities in that rules are explicitly laid out in books, professionalization is complete as athletes are full-time, salaried actors, and games are physically, temporally, socially, and symbolically bounded. And, because they are macro-level social units in so far as sports are not simply organizations (like polities are more than the state), but rather overlapping fields of collectives engaged in their own self-reflexive activities, sport may also be considered an institutional sphere (Turner 2010; Author). In theory, then, sport—as a macro-level structural and cultural institutional domain—can also draw distinctive boundaries and impose a discrete cultural discourse on those wishing to access its core; that is, if sport has attained a degree of autonomy. As such, it provides a potentially fruitful institution to leverage for illustrative purposes. On the one hand, besides a few highly theoretical attempts at examining sport as an institution (Werron 2010, 2012), there have been few notable empirical attempts. On the other hand, institutional analysis in general has been either overly abstract or historically rooted. Thus, sport offers an interesting case to begin fleshing out some of the ways in which institutional spheres become and maintain autonomy. That being said, interrogating an entire institutional domain as vast as sport in a journal-length article is difficult to accomplish. Hence, we turn to a specific field—MLB—to explore some of the key dimensions related to institutional autonomy.

² For the sake of brevity, the focus is on professional sports. Though, the Olympics is an example of how formalized amateur sports may become.

Before doing so, however, two issues must be briefly addressed: the complex series of levels at which baseball (and many other sports occur) and a discussion on the institutional entrepreneurs of MLB, as they are the producers and reproducers of distinction. In terms of the former, MLB is not the only context or field of baseball within the sport institution; youth leagues (e.g., Little League), high school, college-level, various levels of minor leagues, and, finally, an less coupled international series of leagues. At the “lower” levels, we see the limits of sport autonomy as these leagues are both shaped by the efforts of MLB itself, the entrepreneurs who write books and articles and blogs that influence the choices parents and youth make, and, finally, the various other institutional forces like economic actors sponsoring leagues, political actors building parks with ball fields or not, and so forth. Indeed, because youth are not paid to play, the meaning of sport is far more contested by these various actors. The minor leagues are developmental leagues meant to contribute to the training in terms of technical skills and professionalization; though players get paid far less, the games matter a whole lot more as performances determine whether players make it to an MLB team, play in the minors or some international league for the rest of their career, or move on to some other career. Finally, as Leifer (1998) has cogently argued, all sports leagues have thoughts of expanding internationally, but the logistics have complicated matters. However, most teams have contributed to building international (especially Latin American) talent, while countries like Japan have their own formalized leagues resembling MLB. And, like soccer, baseball has recently moved away from the Olympics being central for international competition to a World Cup-like format. To explore all of these leagues would be far beyond the scope of this paper and, ultimately, reflect the unique historical and cultural contexts of the local communities they occur within or the nation-states and their distinct institutional arrangements. In the U.S. in particular, it is plausible to conceptualize sport as potentially attaining some level of autonomy and thus, MLB is a good case for exploring the dynamics of institutions and tentatively answering whether sports has achieved a degree of institutional autonomy.

Defining baseball entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are actors who work to sustain and expand an institution's structural and cultural distinctiveness (Abrutyn 2009, 2014). No institution can attain full autonomy, as they overlap and penetrate each other in important ways. In MLB, there are several candidates for entrepreneurs, including owners of teams, commissioners, and sports writers; and while all of these actors have played a role in what Allen and Parson (2006) term a "consecration project," sports writers have an oversized role in controlling the narrative. At risk of oversimplifying the argument, team owners are less likely to be cultural entrepreneurs than economic actors. On the one hand, there is always variation in motives within a class of owners and, even, within the goals of a given owner. Borer (2008) book, for instance, presents the current Red Sox owners as cultural stewards, aware of their role in preserving and perpetuating the mythos surrounding the team. On the other hand, teams cost upwards of a billion dollars, which makes ownership an exclusive club of extraordinarily wealthy individuals. They have, in short, a vested interest in MLB getting good publicity, fans attending and consuming the sport, and so on, but their interests lie in the economic gain of the team and, more importantly, the prestige of belonging to a wealthy club that only 30 other people can belong to. Commissioners also have vested interests like owners, but they are strongly beholden to the owners who, in essence, employ them.

That leaves sportswriters who work for newspapers, internet sites, television shows or stations. They are "liaisons" between owners, commissioners, and players and those who consume sport—e.g., fans. And, as such, the Baseball Writers Association of America (BBWAA) have attained a level of professionalization that restricts access to important responsibilities like voting for major awards and electing players to the Hall of Fame and, therefore, some level of independence vis-à-vis other stakeholders. They are free to critique players and owners alike, as their jobs do not depend on the any one player's or team's success. In short, they control the "means of mental production." Indeed, as liaisons their primary function is developing and disseminating the central positive and negative

narratives surrounding owners, players, and teams (Leifer 1998). To be sure, sports entrepreneurs—and therefore sports in general—are not nearly as independent as legal or political entrepreneurs: newspapers and television stations like ESPN depend on advertising money and thus restrictions exist and, of course, owners and MLB have lots of money to throw behind public relations campaigns. Furthermore, unlike the American Bar Association that controls and regulates law schools, anyone can get a journalism or communications degree and find a job writing or in broadcast. And, because of these factors, baseball writers are not fully independent from other entrepreneurs like team owners and their cadre of cultural purveyors; indeed, baseball, like any sport, represents a contested field in which meanings are negotiated, contradictory, and sometimes antithetical to each other. Nevertheless, the BBWAA plays an outsized role in shaping what professional baseball means and how fans, owners, and players interpret and evaluate performances, and are thus, worthy of our attention. As such, this paper looks to examine several overlapping questions: if sport, or in this case baseball, is a relatively autonomous domain, what is the cultural discourse about? How does this discourse shape how the average fans's experience of baseball activities? And, how does the potentially polluting and, in Habermas' (1973) terms, *colonizing*, effects of economic culture? First, however, it is important to discuss the method employed for answering these questions.

METHOD

The bulk of these data were collected in 2013-14 during the lead-up to the 2014 MLB Hall of Fame (HOF from here on) election. Of the 571 BBWAA voters in 2014, 159 revealed their votes online; of which, 106 were analyzed, as the remaining 53 merely posted a list with no discussion as to why they chose one player or another. Though imperfect, and certainly not definitive, the 106 cases present a diverse data set that is illustrative of the discourse baseball entrepreneurs—regardless of their position in the debate—employ. This set includes all of the BBWAA writers on several of the most trafficked national sports sites online, including ESPN and Fox Sports, as well as all of the columnists from the New

York, Los Angeles, and Chicago papers (the first, second, and third largest markets, respectively).³

Additionally, columnists from major cities like Boston, San Francisco, and Dallas were included with as many columnists from small market teams like Kansas City and Minnesota were included in the sample.

On the one hand, the collection of the data were purely one of, to be honest, personal interest. As a baseball fan, the Hall of Fame debate had long interested me, but in 2012 Barry Bonds became eligible for election. This marked an important moment, as many of the other cases before him were fairly arguable as to whether the steroids helped their case or not; Bonds was, both statistically and qualitatively, transcendent for his generation. Moreover, pre-PEDs, he was already likely-Hall of Famer. Thus, in 2013 and 2014, the debate had crystallized and sides entrenched around the polarizing candidacy of Bonds. On the other hand, the data are a sample of convenience: some writers published their votes, some do not. The larger goal was to get as representative a sample by finding as many columns by national writers, big newspaper writers (e.g., NY or LA Times), and local writers given their presumably different perspectives on matters large and small. The data set consisted of 114 articles from 106 authors.⁴ To provide context and broaden the analysis, we searched for these writers' columns on the Pete Rose gambling scandal in 1989-90 (3 articles by 3 authors) and the Baseball lockout in 1994-95 (80 articles by 30 authors) that was the first time the World Series was not played since its inception in 1903. Because the internet was either non-existent or in its infancy, these samples are less complete and thus are meant to support the HOF analysis and illustrate further the dominant discourse and how baseball is indeed autonomous to some degree. Moreover, it points in important directions for future systematic research. The interviews were uploaded into Nvivo 11. Themes were found through abductive reasoning, which emphasizes focusing on "surprising" findings (Timmermans and Tavory

³ The New York and Los Angeles Times, respectively, prohibit writers from voting, citing conflict of interest; yet, these writers still weigh in on the debate.

⁴ Some authors had two-part columns explaining their vote, while others required collecting both articles from the official news source they worked for and blogs posted to further clarify their position.

2012). Thus, while some themes were already identified by the author, detailed coding of the transcripts ensured that any unexpected themes could emerge. Once major themes were established, coding shifted to “focused” coding.

There are some limitations worth noting regarding the data. First, because a census of voters is impossible, it is plausible that there are themes or perspectives omitted in this analysis. To reduce this limitation as best as possible, all of the voters who post their votes were collected, while a second data collection effort ensued for the 2016 HOF vote. Though unreproted here, these data confirmed the themes analyzed below. Second, the sample is not random, but rather driven by methodological considerations—e.g., national websites reach more readers [including other voters] than big market columnists and, even more than, local small-market columnists. That being said, the goal of the paper is illustrative and not generalizable, thus the sample fits both the methodological constraints and the theoretical aims.

BUILDING AUTONOMOUS SPACE

Symbolic Differentiation: Cultivating Cultural Discourse

A word on generalized symbolic media. First used by Simmel (1907) in his discussion of the cultural dynamics of “money,” the term generalized symbolic media refer to cultural mechanisms that reduce the complexity of exchanges, interactions, and communication by delimiting them in numerous ways. First, media come to act as both means and ends to accomplishing certain institutionalized goals. In its material form, money is an end in itself *and* a means to other economic goals (e.g., purchasing status goods) and non-economic goals (e.g., subsistence). As such, it regulates a wide array of exchanges. Second, media rationalize exchanges by introducing calculability, predictability, and relatively standard value. Third, *money*—in its symbolic form—is more than just currency: it is a medium of communication in so far as economic attitudes and behaviors can be interpreted through the lens of economic narratives and myths (Luhmann 1995); texts and themes of discourse emerge as both self-

reflexive forms of learning “economics” and assorted goals, lines of action, and the aforementioned interpretive tools; and, finally, a mode of evaluation—that is, *money* in its symbolic form as narrative, myth, and discursive themes implies some level of morals and ethics (Zelizer 1997).

Since Simmel, numerous other institutional spheres besides economy and their typical media have been identified, including polity/*power* (Parsons 1963), kinship/love (Friedland et al. 2014) and *loyalty* (Levi-Strauss 1963); science/*truth* (Luhmann 1995), and, more recently, a whole host of media and the institutional spheres they tend to circulate within (cf. Abrutyn and Turner 2011). Media, as these various scholars have argued, come to delimit and facilitate interactions, exchanges, and communication by way of a special logic distinct to the institutional sphere (Abrutyn 2016); they are, in a word, “conveyor belts” upon which “distant” macro structure and culture trickles down to the phenomenology of the average person (Vandenberghe 2007). Exchanges in polity, then, are characterized by the means-ends aspect of *power*, as well as the fact that power (in the form of political favors or franchised authority lent from the state to other actors) becomes the currency. To be sure, this does not mean all exchanges or interactions are *power*-based, as corruption is always a possibility and, as Habermas (1973) noted, some media and institutions are capable of “colonizing” other institutions (e.g., *money* circulates in all institutions in the form of salary, and can thus reorient the attitudes and actions of, say, a political actor away from politics and towards economics instead). However, colonization is an empirical issue; one we will have more to say about later in the study. For now, it is worth noting that one way we can discern how autonomous an institutional sphere is, is through the efforts of entrepreneurs to produce and distribute distinctive media, protect the institution’s “core” in which this media is produced, and, ultimately, combat “foreign” or “alien” media from corrupting and polluting the cultural world that entrepreneurs and other actors inhabit (Abrutyn 2009, 2014). Sports are, at their root, formalized, regulated conflicts, or competitions; hence, it is plausible to suggest that *competitiveness* is the medium of sport exchange, interaction, and communication of sport. Therefore,

our analysis turns to how MLB entrepreneurs “measure” MLB greatness, as it is not as obvious as “dollars’ and “cents.”

Defining baseball status. “No other sport has anywhere near such reverence for its statistics” as baseball (Schwarz 2004:xiv), as it became the entrepreneur’s first tool for measuring and discussing *competitiveness*. Like *money*, the quantified form of *competitiveness* allows for comparison of value.

Stats

are recorded, analyzed, and memorized with an exactitude that humans summon only for matters so, well, so important...Eventually these numbers ascend to a meaning well above the simple digits that comprise them: The number .406 is Ted William’s 1941 batting average, 56 the length of Joe DiMaggio’s hitting streak...These numbers tell the stories of players and pennant races in a manner that words, photographs, and videotape never do (ibid. iii).

They are external, objectified referents of *competitive* value. As the above quote implies, the number *belongs* to the person who achieved it as it reflects *his* status in terms of *competitiveness*. Moreover, numbers allow for the construction of sacred time, or a continual temporal reality linking the past to the present, running parallel to the profane time, and only accessible through ritual. In Ken Burn’s 10-part PBS documentary on baseball and America, sportswriter Daniel Okrent remarks that stats are

benchmarks that cross generations, and cross decades...They aren’t numbers. A .300 hitter is not a number. A .300 hitter is a tag that means something today, as it did in 1930, as it did in 1890. So, the statistics become a means by which we can connect to the *permanence* of [baseball]. Uh, I can make that comparison with my father, who could have made it with his father on that *common language* of statistics.

It is for these reasons, as we shall see, that breaking records is not taken lightly.

These so-called objective measures are also subject to intense debate about which ones should matter. Traditionalists argue that the original “box score” numbers (batting average, homeruns, and runs batted in [RBIs])⁵ matter most, whereas the younger crowd favors “sabermetrics” they believe

⁵ Because of space limitations, morning-edition newspapers chose some metrics over others in reporting the previous night’s scores.

measure the true competitiveness of a player such as on-base percentage plus slugging percentage (OPS) or, even more radical, advanced metrics like Wins Above Replacement (WAR) that attempt to measure a player's "total" value vis-à-vis a player of average quality (Lewis 2003). These numbers matter, as they shape the debates about who belongs in the Hall of Fame and who is the best at a position or overall. But value is rarely purely objective, even when talking about the highly instrumental medium of *money* (Zelizer 1997); hence, *competitiveness* also manifests in intangible embodied forms.

More than numbers. "Statistics are important...They give us a measure of performance and productivity [yet] baseball doesn't begin and end with statistics. The game is *much too wide and much too deep* for that" (Peterson 2014, emphasis added). The fact that *competitiveness* is not simply objectively measured speaks to the fact that there is something much more moral and affectual—and, therefore, sacred—about the medium. The qualitative debate hinges on two separate, but related arguments. First, some players or teams did not have the longevity to amass the hallowed, magic numbers, yet embody intangibles that made them exemplary champions. Second, an anti-sabermetric/advanced statistics sentiment exists among many of the older voters, who use qualitative assessments—often rooted in real and imagined past traditions—as one weapon against progressivism. In essence, embodiment of *competitiveness* is used as superlative to push a player/team above-and-beyond peers, or to contextualize unique players/teams.

Thus, MLB status and election to the HOF goes beyond instrumentality: MLB entrepreneurs have the power to construct a *mythos* of a player and valorize him as a cultural object, which, in turn, can affect owners, players, and fans' attitudes and beliefs about him. For instance, in my sample, 90 out of 114 articles discussed three particular "borderline" HOF candidates' *competitiveness* using qualitative language for or against their candidacy: Tim Lincecum, Curt Schilling, and Jack Morris.⁶ Each of them suffer

⁶ As of 2017, Raines has been elected, while it was recently announced that the Veterans' Committee—a committee of retired players who can elect players who fall off the ballot—elected Morris for the 2018 class.

from not having “typical” quantitative measures of competitiveness: Raines was not a homerun hitter, nor did he reach 3,000 hits despite playing for 23 years; Schilling’s 216 wins would only be 48th best in the HOF while his 3.46 earned run average (ERA) would put him at 63rd overall; and, though Morris’ 254 wins are certainly better than Schilling’s, his 3.90 ERA would be worst in the HOF and is routinely the first statistic cited against him. However, consider some of the qualitative arguments made for Morris.

Words like “clutch” and “durable” are buttressed by the oft-cited fact that three different managers from three different teams had him start Game 1 of three different World Series (of which his team eventually won all three), as an honor indicative of his “ace” status. Additionally, some appeal to his legendary Game 7 World Series appearance in 1991 where he pitched a normal complete game shutout (no runs given up over all 9 innings)—a rarity in modern baseball—and the 10th inning to clinch the championship. Thus, sport entrepreneurs look for preternatural talent and “epic,” nearly impossible to replicate moments as the ultimate sign of qualitative *competitiveness*. To throw weight behind these embodied aspects of *competitiveness*, highly specialized stats are employed such as the fact he won the most games in the 80s of any pitcher or that he threw more complete games in his career than all pitchers threw combined in 2013. Said one voter, “I would like to believe that I *knew* when I was watching someone *special*, [and that] *eyes-on opinion* counts for something” (Griffin 2013).

Protecting against pollution

One of the dangers of any institution is its corruption (Abrutyn 2015). Media introduce a moral-evaluative dimension that allow actors to discern purity from pollution, or, for example, what attitudes and actions are good and which are deviant in order to protect the value of the medium and the institution from being corrupted. Abuses of *power*, for example, lead individuals to withdraw legitimacy

Schilling, on the other hand, presents a fascinating case in that he has many of the intangibles necessary for enshrinement as noted above. Yet, there is much debate every year about whether his quantitative measures or his outspoken conservatism (he was suspended and eventually fired by ESPN for bigoted tweets) hurt his candidacy most.

from those who claim to possess power; illegitimate acquisition of *money* leads to devaluing of that person's wealth, despite the objective amount of money she has. Thus, we would expect any type of behavior that threaten the ability to quantify and qualify *competitiveness* to be harmful. Gambling, in effect, is that behavior: in the words of former commissioner Bart Giamatti's son Marcus' (2014), gambling is "baseball's *cardinal sin*."

Why? Because gambling casts into doubt the authenticity of the competition and the purity of the measures of *competitiveness* produced during an event. It elicits moral indignation from commissioners, league officials, fans, and sportswriters in near unanimity. In 1919, for instance, eight Chicago White Sox players took money to throw the World Series, forever being called the *Black Sox* (Nathan 2003). The gambling ended up tarnishing the reputation and finishing the career of one of the greatest players in the game, "Shoeless" Joe Jackson. And though the players were acquitted when the case went to trial, then-commissioner Kenesaw Landis placed them all on the "ineligible" list, forever barring them from all MLB-related activities including enshrinement into MLB's HOF. The MLB commissioner, reacting to the MLB entrepreneurs' morally-infused articles, used his official position to institutionalize the moral boundaries. A more recent case is instructive.

Pete Rose owns one of the most hallowed records (4256 hits) because it is believed unreachable⁷, yet was accused of (and later admitted to) gambling on games as the manager of the Cincinnati Reds in 1989. He publicly accepted expulsion and placement on the ineligibility list. Then-commissioner Bart Giamatti remarked that Rose had "stained the game" by committing "*grave*" actions. Baseball "is so much a part of [US] history as a people and because it has such a purpose on our national *soul*," he concluded he had no recourse but to protect "the integrity of the game of baseball—that is,

⁷ The closest hitter, Ty Cobb, who he surpassed, set the hit mark in 1928; it took 53 years for the record to be broken. Since Rose retired, no one has come within 500 hits of his mark (or, the equivalent of three exceptional seasons of hitting).

the game's *authenticity, honesty, and coherence*" by banning Rose forever (Sullivan 2010:153, 157-8).

What makes this case so interesting, is that Rose *embodied competitiveness*. His nickname was Charlie Hustle, which has been memorialized in a statue of his iconic head-first slide into first base at Reds' stadium; he owned numerous records; was the last player to simultaneously manage and play daily; and, had essential quantitative measures (Rookie of the Year; Most Valuable Player of the Year; three World Series). Since the mid-1990s, there have been calls for his enshrinement into the HOF since he was banished. Yet, as recently as 2014, Giamatti's son, Marcus, delivered an elegant rebuke to those reconsidering Rose's "banishment":

on a different level, one pertinent to the *moral* level of honesty, effort and citizenry that my father held so *sacred*, Bart might add today that Rose still does not deserve a second chance for the sake of a second chance – without earning it. This dilemma isn't about how great a player Mr. Rose was....It's about a broken rule [and the] arrogance to stomp on the heart of the game by committing baseball's cardinal sin: betting on the game (Giamatti 2014).

In short, Shoeless Joe's and Rose's offenses were not simply against the sacred measures of *competitiveness*, but against the purity and authenticity of the sport and its measure of value itself; they edged towards the core, with gambling calling into question the very context in which those measures are capable of evaluating baseball greatness. Despite the accolades and undeniable HOF-career, Rose's moral transgressions followed by decades of lying will keep him in a state of disgrace. As we turn to the PED crisis, we find a different situation in which the rules have evolved and the meaning of enshrinement remains open and debated.

Spatial and Temporal Boundedness: Protecting the Sacred Center

That a distinct discourse exists is important in understanding how the currency of *competitiveness* is produced and circulated. Importantly, the language with which entrepreneurs, and those who subscribe to their discourse, talk is infused with moral and religious coding that extends beyond the threat gambling poses (Butterworth 2012). Stadiums, for example, are often labeled "Cathedrals" and the HOF a *shrine*; movies like *Field of Dreams* and *The Natural* connect the

enchantment of childhood with the sacred nature of the field itself and, in the case of the former, an ever-lasting sacred time in which mythic “demi-gods” founded the game. Indeed, in *Field of Dreams*, a Midwestern farmer hears a voice telling him to “build [a stadium] and [deceased legends] will come.” Upon destroying a significant portion of his farm to erect a field, players like Shoeless Joe—frozen in their youthful state—emerge from the cornfield in outfield and begin playing.

Indeed, one of baseball’s distinct qualities vis-à-vis the other three big American sports is its intense reverence for the past, for something lost (Camp 1921; Leifer 1998). Its entrepreneurs have constructed a collective memory rooted in an amalgam of real and imaginary elements of nineteenth century America. Unlike the other sports which took greater purchase in the late 1960s through the innovate use of television (Leifer 1998), baseball remains tethered to the past: slower and subtler; a form more suited to radio. It is a summer sport because of the demands of a now-extinct agrarian age in which games had to happen after crops were planted and before they were harvested. Its popularity and its city-centric focus are tightly linked to the rapid expansion of railroad, which brought the bucolic and the urban closer together. And, finally, it is the only sport which believes its measures of *competitiveness* transcend time: despite changes in the sport, players, and society, the belief, as detailed in the discussion on quantification and quality, is that players today can be compared to any before and vice versa. In this way, baseball entrepreneurs seek to ritualize communication, interaction, and exchange such that it is passed down from one generation to the next (Lever 1983), thereby saturating *competitiveness* and the boundaries of MLB with moral-evaluative meaning. As such, baseball entrepreneurs have attempted to monopolize *competitiveness* as a means to “consecrating” or “valorizing” (Allen and Parson 2006) the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic dimensions of baseball (Abrutyn 2014; Abrutyn and Van Ness 2015). If this project has been successful, the need to protect all sorts of things associated with the sport like its generalized medium would be tightly linked to protecting the integrity of the very “center” of the sport itself: the Hall of Fame.

Shrines to and of Competitiveness. Not surprisingly, *enshrinement* into the HOF is dominated with public debates through the discourse discussed above, as it is the sacred, consecrated center of baseball (Allen and Parsons 2006). There are quantitative metrics that act as baselines for entry and, in some cases, “hallowed” numbers like 3,000 hits,⁸ 500 homeruns,⁹ or, for pitchers, 300 wins¹⁰ (once) meant automatic election.¹¹ More recently, there are debates about “new” versus “old” quantitative metrics, as advanced statistical analyses have emerged to better assess a player’s competitive value. There are qualitative discussions, of course, that range from playoff prowess to intangibles to off-field distractions. All of these debates, however, are *meaningful* to the entrepreneurs (and the fans and players who read and hear them *ad nauseum*) as many employ morally-tinged language when discussing their responsibility and when talking about the meaning of enshrinement. As might be expected of a holy city like Jerusalem or Mecca, many MLB entrepreneurs conceptualize the HOF as the true center of baseball to which fathers and sons make pilgrimages; it is “hallowed” ground (Albee 2014). Enshrinement, consequently, is serious business if MLB entrepreneurs are to protect the sanctity of *competitiveness* by not “turning the Hall of Fame into Cooperstown Lite.” These concerns are backed by claims that the Baseball HOF is unique among HOFs. For instance, “I hold baseball to a challenging standard. Guilty as charged. Football, basketball and pornography are freak shows, and those people can do what they want, so far as I’m concerned. I’m not saying I dislike freak shows, but I detest freak-

⁸ 31 players have reached this number. 25 are in the HOF, two are still playing (Ichiro Suzuki and Adrian Beltre), one (Derek Jeter) just retired and is talked about as a lock for the HOF, while the remaining three are not likely to gain entrance because of gambling (Pete Rose) and suspected cheating (Rafael Palmeiro and Alex Rodriguez).

⁹ 27 players have reached this number. 18 are in the HOF, one is still playing and two have yet to become eligible for election, but may not get in because his known PED use (Rodriguez). Of the remaining six cases, election is in doubt because of known or suspected PED use, with three having already falling off the ballot.

¹⁰ 24 players have reached this mark, 23 are in the HOF while one, Roger Clemens who has the ninth most wins in baseball history, is another case of PED use whose fate remains underdetermined.

¹¹ Said one voter regarding why he did not vote for recent candidate Fred McGriff (McNeal 2014): “Seven more homers and he would have hit the magic number of 500. But a line has to be drawn somewhere and given that power was his biggest asset, he falls seven homers short of my vote.”

show baseball” (Peterson 2014). And because of the HOF being the epicenter, so to speak, of entrepreneurship, it affords us a unique vantage to examine in great detail how autonomy may be constructed in one field of one institution and, thus, possibly in other spheres.

Cores and consequences. Dubbed the “mecca of baseball” (Springwood 1996) and “revered” by enthusiasts as a *sacred* space (Parsons and Stern 2012), the Baseball HOF provides the clearest example of the construction and maintenance of an institutional core, both physically and cognitive-culturally. The institutional center is sacred, not in the religious sense, but in the sense Durkheim attributed to the term: set aside, in need of protection against pollution, the place that draws our attention and marshals mutual emotion. And while religious language is often co-opted by non-religious entrepreneurs, it is sacred more so because it “houses” the material and symbolic culture, the people, the memories, and facilitates the rituals that *immerse* actors in the collective effervescence and *ultimate* values that the institutional sphere is founded on (Shils 1975).

The center is often the site of an historical “theophany” or “hierophany,” or moment in which the sacred and profane came into contact with each other (Eliade 1959)—e.g., Mt. Sinai. As such, it becomes part of the foundational mythology upon which the institutional sphere was created; the source from which entrepreneur’s derive their authority; and the place non-entrepreneurs can pilgrimage to come into contact, however ephemeral, with the ultimate values produced by the sphere and its entrepreneurs. As such, one would expect the creation myth to be shrouded in legend that bends the truth. And, it is. According to one MLB entrepreneur (Posnanski 2014), the choice of Cooperstown, NY as the site of the HOF was based on a popular myth that the game itself was invented there in 1839 by Abner Doubleday (Gould 1989). This myth, however, is the first example of entrepreneurs trying to build protective defenses against the pollution of *money* in its material and symbolic form. The real story is not as exciting, and much more utilitarian: a businessman, Alexander Cleland saw an opportunity to build a museum and make money that could play off the myth. Cleland knew he needed some type of

substantive legitimacy, which a baseball executive, Ford Frick, would provide. Frick, influenced by the entrepreneurs of his day, imagined a shrine that would honor *only* the greatest players in the greatest game at the spot in which he believed the sport emerged. Upon opening and dedicating it in 1939, he linked it directly to the origins story: as the 100th anniversary of baseball's advent and built on the very ground in which the game was first conceived and played, the HOF served as the site of direct contact with those mythic people and places. He "sacralized" Cleland's motives successfully. According to its website, 315,000 people visit the HOF each year, which is 26,250 a month and 863 a day.

Given this discussion, it is not surprising *enshrinement* into the HOF is the ultimate honor for a ballplayer and the ultimate "privilege" and responsibility of an entrepreneur. Unlike the other major or minor sports in the U.S., the MLB HOF produces some of the most intense public disagreements and debates reflecting the sanctity of the center, and the fear of pollution. Currently, there are 575 voters (BBWAA 2014), of which must have spent ten years covering baseball before becoming eligible. Entrance into the HOF is, thus, tightly guarded. The rules, though vague, for voting are as such: (1) a player with 10 years of major league service and retired for five years is eligible and must garner 75 percent of the vote to be elected (432 voters)—there is no rounding up—and 5 percent to stay on the ballot (for a maximum of 10 years); (2) the voters are only (vaguely) instructed to vote "upon the player's record, playing ability, integrity, sportsmanship, character, and contributions to the team(s) on which the player played"; (3) a maximum 10 players can be selected on a given ballot each year. Membership is exclusive. While baseball is nearly two centuries old, and thousands have played professionally, only 220 MLB players have been elected.¹² Even more telling: not a single player has received a unanimous vote which, itself is a major point of debate and contention causing longtime Boston Globe entrepreneur, Bob Ryan (2013) to ask about the 2014 election: "Will this finally be the

¹² For comparison, the NFL HOF (opened in 1963) has 287 members; the NBA (1959) has 335; and the NHL (1945) has 381 members, 260 of which are players.

year we have the preposterously overdue unanimous selection?” The debate itself reflects the line between it being a museum, a chronicle of historical events, and the coronation of new “immortals” into the sacred center. Ironically, enshrinement matters so much that Ryan, who cannot believe that baseball has elected someone unanimously is also incredulous that Tom Seaver has the highest election percentage (98.84) when there are so many more deserving players of that “honor.” When Greg Maddux “only” received 97.2, he declared his inability to surpass Seaver an “embarrassment” because Maddux deserved 100 percent of the vote. This argument is compounded by two facts: (1) some voters do not vote and (2) an entrepreneur’s vote is confidential unless voluntarily made public

Complicating matters, voters are provided vague instructions or rules for election, leaving space for moral appeals. In particular, what is known as the “character clause” states that besides the tangible and intangible measures of *competitiveness*, voters should consider “integrity, sportsmanship, [and] character.” It is here that the essence of *competitiveness* is struggled over. That is, anything that corrupts or, worse, pollutes the cherished values should emerge in the discourse that comes to shape how *competitiveness* manifests itself in the language and external objects that symbolically reflect the essence of sport. Indeed, it was already shown that the “cardinal sin” of baseball, gambling, is so polluting, that admission to the HOF is nearly impossible once implicated. However, a new issue has emerged as a flashpoint for MLB entrepreneurs: the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) like steroids and what this means for some of the greatest players of the 1990s and 2000s. What is so unique about the PED issue is that we can see entrepreneurship in action; with gambling, the debate—though not fully settled—is not much of a debate. With PEDs, however, the moralizing has been met by entrepreneurs trying to “de-escalate” and “de-sacralize” the HOF and the process itself. Thus, though the debate often gets muddled with religious language of purity and sanctity, what is really at stake is found in Goffman’s (1968) dramaturgy: are the performers authentic in their roles, is the “drama” real, and can the audience walk away believing the ritual reflected the underlying moral nature of the

encounter? Indeed, as one voter laments: “how can you reasonably judge the statistics and—more importantly to me—memories they left behind,” if they may have taken PEDs (Donnellon 2014)?

The PED moral dilemma. Underlying the PED debate is whether or not baseball, and sports in general, are distinct from other spheres of social life; particularly the economy. At every turn, sport entrepreneurs seek to build barriers between the “purity” of competition and the business side of leagues, teams, and players. On the one hand, moral entrepreneurship involves appeals to the sanctity, sacredness, and power of the baseball center: the HOF. On the other hand, some sports entrepreneurs “decouple” moral language from performance (Lee and Kwak 2016). Both types of entrepreneurs are involved in protecting the boundaries, but have very different ideas of just how autonomous a field baseball is or ought to be. The following two quotes clearly summarize the debate:

The Baseball Hall of Fame isn't a historical encyclopedia, incidentally...The PED era happened. Nobody's ignoring it. In fact, I'd argue just the opposite. But just because it happened doesn't mean the players who excelled during that time, regardless of how, should have bronze statues cast, script induction speeches and be included among the greats of the game (Cazano 2014).

The biggest mistake people make about the Hall of Fame, which I've visited many times, is that it is some sort of Valhalla. In truth, it is a museum, a repository of baseball history. And you can't have a reputable museum without telling the complete history, tainted as it may be during certain periods (Steward 2014).

At the heart of these two quotes is a dispute over the significance of the HOF, its function, and the ambiguous character clause; and, ultimately, whether protecting MLB's core, its “center of gravity” in Shils' terms, is a moral imperative.

The most extreme “moralizer” argument works to fully block any hint of impurity: “No votes for guys caught cheating. And worse—no votes for guys *who just don't look right*” (Shaughnessy 2014). Though most do not sit on this extreme, they tend to use a common set of appeals. For instance, morality is deeply tied to immutable tradition:

People have twisted this to mean “morals,” or, that since “racists” are in the Hall, you must allow steroid users. Such assumptions have led people to promote the idea of removing the “character clause.” The clause comes from the man who came up with the very idea of the Hall of Fame itself: Alexander Cleland...Now you know that one of the *founding fathers* instructed “character” to be considered from the birth of the Hall itself. It's a central, *original principle* of the voting process. You don't just dismiss the Thomas Jefferson of the Hall of Fame and 77 years of history to accommodate steroid users (Verducci 2013).

Others make explicit appeals to MLB entrepreneurs' unique status as guardians of *competitiveness* and the sport's autonomy:

Nothing changes the fact that PED users cheated the game. And in an otherwise very complicated, murky field, that's enough of a violation of the Hall's character, integrity and sportsmanship guidelines for me. Call it sanctimonious if you'd like, but I prefer to consider it my humble little effort to protect the game's integrity (DeMarco 2014).

Finally, others simply refer to the consequences PED-tainted numbers have for the central measure of competitiveness: statistics.

And there it is, the so-called “character clause,” which really is not a clause at all. And yet, by juicing and making a mockery of the record book, which is a much more *sacred* text in baseball than in any other sport, they impugned the character of the game, regardless of the legal ramifications, or lack thereof (Gutierrez 2014).

This isn't a character issue, it's a competitive issue. Steroids gave players a huge boost in both performance and their ability to recover more quickly. If it didn't help, then why won't guys admit they did it? Because they knew it was wrong, knew they were getting an advantage akin to Ben Johnson running in the Olympics against Carl Lewis (Renck 2014).

In short, moralists see a clear boundary, and fear what may come from pollution. In their estimation, competition, as a measure of sport greatness and as the primary measure of the status hierarchy, demand it be walled off from any thing that might taint it.

Others, however, are not so sure that PEDs threaten *competitiveness*. A particularly common refrain, is that sports entrepreneurs have no right to moralize about players' character. These arguments often begin by arguing that “moralizers” do not seem to care that thugs and racists like Ty Cobb are enshrined despite violating the character clause. Moreover, voters have failed to differentiate “one form of cheating from another,” noting that spitballers and corked bat users are enshrined despite

the clear advantages these rule-breakers earned (Gammons 2013). Finally, they note that drugs have been a part of the game, but until PEDs, have not been treated as polluting:

Oh, we also have players who have tested positive for amphetamines. Are they now supposedly ineligible for Cooperstown? Greenies and beans were rampant in the Fifties, Sixties, Seventies and Eighties, eyesight's were affected and the ability to ramp it up again helped career home run totals creep past 400 or 500 or 600. I love watching the grainy film of The Mick, head down, rounding the bases, or Don Larsen jumping into Yogi's arms, but baseball was not played in a Franciscan ordinary (Gammons 2013).

For Gammons, the search for an edge is a different, yet legitimate, embodied form of *competitiveness*.

And, thus, who are we to determine which competitive edge is purer? The response from the moralists to this line of argument is often as such:

Forget the racists and scoundrels comparison. Here's my issue with steroid users as it relates to the "character clause:" it's about how they played the game between the lines, not how they conducted themselves outside of it. It's an issue of *competitive* integrity, not personal integrity. They bastardized baseball, eroded the implicit fairness of it and disadvantaged those who chose to play fairly to extents never seen before (Verducci 2013).

This type of counter-argument is rebuffed in two ways. First, some MLB entrepreneurs rhetorically ask what it means to be the guardians of the HOF: does it require legal expertise or simply judgment about a person's performance? Unlike in the case of gambling, appeals to rules are effective: "In the absense of specific guidelines from the [HOF]...I simply don't feel more comfortable withholding my vote" (Crasnick 2014).

I am a Hall of Fame voter. With that responsibility, I believe, comes many other titles. But definitely not plenty others. I am a judge, but not a cop...I don't conduct my own investigation into players' alleged performance-enhancing drug usage, nor do I seek to right past wrongs or protect "clean" players. If, and only if, baseball has punished someone for a violation, then I will factor that punishment into a candidacy (Davidoff 2014).

Second, MLB entrepreneurs also remind their colleagues that the guardians themselves were complicit in turning a blind eye and glorifying of these players, rather than admonishing them and putting a stop to it. By the mid to late 1990s, players grew physically in ways that was noticeable—e.g., heads grew huge, as did arms and upper bodies. Some of this physical growth was predicated on changes in

economics and sports medicine that saw rewards for bigger, stronger, faster performers and provided scientific regimes for producing these naturally. In essence, players were simply in better shape because resources were more available and the stakes for being the best was dramatically higher. Yet, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the signs of PED use were everywhere (Fainaru-Wada and Williams 2006), but were consciously and unconsciously ignored (Fletcher 2013). This sin of commission was intensified following the disastrous 1994-1995 strike that led to the World Series being cancelled for the first time since 1904, and lasted longer than the previous eight strikes (232 days). Attendance dropped 20 percent the following season, causing baseball to seek new methods of advertising and marketing. This break in action and the cancellation of the most important collective commencement ritual (the World Series) that imbues special intangible forms of *competitiveness* (Champions) on its performers was a huge polluting force (as we shall see shortly). Thus, not only had MLB entrepreneurs ignored the physical signs because they had a vested interest in reproducing the mythos, but the owners and the league felt the material threat of the strike and were interested in building a better product.

Post-script. Given that the focus of the data are on the 2014 MLB HOF election, one may ask whether this issue has been resolved. In 2016, for instance, Mike Piazza and in 2017 Jeff Bagwell were inducted, respectively; both were accused of being PED-users though there was never any direct evidence. As one might expect, their induction hardened the positions of the two sides rather than softening them. More recently, a “legend,” Joe Morgan, wrote a letter to 2018 voters, arguing against letting in PED-users (Gartland 2017). He wrote: “The more we Hall of Famers talk about this—and we talk about it a lot—we realize that we can no longer sit silent [lest] fans think our standards of election to the Hall of Fame are relaxed, at least relaxed enough for steroid users to enter and become members of the most sacred place in Baseball.” Thus, the issue has by no means been resolved; and, with the two most infamous (and most talented) accused PED-users making significant gains on 2017 ballots, the issue may very well come to a public head sooner than later.

AGAINST COLONIZATION

In short, while sports and, specifically baseball, might appear as games that are distinguished only by the fact that they make money and actors are paid money, in the U.S., professional sports like MLB have become relatively autonomous fields in a relatively autonomous sport institution. As illustrated above, MLB entrepreneurs have worked hard for over a century to cultivate a distinctive cultural discourse that revolves around themes of *competitiveness*. These themes are mechanisms by which owners, athletes, sports writers, and fans make sense of performances—that is, whether performances are authentic, appropriate, executed competently, transcendent, and so forth. Like the generalized symbolic medium of economy, *competitiveness* is more than just a material form of currency. Statistics provide a language and “currency” allowing actors to evaluate the differences between teams and players across time and space. So precise, the stats claim to measure tenths and hundredths of a second in order to establish records and distribute *competitiveness*. Additionally, discourse surrounding intangibles like singularly transcendent and memorable performances or repeated playoff winning provide depth and texture to the quantitative aspect. By examining the intense moral indignation lobbed at gamblers and, in many cases, PED-users, we see that there is a moral-evaluative dimension to MLB entrepreneurship: endogenous boundaries matter, especially the institutional core (the HOF) and, thus, entrepreneurs act as though they have a responsibility to protecting it from pollution.

Yet, MLB is a business and thus the thorny issue of how sport and economy are related deserves some attention. To be sure, *money* matters: owners spend inordinate amounts to purchase teams¹³; players and coaches earn inordinate amounts to play what are, ultimately, games; and fans spend inordinate amounts to “consume” their favorite sport, team, and players. Furthermore, baseballs history

¹³ The average team, according to various sources, is valued at \$1.3 billion with the New York Yankees estimated at \$3.4 billion.

is inextricably linked to labor relations, which, since the 1960s, have been explicitly central to the history of baseball (Helyar 1995). Numerous institutionalists have pointed out how *money* and *power*, and their respective institutional domains economy and polity, dominate modern societies (Parsons and Smelser 1956; Luhmann 1995; Abrutyn and Turner 2011); their media circulate much more readily in other institutional domains in the form of salaries and franchised authority (Abrutyn and Turner 2011); they provide the discourse as well as material and symbolic resources that are ubiquitously at every level of social reality. Perhaps, then, the analysis above overstates the autonomy and the degree to which *competitiveness* is the principal currency and form of discourse in MLB? It is equally plausible to caution against cynicism, as athletes are not that different from professors or doctors who are also paid a salary, but who are often committed to truth/knowledge and health care, respectively, more so or equal to money.

Consider, for instance, how MLB entrepreneurs work to protect the core of their domain. During the season, for example, when ritualized events are the center of production and distribution of *competitiveness*, discussions of *money* (e.g., contracts and free agency) are relegated to the background; the season is sacred time, set aside from the mundane (Mount 1994). In the offseason, mundane affairs become foreground material, as MLB entrepreneurs evaluate teams' decisions regarding the labor market. Using *competitiveness* as a measure, they write about a player's body of work and the contract he does or does not deserve; they write about a team's performance and their willingness to spend on needs or whether they are miserly. It is arguable, in fact, that the primary standard owners are held to is whether or not they spend the money necessary to field the most competitive team possible?¹⁴ Indeed, some teams, like the Miami Marlins, have a reputation for being in a cyclical state of building up assets

¹⁴ One of the more notable baseball comedies, *Major League*, centered on an owner's widow attempting to strip the Cleveland Indians of nearly all its material resources in hopes of fielding a team so bad that she could move it to Florida. The comedy played off the well-worn idea that owner's interests directly conflict with the players, fans, and sportswriters—an idea, incidentally found in other sports movies like the Paul Newman hockey film, *Slapstick*.

and then, when the team is sold, having a “fire sale.” For instance, the team was sold this offseason (2017) to a large group of investors, who subsequently traded one of the three best players (Giancarlo Stanton) in the whole sport for almost nothing in return. This move has been reviled by the national media, referred to as a disgrace to the nature of the game (Baumann 2017) because it both revealed the corruption of *money* over *competitiveness* in two respects. From the Marlins side, it is a betrayal of the logic of the game: teams owe their allegiance to their hometowns, who pay for the stadiums through taxes and who treat their teams tribally (Leifer 1998); *money* objectifies this relationship. During the offseason, then, when *money* is part of the central narratives, *competitiveness* remains as important as ever; indeed, very often, the two discourses enter into dialectical relations.

Consider, then, the 1994-95 strike as a special case study: on the one hand, the strike interrupted the ritual flow of the season, creating a prolonged offseason. *Money* was thrust into the center as players and owners debated whose contribution was of greater value. An easy analysis of the lockout would resort to classic Marxian analysis of labor versus capital and so forth. And, in one sense, this would not be wrong. But, as I have labored to show, MLB (and sport) are about something more than *money*. There is something visceral, moral, affectual about *competitiveness* that draws fans, athletes, and many owners into an engrossed state during the season, and which is carefully constructed and maintained by sports entrepreneurs. The specter of *money* corrupting this sacred time and place elicits moral indignation.

The 750 adult males getting paid an average \$ 1.1 million a year to play a boys' game...are picking up their gloves and going home because they don't think they can risk settling for less...And the 28 adults who paid up to \$173 million to own major league teams are willing to shut baseball down, not because they fear the players, but because they fear each other. They want to cap team payrolls so no owner can pay players as he or she wishes. Freedom isn't part of their vocabulary (McMahon 1994).

Thus, both sides were considered at fault in many cases. But, the argument was often different. For owners, motives of *money* were not violations of their expected behavior or attitudes, but rather

exposed their efforts to conceal these motives; they were authorized, however unsavory and immoral it was, to want money. "Major league baseball owners want to put this all on the players...But their dirty *little secret* is out now. This is the owners' greedy mess" (Burwell 1994). Players, who play a "boys' game" were held to different standards. Framing of their fault was less direct by the MLB entrepreneurs, who let "regular" fans communicate their messages:

Michael Grodinsky used to go to baseball games and see heroes on the field. But if he ever returns to Olympic Stadium, Grodinsky says, he will see businessmen in funny suits who decided to become baseball players instead of doctors or lawyers - because it pays better. [Likewise, longtime] fans Rocky and Judy Rapoport said there is no real good guy in this latter-day morality tale; pick any side and you'll find *greedy, avaricious people* who have lost all senses of proportion and reality. But they blame the players more, and said somebody has to stop them from riding roughshod over a game that is quickly turning from America's pastime to rich America's pastime....'It's disgusting that it had to go so far...If we, as Jews, could make peace with the Arabs, then why couldn't the players make peace with the owners?'" (Fitterman 1994).

Of course, everyone involved was guilty: "Overpaid lawyers and labor negotiations have robbed baseball fans of their usual autumn menu. We can only hope the World Series returns in 1995" (Bodley 1994). Ultimately, entrepreneurs sought to chastise the major players who purposively called into question the definition of the situation, halted the unending flow of sacred time for self-interest, and who broke traditions (World Series played every October since 1905) that were at the heart of the production and reproduction of *competitiveness*. Acting as liaisons between the consumers of *competitiveness* and the embodiment of it, they worked to rebuild and strengthen the walls around the core.

Thus, what seems like a game and, for many, a profession like law or medicine that is, ultimately, about dollars and cents has far deeper meanings for those oriented towards the sport sphere. These actors, who dedicate their lives to producing and reproducing *competitiveness* adhere to a moral code that regulates their interpretation of actions and attitudes associated with MLB. As one MLB entrepreneur concluded, baseball "in much popular writing and reporting remains a metaphor for

purity” (Schwarz 2004). And thus, once again it is possible to see how MLB, and perhaps sports in general, are relatively autonomous spaces as their entrepreneurs not only work to protect against internal threats (gambling that destroys the value of *competitiveness*) but external threats that might corrupt or pollute the purity by reorienting the feelings, thoughts, and actions of all sport actors.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Thus far, the paper has focused exclusively on how MLB entrepreneurs work to produce and reproduce a degree of structural and cultural autonomy such that the field of professional baseball is its own “life-world” replete with themes of discourse delimiting exchanges, interaction, and communication that is deemed “baseball.” They perpetuate a *mythos* that emphasizes the bucolic origins of the sport (Thorn 2012), the halcyon days of yore (Ritter 1966), the purity of the game (Kahn 1972), while juxtapositioning the “scoundrels” of yore like Ty Cobb with the virtues of baseball—e.g., leading the charge of racial integration in the U.S. (Tygel 1993). In short, MLB entrepreneurs have striven to build a high degree of autonomy by presenting the sport as an external representation of the U.S. itself: competitive, but rule-following; agrarian, yet industrious; behind in social policy, but always willing to make difficult, uncomfortable change (Halberstam 1994; Helyar 1995). Put in the word of an entrepreneur (Posnanski 2014):

I think baseball is our National Pastime because the qualities it develops in its contests — the team play, cooperation of all the members toward one purpose, with stardom achievable only through and with such cooperation — come closer to representing the fundamental principles that make up the *spirit* of the American people than is true in the case of any other sport on the calendar.

Yet, the question we now turn to is how does this inform a broader sociology of institutions?

First, as has been argued herein as well as by many other cultural sociologists, to understand how distinct a cultural reality is, we have to pay attention to language. It is through language that the world is made and remade, and it is through language that distinctions are drawn between the experiences, events, emotions, attitudes, actions, and goals in one context and in another. MLB

entrepreneurs employ a discourse of *competitiveness* to discuss sports; they transform it into metrics that have moral-evaluative content for judging athletes and teams, establishing a hierarchy with real consequences (e.g., enshrinement in the Hall of Fame), and for interpreting events into a generalized set of meanings accessible to owners, players, and fans alike. Of course, we would expect that this is the case in other sport fields like football or soccer and, more generally, other spheres would be discrete by way of distinctive themes of discourse—e.g., medical knowledge and practices are rooted in *health care*, legal knowledge and practices in *justice*, and scientific knowledge and practices in *truth*. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate these claims, these are worthwhile empirical questions for future research.

Second, and closely related, it has too often been the case that the study of cultural discourse and institutional differentiation and/or autonomy, has been overly macro or micro in its orientation. On the one end, there is a tendency to see large-scale historical patterns in which complexity and growth in size and scale are pointed to as evidence of important processes. On the other end, micro-interactions highlight the specific use of words strung together to make sense of the world. Neither approach is wrong, but rather without considering the role entrepreneurs, or meso-level collective actors, play, they are incomplete. One of Weber's most important insights was not that charismatic leaders reshaped the world, but rather they inspired the closest cadre of followers to carry on their burgeoning traditions and build a charismatic *community* (Weber 1968). The efficacy and lastingness of the leaders' innovations were directly tied to the fate of this small group of disciples or lieutenants. Thus, MLB entrepreneurs are a species of sport entrepreneurs, who should share similar characteristics with NFL or NBA entrepreneurs and, presumably, entrepreneurs in other institutional spheres. In many ways, the approach above suggests bringing a collective behavior approach, like Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) strategic action fields, to institutional analysis. To be sure, Eisenstadt (1980) has explored political and religious entrepreneurs operating within orthodoxies to build heterodoxies, but far less work has

considered medical, scientific, legal, or other entrepreneurs and their efforts to reconfigure the social world and build autonomous spheres of their own. All of these are avenues for innovative historical approaches to the question of institutional differentiation and autonomy, and more broadly, historical change.

Finally, the study of boundary maintenance is central to understanding institutional spheres or domains. Long forgotten are the insights of Shils' (1975) institutional ecology. There are centers or cores that act as forces of gravity, pulling people physically and, more often, cognitively towards the cultural discourse produced and distributed by entrepreneurs. The Bourdieusian field metaphor has re-imagined the world as a grid in which groups compete while fully abandoning the notion that Jewish synagogues, Catholic churches, and Muslim mosques face east in North America because their parishioners are to worship facing the holy centers of each religion respectively; politics always occurs in a *capital* city in which the congress becomes the center of power; the Hall of Fame and the stadiums that are infused with sacredness during games, draw the attention and emotion of fans and owners and players; and, finally, courthouses in the U.S., with their Roman architecture, pull legal disputes into their orbit. In these centers, power dynamics operate less overtly and strategically as in the field metaphors in style: the physical organization of space and its centrality weaken resistance, encourage unthinking subordination, and make interactions flow accordingly. Indeed, ecological analyses—mostly touched on in passing above—offer a complimentary perspective to the vertical/horizontal grid of field metaphors; and, perhaps, through empirical analysis, may bring innovative integrative insights.

In sum, by looking at the use of a particularized cultural discourse, we are able to illustrate how institutional entrepreneurs, like our MLB sportswriters, erect and maintain a distinct reality. A reality in which athletics are transformed from games and a business, into a morally charged event that is embedded in a much longer history of previous events. Successes and failures are judged through a specific language meant that isolates what is relevant while attempting to insulate against what is

deemed irrelevant; especially that which is polluting or corrupting. While this analysis is not generalizable to other sports or to the sport institution itself—especially given the wide variation from amateur to professional sports, from MLB to less legitimized leagues like the XFL or the defunct USFL—it is suggestive of how one might pursue more comprehensive and robust analyses with more time and space.

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