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The Rochester Institute of Technology

Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Actors & Athletes on Trial:

A Textual Analysis of Two Scandals in the 1920s

by

Melissa Greco Lopes

*A Thesis submitted*

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:

March 8, 2013

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....5

Introduction.....6

Rationale.....7

Review of Literature.....9

    History of Scandal Studies.....9

    Types of Scandals.....10

        Institutional Scandals.....11

        Celebrity Scandals.....11

        Psychodrama Scandals.....12

    Elements of Scandals.....12

        Stages of Scandal.....12

        Story Narratives.....14

        Characters.....14

        Language and Rhetoric.....14

    Scandals of the 1920s.....15

        The 1919 World Series Gambling Fix.....16

            The Rise of Newspapers and the City of Chicago.....16

            Baseball and the Flawed Hero.....17

            The Story that Broke the Scandal.....19

        The Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle Murder Trial.....22

            The Birth of Cinema.....23

            The Party Heard ’round the World.....25

Method.....28

    Textual Analysis.....28

    Gathering Content.....29

    Elements of Newspaper Coverage.....31

        Scandal Coverage.....31

        Main Actors.....32

        Societal Morals.....32

Discussion.....33

    Research Question 1: Scandal coverage in the entertainment and sports industries.....33

        The Star vs. the Idol.....33

    Research Question 2: Hometown coverage versus national coverage.....37

        Elements of the Scandal.....37

    Research Question 3: Revealing the moral values of the 1920s.....41

        Women a Vigilant Voice Against Fatty.....41

        Baseball Fans take a Stand.....42

ACTORS & ATHLETES ON TRIAL	4
Cleaning House to Clean the Image.....	43
Conclusion .....	46
Contributions to Scandal Literature .....	47
Limitations .....	47
Areas of Further Study.....	48
References.....	49

## ACTORS &amp; ATHLETES: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF TWO SCANDALS IN THE 1920s

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### **Abstract**

Using textual analysis, this thesis studied newspaper coverage of the Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle murder trial and the 1919 World Series fix. It examined differences in how hometown papers (*Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*) and a national paper (*New York Times*) covered the scandals. It answered questions about coverage of a scandal within the entertainment industry versus one within the sports arena, and also explored how reports revealed standards of morality in the 1920s. Results showed subtle differences in hometown and national newspaper coverage, but vast differences in reports about the entertainment scandal versus the sports scandal. The research also found that citizens with a vested interest in the outcome of the scandals served as strong voices of morality.

*Keywords:* scandal, morality, 1919 World Series, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle, newspapers, baseball, cinema

**Actors & Athletes on Trial:****A Textual Analysis of Two Scandals in the 1920s**

From the Tiger Woods sex scandal of 2009 to the Casey Anthony murder trial, which spanned four years from 2008 to 2011, today's media landscape is riddled with scandalous stories. Based on the intense media coverage that ensues after a scandal story breaks, the American public has judged celebrities, athletes, and ordinary people thrust into the spotlight for breaking away from the moral code. Researchers including Hurwitz, Green, and Segal (1976) and Pellecha (1997) study how news media have reported seminal events in American history. There are perhaps few media reports that make more of an impression on the public than scandals.

Garrard and Newell (2006) defined scandal as "breaches of standards of correct behavior" that are "communicated to an audience wider than those immediately involved" (p. 5). Scandals are created not just when a moral standard is transgressed, but when that transgression is revealed in the public sphere and triggers a reaction. The revelation is a key factor in defining scandal. A transgression or breach in conduct that is not revealed, or once revealed does not generate a public response, would not be classified as a scandal (Thompson, 2002). Furthermore, a story is a scandal when the revelation of individual or institutional breaches of socially acceptable conduct compromises the reputation of those involved (Apostolidis and Williams, 2004).

In several of the studies included in the literature review, researchers (Gwyn, 1965, Thompson, 2002, and Benson, 2009) each described the state of the culture at the time of the scandal. When studies explore scandal in the wider context of society and its developments,

culture, and morals, a critical analysis can be developed about the experiences of the citizens at a certain place and time (Williams, 2006 and Apostolidis & Williams, 2004).

The study of scandal, Thompson (2002) said, can answer “questions about how media can shape public debate,” can reveal the “scope of journalistic investigation in private lives of public figures,” and can, in an analytical fashion, “examine the nature of scandals and the social conditions which shape their emergence, development and consequences” (p. 5-6). While Benson (2009) noted that it can be difficult to prove why the press covered scandals as they did or how that coverage influenced public opinion, studying the coverage itself may provide information on the attitudes and values of the day. Identifying what newspapers and audiences deemed scandalous, how the institutions and individuals involved responded to the coverage, and what moral judgments were made about the scandal can advance our understanding of the moral values of the majority.

### **Rationale**

Gwyn (1965) also argued that scandals are “built less by what happened than by why it happened and by what was done about it by those in authority” (p. 3). It is in answering those two questions, why it happened and what was done about it, that media play a pivotal role. And, this is not a new role for media; both European and American newspapers and tabloids have a long history of covering scandals and sensational stories (Ehrlich, 1996). This study seeks to explore how newspapers covered two scandals from the 1920s, the 1919 World Series gambling fix and the Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle murder trial. It also looks at how the reports described what happened and how the characters, authority figures, and general public reacted to those scandals. As Lagos (2012) argued, looking at a body of media coverage can reveal narratives created according to the standards of journalism at a given time (p. 47). Looking at the 1920s scandals



will tell us something about how newspapers built narratives around two different types of institutional scandals (sports and entertainment) and can also provide a point for future studies on which to base trends on how media narratives cover actors and athletes over time.

This study also adds to the body of research about the anatomy of scandal. Much of this study's cited research, including studies by Benson (2009), Lowi and Hinerman (1997), and Thompson (2000), draws upon content analyses from scandals occurring in the last three or four decades; many occurred after the internet boom, but few have explored scandals earlier than Watergate, which occurred in the early 1970s. While many of these studies explore political scandal few exist that take that same analytical approach to celebrity scandal. This study will analyze two scandals from the 1920s, which occurred in both the celebrity and sports industries and happened almost simultaneously, creating an ideal scenario for the study of scandal.

The present study will also add to the body of sociological, historical, and communication research, including studies by Bachin (2003), Mayer (2006), and Lagos (2012) that explore the sports and entertainment industries in the 1920s. Press coverage of scandal can be studied from a variety of angles; past research has focused on reporter's use of sources (Gwyn, 1965) and has plotted the sequence of reporting (Gamson, 2001). This study aims to employ both angles, creating a clearer understanding of how media cover a scandal, what role sources play in explaining a scandal, and how coverage may differ depending on the geographic location of the newspaper covering it.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

**Research Question 1:** How does newspaper coverage of a scandal that occurred in the entertainment industry differ from coverage of a scandal that occurred in the sports industry?

**Research Question 2:** What differences emerge from coverage of scandal from its hometown newspaper (*Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*) compared with news coverage within the *New York Times*, a national paper of record?

**Research Question 3:** What does scandal coverage tell us about the prevailing moral values of the era and how did the entertainment and sports industries respond to breaches in those values?

## Review of Literature

### History of Scandal Studies

As this study focuses on media coverage of scandal, it is important to understand prior research on scandal and sensationalism in the press.

In a study about the differences between television tabloid news and investigative news, Ehrlich (1996) noted that sensationalism in the press dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and plays off the “human fascination with crime, sex, and gossip” (p. 1). Loosely tracing its origins to London, England, Benson (2009) defined sensationalism as a journalistic innovation that was widely used to earn market share, while Ehrlich (1996) argued that it flourished both in England and the United States as newspapers faced increased competition and fought to attract new readers, including the rush of immigrants that entered the country during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (p. 1). The practice of sensationalism in the press meant focusing attention on human interest stories, including crime, celebrities, and lifestyle (Vasterman, 2005).

In the early 1900s, the heated circulation wars of publishers William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer created conditions for rampant sensationalism and the coverage of scandal. In Chicago, home of the 1919 World Series scandal, yellow journalism was a common practice

as reporters overdramatized and exaggerated facts to tell stories. Reporters scoured the city, hoping to find violent or salacious material before their competitors did, and in the process they paid little attention to facts or details. In focusing on producing the most sensational stories of the day, Chicago reporters boasted of inventing the scoop, or the idea of getting exclusive information on a breaking story that was likely to be of importance (Mayer, 2006). *Chicago Times* editor Wilbur Storey characterized the era by explaining that the news mentality was to “print the news and raise hell” (Mayer, 2006, p. 5).

In light of Storey’s mentality, it is easy to see how media coverage of a scandal can reach fever pitch. Scandals are generally triggered by a key event, which sets media in motion as they seek to be the source of information by uncovering facts, relying on rumor and innuendo, or some combination of the two (Vasterman, 2005). The extensive coverage creates a news wave that details the specific events revolving around the scandal, explores the characteristics of those involved, and reports on reactions from those in authority and members of the public. As a result, Campbell (2006) argued that in covering scandal, the press can “provide some cultural glue that sticks us together” and can “reflect and sustain the values and traditions of a vital democracy, not only by engaging and entertaining diverse audiences, but also by watching over society’s institutions, making sense of its important events, and chronicling the ebb and flow of daily life” (p. 193).

### **Types of Scandals**

When studying scandals, one question Lull and Hinerman (1997) sought to answer is in what context is the scandal being placed? They identified three different contexts for scandal stories: institutional, celebrity, and psychodrama.

**Institutional scandals.** Institutional scandals occur when a character's transgression reflects directly upon the institution for which they are associated or when members of an institution violate society norms for their own gain. Institutional scandals deal with the reputation of not just the individuals involved, but with the entire organization, which becomes publicly responsible for the transgression (Lull & Hinerman, 1997).

Institutional scandals can be analyzed by documenting how discourse varies from institution to institution, and what effect the scandal has on the institution itself. Gamson (2001) noted that in some cases, scandals not only expose the moral transgressions of an individual but can also point to "institutional decay" (Gamson, 2001, p. 43). Media stories during institutional scandals will often label characters as hypocrites or will call for further investigation within the institution. As the scandal is revealed, an entire institution can come under scrutiny and the characteristics of the transgressor can be used to describe the whole environment (Gamson, 2001).

Both Lull and Hinerman (1997) and Gamson (2001) noted that institutional scandals often suggest that given how realms, like religion, entertainment, and politics operate, that scandals are always occurring, and it is only a matter of time until they are revealed.

**Celebrity scandals.** Celebrities, including actors, pop stars, and athletes, all engage in image management, balancing their personal lives and professional personas to create and sustain a positive image in the eye of the public (Gamson, 2001). When celebrities behave in ways that are at odds with their personas, they will often come under intense media scrutiny and public condemnation. Lull and Hinerman note that celebrity scandals progress under three simultaneous scenarios: society's dominant moral values, the star's image, and the actual events reported in the news.

The image systems under which celebrities exist create avenues for themes to emerge within the context of the scandal. One example is the image-as-commodity theme, in which media commentary questioned a celebrity's actions and their willingness to compromise their image in Hollywood. In many themes, the media coverage focused largely on questions of "why" (Gamson, 2001).

As this study deals with professional sports systems, Rowe's study of Olympic scandals provided additional background on athletes as celebrities. Additionally, Rowe (1997) draws parallels between the expectations moviegoers and sports fans have for actors and sports stars. Both audiences have special expectations, where a celebrity's performance should align with their personal conduct. Considering this expectation, Rowe explains that several characters, including athletes, sports management, media, and fans, all play roles as scandals unfold (Rowe, 1997).

**Psychodrama scandals.** Psychodrama, the third type of scandal, focuses on the "basic cognitive and emotional structures" that occur due to "cultural pressure points," and usually includes strong stories and character types (Lull & Hinerman, 1997, p. 20). In psychodramas, ordinary people who commit moral violations are thrust into the spotlight, becoming quasi-celebrities as the scandal unfolds (Lull & Hinerman, 1997). Psychodramas have compelling stories with characters that fit into stereotypes that are story-appropriate. While psychodramas are worthy of further investigation, this study will focus primarily on institutional and celebrity scandal.

### **Elements of Scandals**

**Stages of scandal.** Gerrard (2006) and Thompson (2002) both discuss the common script that occurs in the development of a scandal. A scandal begins with a transgression of

moral norms. Next, the transgressor is accused of immoral behavior and the action is revealed to the public through media channels. To set a scandal apart from moral panic or rumor, Lull and Hinerman (1997) noted that scandals must be able to be “traceable to real persons who are held responsible for their actions” (p. 4). In many cases, scandals involve public figures, politicians, prominent business figures, actors, and professional athletes, among others.

The media typically become involved as a result of a trigger event, something that catches the media’s attention and is worthy of coverage. Trigger events can be actual events that occurred, but also can be what Boorstin (1961) calls pseudo-events, an event “constructed by the media or other actors in order to set the agenda” (Wein & Elmelund-Praestekaer, 2009, p. 187). Drohan (2005) also explains that trigger events are not always new, but that a history of indiscretion or transgression may have occurred over time (p. 117).

After the initial broadcast, characters involved in the scandal, prompted by public disappointment, either deny or cover up the action or confess. During this phase, media rely on follow-up stories and speculation to ask the “how” and “why” questions, and investigate what is going to be done about it (Bird, 2006).

This leads to a formal inquiry by authority figures related to the scandal. Because scandals are often systemic or indicative of issues in a given environment, formal inquiries, particularly at the institutional level, can often result in reformation or regulation (Garrard, 2006, p. 17, 20).

While several researchers, including Vasterman (2005), Drohan (2005), and Garrard (2006), have identified and studied the script that a scandal follows, Gamson (2001) noted that the construction of the script and its affects are generally understudied. Lowi (2004) offers two

areas for further script analysis; it can be substantive and look at the actual scandal and its revelation to the public or it can be procedural and focus on the cover-up, denial, or confession.

**Story narratives.** Lull and Hinerman (1997) argue that ‘to call a story a scandal is to give it a bizarre kind of journalistic appeal and integrity’ that begs to be told and retold (p. 9). Scandals thrive when they possess a certain ubiquity; when a story has something, everybody covers it and talks about it (Williams, 2004). Here, media becomes an important element of scandal because it creates that narrative, “fram[ing] the scandal, populat[ing] it with characters, [and] giv[ing] it a structure and longevity” (Lull & Hinerman, 1997, p. 3). Vasterman (2005) and Benson (2009) found that narratives often rely on metaphors, photographs, and images to make the scandal easily accessible and understandable to wider audiences. The use of eye witness accounts, expert analysis, courtroom proceedings (verbatim or near verbatim), or editorial comment are also used in news coverage to help introduce story elements or provide background information about the scandal (Williams (2004).

**Characters.** In analyzing scandals, researchers including Gwyn (1965) and Benson (2009) discussed the traits of a scandal’s main characters. Like any good novel, scandals require characters whose motives and actions move the plot along (Lull & Hinerman, 1997).

Benson looked for adjectives used to describe the main characters of a scandal that occurred in a small village in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. He found that the newspaper reports treated the characters as objects, with a mix of both condemnation and admiration, so that readers would stay intrigued and interested by the story (Benson, 2009).

**Language & rhetoric.** Van Gorp (2005), building upon Entman’s idea of framing, identified devices including “metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, lexical choices, selection of sources, graphics, stereotypes, and dramatic characters” in a content analysis of media

coverage (p. 458). In the study, the researchers compared tabloid papers against quality papers and also looked for differences in reporting between two different geographic regions. As this research project also seeks to find differences between the reporting of scandal between a local paper and a national paper, Van Gorp's study offers useful directions in how to do so.

Williams (2004) also looked at rhetoric within the media coverage when studying the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. He identified ways in which the political institution was described prior to the scandal, how the press named or identified the scandal and its characters after the revelation of transgressions, and analyzed the rhetoric of apology by the characters associated with the scandal. He looked for special iconography (for example, the blue dress, beret, and cigar), and sought to identify vocabulary, signal personalities, plots, keywords, technical terms, or memorable phrases found in the coverage (Williams, 2004). It is the "characters, icons, vocabulary" that unified the story and served as the "chief function of the spectacle" (Williams, 2004, 243).

### **Scandals of the 1920s**

This study will explore media coverage of two scandals in the 1920s. They are arguably among the first major scandals in their respective industries (Lagos, 2012 and Bachin, 2003). Both scandals were covered extensively by Hearst papers and independently owned papers in the cities in which the scandal occurred, two of which will serve as the hometown papers for the study. Both scandals also were covered by the *New York Times*, which will serve as the national paper because of its established reputation as the paper of record in the United States (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005).



**The 1919 World Series Gambling Fix**

Called by many as the “national pastime,” baseball has been equated with wholesome American values. But, like the country’s own turmoil, baseball, too, has not been without its troubles. The sport’s popularity rose because it served as an escape during America’s Civil War, world wars, and Depression, creating hometown heroes in young cities across the nation. And because the sport had gained a central place in the heart of Americans by the time its first big scandal, the 1919 World Series fix, was exposed, baseball officials and members of the media did everything they could to preserve the purity of the game in the minds of the public.

The 1919 World Series pitted the Chicago White Sox against the Cincinnati Reds, with the Sox as the clear favorite to win. But the American League team lost and rumors of a fix soared. Gossip inside and outside the club house would lead to an investigation, Grand Jury hearing, criminal trial, and eventual lifetime ban from baseball for eight White Sox players implicated in a conspiracy to throw the series for monetary gain.

**The rise of newspapers and the city of Chicago.** Founded in 1833, the city of Chicago grew up at precisely the same time as the newspaper industry. Like the mass medium, Chicago’s expansion was fueled by the industrial revolution and urbanization. According to the United States census, the city had grown from the 92<sup>nd</sup> largest city in America to the fifth largest in less than a decade and by the 1850s the city had seven railroads bringing innovation, business, and settlers to and from Chicago (Mayer, 2006).

In the 1830s, the newspaper as a mass medium was also transforming. When a printer in New York created the “power press, a scheme for financing the paper through advertising, and a bureaucratic organization for gathering the news and distributing the paper,” it became apparent that newspapers could be a viable business (Lowery & De Fleur, 1983, p.13).

The model was copied throughout the country, and Chicago was no exception. The city's first paper, the *Weekly Democrat*, had a strong political allegiance, as did many papers of the time. While one role of the newspaper was often to support a specific political party, it also was charged with "boosting the community: trumpeting the advantages of the hometown over a host of others competing for settlers, business, and infrastructure improvements such as railroads and canals" and this was especially important for frontier towns like Chicago (Mayer, 2006, p. 3).

As the industry grew, "competition, unfortunately, encouraged irresponsibility" and resulted in the rise of penny presses (papers that sold for one cent) and yellow journalism (reporting sensational stories) of the era (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 46). Both tactics were used to boost sales among a new market: America's "first-generation immigrants, barely literate in English, who wanted their piece of the American dream" (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 47). In Chicago, editors followed these journalism tactics. By the late 1840s, the city's only non-partisan paper, the *Tribune* was quickly buying out rival papers and shifting to coverage that would appeal to a more general audience (Mayer, 2006).

**Baseball and the flawed hero.** Throughout its early history, America experienced a civil war, a conflict with Spain, and involvement in World War I in Europe, while shifting from an agricultural to industrial society at home. Baseball "grew to impressive proportions during the Civil War era" and remained a popular activity for the rest of the century (Voigt, 1974, p. 6).

In the 1870s, Albert G. Spalding, a famous pitcher who retired to take over as president of the Chicago White Stockings (today's Chicago Cubs), began to create an image for the young sport: America's pastime (Voigt, 1974). In addition to owning a team, Spalding created the American Sports Publishing Company, where his editors and journalists wrote at length about baseball as the "national game" (Voigt, 1974). Americans were fast to agree, embracing

“collective symbols like the flag, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence, along with popular heroes to satisfy feelings of national identity” (Voigt, 1974, p. 22).

In Chicago, the city provided a venue for such an identity. At the end of World War I, baseball stood for the “wholeness of an American institution” and philosopher Morris Cohen described the sport as the “national religion” (Bachin, 2003, p. 2). As Americans searched for heroes, baseball gladly stepped in, and with the help of the sports journalists who “made sure to note that the sports hero played baseball not for glory or monetary rewards but for the love of the game,” it was an easily filled void (Roessner, 2009, p. 44). In the early 1800s, sports journalism initially focused on cricket, racing, and boxing, but the penny presses ushered in more full coverage and by the end of the century, all the major daily newspapers had sports beats (Roessner, 2009). Just as local papers served as “boosters” for the community, sports journalists were inclined to unabashedly support the home ball clubs. They wrote short biographies and long features, ran photographs of the heroes in action, and used the sport’s statistics to measure the athletes’ record-breaking feats (Roessner, 2009, p. 45).

The 1919 World Series was the first series to be played post-World War I. More than half of all the professional players in the league had joined the war effort in some capacity and the 1918 season was cut short as a result (Bachin, 2003). Reporters jumped to support the teams and the *New York Times* went so far as to suggest the series had the “potential to draw all Americans together despite the contentious events dividing the nation” (Bachin, 2003, p. 4). An article printed on October 1, 1919 describes that “great things will be done today in Cincinnati” and describes the White Sox as “upholders of the dignity of Chicago and the honor of the American League” (“The Series”, 1919). While it was easy to write about the triumphs of America’s new supermen, as the Greek tragedies have taught, even heroes have flaws.

The hype leading up to the series was optimistic, but the outcome would change everything. After the White Sox suffered losses in the first two games, rumors that the game wasn't on the square circulated. As more details of a plot to conspire with gamblers came out, many in the newspapers business, especially those writing for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, feared a scandal of such magnitude would leave a black mark on baseball's history forever (Punish Crooks by Banishment from Baseball, 1921).

**The story that broke the scandal.** As rumors circulated among baseball promoters and journalists that gamblers had worked with players to fix the series, both groups “did their best to assert the purity of the game...and [extolled] the virtues of the game, and its central role in both shaping and reflecting American values” (Bachin, 2003, p. 6). In what appeared to be an attempt to show confidence in his players and quell rumors of a fix, Charles Comiskey, owner of the White Sox, publicly declared he would offer \$20,000 for “evidence that any of his players had deliberately threw any of the world series games ...” (Rumors Arouse Comiskey, 1919). In the same *New York Times* article, he vouched for his players, brushing off the rumors as “bitterness due to losing wagers” (Rumors Arouse Comiskey, 1919).

Despite all their best efforts, events in 1920 would uncover how tightly gambling was woven into the sport. When players from the Chicago Cubs were accused of throwing a game against the Philadelphia Phillies during the regular season, baseball officials launched a wide-spread investigation, reopened inquiries regarding the 1919 series, and took “vigorous action against baseball gamblers” (Must Stamp Out Baseball Gambling, 1920, para. 2).

Although Comiskey's rhetoric right after the series showed confidence in the innocence of his players, a year later, the *New York Times* quoted him as saying he was “convinced after the

first game last fall against the Cincinnati Reds that someone had ‘fixed’ some of his players” (White Sox Owner Convinced, 1920, para. 1).

The internal investigation resulted in a Grand Jury hearing in Cook County, Illinois that indicted eight players from the 1919 White Sox team: Eddie Cicotte, Oscar “Happy” Felsch, Arnold “Chick” Gandil, “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, Fred McMullin, Charles “Swede” Risberg, George “Buck” Weaver, and Claude “Lefty” Williams. As the hearings got started, the *Philadelphia North American* printed a story on September 28 that blew the entire plot open; former boxer Billy Maharg went on record to expose details of the plan to fix the series and named former and current Chicago players and known gamblers who were involved (New Witness Tells of Baseball Plot, 1920).

In what is perhaps the most heartbreaking depiction of the effect this scandal had on the “national pastime” is the article that tells the story of the small boy who stopped Joe Jackson as he left the Cook County Courthouse:

When Joe Jackson left the Grand Jury room yesterday after his confession, a crowd of small boys gathered around their heavy hitting idol and asked: “it isn’t true, is it, Joe?” “Yes, boys, I’m afraid it is,” Jackson replied. (Heydler Says Magee Confessed, 1920, p. 1)

Today, we know that as the “say it ain’t so, Joe” story.

Given the evidence, testimonials, and confessions the jury indicted 13 people on criminal charges of conspiracy, including the eight players. In response to the Grand Jury hearing, baseball officials dismantled their current three-man National Commission and replaced it with one official who would have supreme power. They chose Judge Kenesaw Landis as the new commissioner. He accepted the appointment and publicly vowed to clean up the tainted image of

the sport (Bachin, 2003). The owners did what they could to combat negative press, which began to put baseball in the “same company as horseracing and pugilism” by making clear contrasts between the honest, pure players and the dishonest players who were charged with being involved in the fix (Bachin, 2003, p. 6). Landis came on tough, using strong language in response to the hearings. The *New York Times* quoted him as saying:

We have got to have a higher standard of integrity and honesty in baseball than in any other walk of life—and we are going to have it ... we are determined to heal the wounds suffered by the great national game and maintain the sport in the place it deserves in the heart of America. (Landis Calls on Garry Herrmann, 1920, p. 1)

When the eight players went to trial, they were painted as “traitors to the game and betrayers of American values” by members of the media (Bachin, 2003, p. 6). In reports, it was made clear: it wasn’t the game that was dishonest, it was the players. The *New York Times* began to refer to the eight players as the “Black Sox” in an article that appeared in print on March 14, 1921; and a search on the *Times* Web site today retrieves more than 750 articles that use that term (White Sox Trial to be Postponed, 1921, p. 1).

Even after they were acquitted of all charges, reporters were reticent to admit there was anything wrong with the sport. If the players did throw the series, it was the “crooked crooks” and the “chicanery and furtiveness of the professional gambler” to blame (Bachin, 2003, p. 6).

Despite the acquittal, the eight ball players were banned from the league for life by Comiskey, Landis, and Ban Johnson, the American League president; Landis issued this now famous statement to the press:

Regardless of the verdict of juries, no player that throws a ball game; no player that undertakes or promises to throw a ball game; no player that sits in a conference with a bunch of crooked players and gamblers where the ways and means of throwing games are planned and discussed and does not promptly tell his club about it, will ever play professional baseball. (Baseball Leaders Won't Let White Sox Return, 1921, p. 1)

Over the next year, articles reported that George Weaver petitioned for reinstatement into the league but was denied. Others described a grassroots movement to clear Joe Jackson's name and articles arguing his innocence have appeared as recently as 2009.

The 1919 Black Sox gambling fix has all of the elements of a scandal. It has characters that were stars with high reputations in the public eye. In the conspiracy with gamblers to throw the World Series for monetary gain, it has a transgression of not just a legal standard, but a moral one. When local newspapers, wire services, and the *New York Times* reported on the idea of a possible fix, the reports evoked intense outrage from fans and brought the entire sport under scrutiny. The eight players engaged in varying degrees of denial, confession, and apology throughout the coverage. Lastly, the baseball authority responded strongly and swiftly to remedy the reputation of the industry.

### **The Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle Murder Trial**

Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle was a portly actor known for his slapstick, physical comedy. A film industry darling, in 1920 Arbuckle became one of the first actors to earn an annual million dollar contract for his work. But his career came to an abrupt end on September 3, 1920 when he was charged with the murder of Virginia Rappe, a young actress who died after a raucous hotel

party (Chua-Eoan, 2007). Though he was acquitted of all charges after three different trials, Arbuckle was never able to resurrect his career.

**The birth of cinema.** In the late 1800s, inventor Thomas Edison and his assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson developed the Kinetoscope, technology that made possible the recording and viewing of movement on film (Dirks). From the Kinetoscope, technology developed quickly, and in just ten years, companies sprang up that were creating, distributing, and exhibiting motion pictures throughout the country. Films were screened as a part of vaudeville shows, and nickelodeons became popular stand alone forms of entertainment, attracting mass audiences who flocked to see silent films in a range of genres, including melodramas, comedies, and romances (Dirks).

While American film may have gotten its start in Edison's lab in New Jersey, California soon became the cinema capital of the world. Early movies were traditionally short 10-minute films called one-reelers because they could fit on one reel of film. Most East Coast movie producers agreed to this standard, believing that audiences wouldn't sit through a lengthy film, but a small outlier group disagreed (Dirks). Breaking away from the East Coast mentality, they headed west to California, making their home in Los Angeles. And with the first West Coast film, a Latino movie called *Old California* (1910), Hollywood was born.

As Hollywood established itself as a movie mecca, it became the stomping ground for screen writers, directors, producers, and most importantly, actors and actresses. Producers and directors quickly realized that it wasn't just the films America was interested in, but that actors and actresses had as much drawing power as the stories did. Soon, the executives began to rely on the star power of their actors to bring people back to the cinema and ensure that currently screening films would bring in enough revenue to fund the next one (Baldasty).



In the early 1900s, actors with that sort of star power included Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Charlie Chaplin, Roscoe Arbuckle, and the “Keystone Cops,” an ensemble of actors who appeared in many of Arbuckle’s films. These stars, and the films they appeared in, enjoyed immense popularity among many of America’s social groups and classes. Immigrants new to the country were attracted to films, as they were baseball, because the entertainment forms didn’t require knowledge of English (Kaes, 1990).

To help boost star power, producers used publicity departments to share details of daily lives of Hollywood actors with gossip columnists and newspaper reporters. The details revealed the clothes actors wore, night spots they frequented, parties they attended, and films they were currently shooting (Abrams, 2004). Columns written by syndicated reporters, along with feature stories and photographs of Hollywood and its personalities, were seen by millions of readers each week.

While mass audiences ate up the information, movies and film stars weren’t without their critics. In fact, despite having the adoration and attention of millions, Hollywood had a love-hate relationship with society. While baseball thrived under the changes in culture that were brought on in post-World War I America, the “breakdown of genteel culture” and the new, greater “presentation of sexual innuendo and sexuality in the mass media” and in Hollywood, earned its share of push back and resistance (Abrams, 2004, p. 67). Along with Prohibition and the suffragette movement, in the 1910s and 1920s, women also championed the anti-obscenity movement and they directed their attention at the entertainment industry (Kitamura, 2006). Many feared that films were tearing away the moral fabric of the country. Lawmakers in several states tried to ban films or conducted raids on nickelodeons and film houses (Fine, 1997).

Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle rose to fame at this precise time. In his short career at Keystone, Arbuckle acted in, directed, or produced nearly 100 one-and-two reels. Rapf (2009) described Arbuckle as a jack of all trades; he played the “innocent country rube, a flirt, or a hen-pecked husband ... he could be a drunk, a bum, a swell-about-town, or a young lady in drag” (p. 339). Despite his immense weight, Arbuckle was an agile actor who could gracefully and deftly move about. His ease of movement, paired with impeccable comedic timing, was a recipe for screen success. In his films, audiences could also see his signature “belly bump,” which he used during fight scenes in several films (Rapf, 2009).

**The party heard 'round the world.** When Labor Day weekend 1921 came, Arbuckle’s career was at its height. He had six films currently screening in Los Angeles and New York, and had just wrapped shooting on three others (Fine, 1997). Arbuckle, along with several other actors, directors, and Hollywood insiders, traveled from Los Angeles to San Francisco for a party at the St. Francis Hotel. While Prohibition had been enacted nearly a year before, liquor was easy to obtain in both cities. Private parties of this sort were often described in the press as lavish events where attendees would engage in unrestrained behavior (Abrams, 2004).

In the three connecting rooms that Arbuckle booked for his party, over 30 guests, including Virginia Rappe, attended the party, which took place on Monday, September 5, 1921. While the details of what happened are still unclear, witness accounts suggest Rappe and Arbuckle entered a bedroom together and shut the door (Schanie, 2010, p. 6). Sometime later, guest Maude Delmont heard Rappe screaming in pain. Calls were made to the front desk and to a doctor, who diagnosed Rappe with alcohol poisoning, however a second doctor was called, and after examining Rappe, determined she had suffered internal injuries and a ripped bladder. She

died four days later, on Friday, September 9, 1921, due to peritonitis, an inflammation of the abdomen (Schanie, 2010).

When the story leaked of Rappe's death, Delmont spoke freely to reporters, accusing Arbuckle of rape and murder. On the advice of legal counsel, he turned himself into the police for questioning; he was soon charged with manslaughter. Arbuckle was tried three separate times, as the first two trials resulted in hung juries. The prosecution continued to maintain his guilt, but in his third trial, the jury returned a not guilty verdict after just six minutes of deliberation (Schanie, 2010).

And, just as newspapers were eager to cover the glamour of Hollywood, they were just as eager to cover its scandal. When news of Rappe's death broke, newspapers, including Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner* and the independent *San Francisco Chronicle*, covered the arrest and trials of Arbuckle. The trials provided the perfect backdrop for such articles,

because of the natural antagonistic elements involved in a court trial (between prosecutor and defense attorneys, between guilt and innocence, etc.), newspapers can all too easily turn the courtroom into a staged theatrical production replete with protagonists, antagonist, supporting characters, and the unfolding plot lines of the trial itself. (Lagos, 2012, p. 50)

Hearst's paper used photos and graphics to create a narrative that portrayed Rappe as an innocent victim and Arbuckle as a "sexual lothario" (Lagos, 2012, p. 49). Fine (1997), quoting Yallop (1976, p. 131), noted that Hearst's *Examiner* "sold more copies about the Arbuckle scandal than any edition since the 1915 sinking of the *Lusitania*" (p. 309).

Moviegoers, galvanized by the media coverage, vehemently protested Arbuckle's films as the trials pressed on. Barbas (1997) noted that the New York City Exhibitor's Chamber of

Commerce decided to remove Arbuckle's films from screening while the trial was underway and the Motion Picture Theater Owners of America did the same with any film starring either Arbuckle or Rappe nationwide. The intense coverage of the trial also contributed to the national debate about the immoral nature of Hollywood and the entertainment industry at large. Lagos (2012) argued that this narrative was easy to construct as it played upon a general unease about Hollywood's "loose morals" (p. 49).

Abrams (2004) argued that the Arbuckle trials "demonstrate that the industry strove to control scandal and the publicizing of unorthodox behavior" (p. 80). Mirroring the baseball owners idea of reorganizing their governing body and appointing a sole commissioner, after the trial, producers created a new group, the Motion Picture Productions and Distributors Association, designed to self-regulate the industry and clean up its image. They tapped Will Hays to lead the new organization. Hays, following the example set by Judge Landiss in banning the eight White Sox players, banned Arbuckle from appearing in films (Fine, 1997). Hays lifted the ban in 1922, but it wasn't until 1932 that Arbuckle got a second chance in the industry, making short films for Warner Brothers Studios (Schanie, 2010). But, his career was again cut short, as Arbuckle died June 29, 1933.

Similar to the Black Sox scandal, the Arbuckle trial easily meets the criteria of a scandal. The story has characters of national interest who engaged in unconventional, immoral behavior. It included a revealing trigger event (Virginia Rappe's death) which sparked intense outrage from the public. During the trial, a cast of supporting characters offered commentary and eye witness accounts, feeding the media coverage. Additionally, the industry felt pressure to repair its image as the actions of the Labor Day party were made to mirror the moral decay of Hollywood itself.

### **Method**

Using the textual analysis methodology, the proposed study will look at how 1920s newspapers covered two scandals, the 1919 World Series gambling fix, which occurred in the context of the sports industry, and the Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle murder trial, which occurred in the entertainment industry.

### **Textual Analysis**

This study will rely on textual analysis methodology, chosen for its ability to allow researchers to make inferences and interpretations about the text. As McKee (2003) explains, textual analysis is a “data gathering process,” suited for the humanities including media and mass communication studies, that uses texts to reveal how individuals make sense of the world (p. 1).

In the case of this research, textual analysis will help uncover how members of the media make sense of the two scandals, the characters involved, and how they exist within their respective industries and in larger society. These questions can be teased out through the type of close reading of a text that this particular methodology promotes. Textual analysis is rooted in grounded theory, which requires a researcher to search for a set of core, common concepts within a given set of texts (Glaser, 2002). Glaser (2002) also explains that concepts can “instantly sensitize people, rightly or wrongly, to seeing a pattern in an event or happening that makes them feel they understand with ‘know how’” (p. 16). Grounded theory gives concepts credibility by generating them from organized data. This is done by gathering data, then comparing each unit, generating categories, and organizing those into core categories through the collecting of emerging ideas, mapping, and memo-writing (Carley, 1993).

This qualitative method was chosen because it allows the researcher to identify dominant themes and explore relationships between those themes. This study will explore concepts often

connected with scandals: the concept of the fallen idol and the concept of breached morals.

Additionally, the study will look at how rhetorical devices, such as metaphors or hyperbole, are used to describe the scandal. Lastly, the researcher will look at how newspaper coverage may have used appeals to authority, such as quotes from police officers, lawyers, or judges, or third parties, such as citizens or those close to the events, to validate points or offer explanations for the scandals.

McKee (2003) acknowledges that critics of textual analysis will cite its lack of quantitative data and its inability to be replicated as problematic. However, he argues that there is an inherent value in interpretive, intuitive work, especially in the humanities. While other methodologies, including content analysis, could be used in a study of this manner, textual analysis was chosen because the researcher is interested only in identifying how the text could be individually interpreted, rather than statistical representations of each scandal's elements (McKee, 2003). As Carley (1993) described, it is the connection of concepts, instead of the count of concepts that is important to this type of study.

### **Gathering Content**

ProQuest Historical Newspapers database was used to search *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* archives to gather all articles regarding each scandal. The two regional newspapers were chosen because of their proximity to the respective scandals' action. The *New York Times* was selected because it was removed from the action but has been widely considered the national paper (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). For articles from the *New York Times*, the researcher consulted the paper's free historical archive.

For newspaper coverage of the White Sox scandal, the researcher searched *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *New York Times* from October 10, 1919 through December 31, 1922, using

the key search term “White Sox.” The start date was chosen because it was the date of the last game of the World Series, in which the White Sox lost to the Cincinnati Reds. The end date was chosen because it completes the year (1922) in which the trial took place. While the trial was in July 1922, the researcher included clips through December to see if any post-trial coverage existed. The researcher omitted any articles that do not specifically mention the 1919 World Series gambling fix. Omitted articles would include stories about spring training and box scores from the current season. This search, minus omitted stories, yielded 170 articles from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and 130 articles from the *New York Times*. Of the 170 *Chicago Daily Tribune* articles read by the researcher, 42 were a part of the analysis; of the 130 *New York Times* articles read, 53 were analyzed. Articles excluded from the research either summarized information already included in the analysis or contained information not pertinent to the research questions. For example, many articles discussed trial logistics and proceedings, while others focused on the reorganization of professional baseball, with little mention of the White Sox scandal.

For the Roscoe ‘Fatty’ Arbuckle murder scandal, the researcher searched the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* from September 4, 1921 through June 30, 1922. The start date was selected because it was the day Roscoe Arbuckle hosted a party at the St. Francis Hotel, which Virginia Rappe attended before falling ill and dying. June 30, 1922 was selected because it provided a two-month cushion of stories after the third trial. Key search terms included “Roscoe Fatty Arbuckle” and “Virginia Rappe.” When names were used as a key term, variations on that name were used. For example, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle was searched as “Roscoe Arbuckle,” “Arbuckle,” or “Fatty Arbuckle.” The researcher omitted articles that did not directly reference the scandal. This search, minus omitted stories, yielded 150 articles from

the *Los Angeles Times* and 50 articles from the *New York Times*. Of the 150 *Los Angeles Times* articles read, the researcher analyzed 45 and of the 50 *New York Times* articles read, the researcher analyzed 35. Similar to the White Sox scandal, many articles collected focused on the court proceedings, including the jury selection for the three trials. Many articles also explored the life of victim Virginia Rappe, without mentioning anything about Roscoe Arbuckle other than his alleged involvement in her death.

### **Elements of Newspaper Coverage**

Using individual articles as the unit of analysis, the research explored newspaper coverage, main actors, societal morals, and looked at the scandal in the context of the entertainment and sports industries.

**Scandal coverage.** A large portion of this study sought to see if patterns existed in how newspaper coverage of a scandal progressed. To answer this question, each story was classified into one step of the model, which is a hybrid of the models derived from Vasterman's (2005) and Drohan's (2005) findings, as discussed in the literature review. In this study, the stages included (1) the trigger event, (2) identification of a guilty party, (3) description of guilty action, (4) suggestions for punishment, and (5) discussion of larger societal or policy issue. Definitions of each stage are as follows:

**Stage 1 Trigger event:** A trigger event is the primary action that catches the media's attention, causing them to break the story. These are often the earliest reports of the scandal.

**Stage 2 Identification of a guilty party:** Prompted by a quote from a source, government official, or legal authority, in Stage 2, the media will identify a possibly guilty party. In this stage, the alleged guilty party will often deny any wrong doing.



**Main actors.** As researchers explored how and when media reports identify the guilty party, they also looked at media treatment of the main actors involved in the scandal. In this study, the main actors were any of the eight White Sox players and Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle. Basic questions such as “is the main actor mentioned in the headline” and “how central is the main actor to the story” helped identify how much salience the media give the character. Were there similarities or differences in the way the articles describe the main characters? What might have accounted for this? How did the media describe the main actor? Were metaphors used? Was the main character painted in a positive or negative light? Did the articles interview members of the public that express support for or against the main characters? Were personal details about the main actor shared and did they present a positive or negative impression?

Stage 3 Description of a guilty action: Media reports falling into Stage 3 described in detail the guilty action, who was involved, when it took place, and how it was planned and executed. These reports may also have included a confession on the part of the guilty party.

Stage 4 Suggestions for punishment: In Stage 4, media reports, either through the reporter or a source, described ways that the guilty party should be punished for their involvement in the scandal.

**Societal morals.** In order for an event to be categorized as a scandal, a moral transgression must take place. While looking at the suggestions for punishment, this study sought to uncover which morals were breached that made the main actors so deserving of punishment. It also looked at who voiced concerns about the loss of morality and who decided how the transgressors should atone for their actions. By reading the texts closely, the researcher made inferences about the moral values of the era.

Stage 5 Discussion of a larger societal/policy issue: Stage 5 articles included reports that discussed larger problems in society that were related to the scandal. These reports often relied on outside experts to comment on these larger issues. In conducting the analysis, the researcher looked for differences and similarities among how the scandals were discussed in terms of their respective industries. Did articles identify the scandal as being symptomatic of large issues occurring in the industry or was it an isolated event? What was the reputation of the industry prior to, during, and after the scandal? How did authorities in each industry react to the scandal and what steps, if any, did they take to rectify the situations?

### **Discussion**

#### **Research Question 1: Scandal Coverage in the Entertainment and Sports Industries**

Research Question 1 inquired about how newspaper coverage of a scandal that occurred in the entertainment industry may have differed from coverage of a scandal that occurred in the sports industry. One major theme that emerged when comparing the scandals within the contexts of their respective industries was the treatment of the main characters involved in each scandal. Newspaper coverage of Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle was much different than that of the eight White Sox players. The main difference in coverage lies in the personal history and background revealed about Roscoe Arbuckle, while coverage of the eight White Sox involved very little personal details.

**The star vs. the idol.** In both scandals, the main actors – Roscoe Arbuckle on his own and the White Sox as a group – make their way into the papers and into the headlines for actions that conflict with standards of morality in the 1920s. From then on, they are central to the story but are described in very different ways.

Media reports during the Roscoe Arbuckle trial spent time exploring his background, past jobs, and rise to fame. They did this by interviewing individuals from his past, including A.G. Rushlight, his former employer, and his estranged wife, Minta Durfee. Durfee's interview, which noted his rise to fame from a show barker in vaudeville to his work at Senett Studios, directly disputed an interview with Virginia Rappe's fiancé, Henry Lehrman. Lehrman was quoted as saying Arbuckle was nothing but a bar boy, "merely a beast" and was an example of "what results from making idols and millionaires out of people you take from the gutter" (Arbuckle, beast from gutter, I would kill him, 1921). Some articles quoted Arbuckle's friends in the film industry, including Buster Keaton, who suspended work in his studio for two days following his friend's arrest, while others discussed the divide among the cinema colony, noting that actors were split in their opinions of his guilt or innocence. The coverage, both in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles*, included interviews with such an array of people that it resulted in a mix of both positive and negative images of the actor.

Reports about Roscoe Arbuckle during the trial focused quite a bit on his physical attributes, noting his expressions, nervous ticks, and clothing. A *Los Angeles Times* article noted that his smile "known to millions of comedy fans, was not in evidence" the night he was arrested, while *New York Times* accounts show him "locked in a bare cell" looking "staggered ... red in the face ... forlorn of expression" (Mystery death takes actress, 1921 and Arbuckle is jailed on murder charge in woman's death, 1921). As the trial progressed, articles reported on his "ruddy countenance" and "fat fingers," while another quoted fellow actor Francis X. Bushman calling him "just a fat boy" (Tattered clothes in Arbuckle trial, 1921, and *Los Angeles* scored by Beverly Bayne). Because Arbuckle rarely gave comments to the press, the focus on his physical state could serve as attempts to visually describe the actor's guilt, which couldn't be

covered until he took the stand. This could be supported by a line in a *Los Angeles Times* article that described Arbuckle standing in court “twisting his green golf cap, very much like a naughty boy would stand when a teacher or parent was administering a severe lecture” (Arbuckle to be tried on charge of murder, 1921).

This coverage of Arbuckle’s character differs greatly from the White Sox coverage, which was reluctant to even mention the names of those involved until months after the scandal. The players were instead referred to as dishonest or crooked, and reports expressed surprise in the disloyalty of the ball players. However, very little detail was given about their past or current lives. When personal details about the players were revealed, it focused on their ability to earn income, as seen in a *New York Times* article that discussed what businesses they engaged in after being released from their contract with the White Sox (Accused players prosper, 1921). This article, along with a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article, noted how the players attempted to play baseball with independent teams before and during the trial and tried to stay active through managing or coaching after the trial (Jury frees baseball men, 1921).

One way to interpret the difference in media coverage is the idea of a star versus an idol. Roscoe Arbuckle was a silent film star, well-liked because of his on-screen persona. But as a person, he was a product of Hollywood. The White Sox players, on the other hand, were hometown heroes, idols of the national pastime. And while they were alleged to be crooked, they were on a much higher pedestal than Arbuckle ever was. This can be distilled down to the idea that a celebrity star – Roscoe Arbuckle – does not carry the same clout or staying power as idols like the White Sox players.

One way to explain the staying power of an idol versus a star could be attributed to the way in which idols interact with fans. Audiences may never see a film star in person, while fans

of baseball could see their favorite players in action several times a year. The physical proximity to the players is one possible reason they were elevated above film stars, who were largely confined to California or New York.

As discussed in the literature review, sports reporting also may propel athletes to idol status. In addition to daily newspapers, publications such as *The Sporting News* provided extensive details of the athletic feats of players. For hometown fans, such feats were a source of pride and may contribute to how sports fans often identify with the teams they love. A *Chicago Daily Tribune* editorial during the scandal pointed to the hometown pride fans felt for the White Sox. The writers polled men and women on whether the White Sox players had been punished enough or if they should be brought to trial and sent to prison. Of the 295 respondents, 185 were in favor of no further action, and some letters to the editors suggested that the players be allowed back into the game, perhaps on a probationary basis. The editors guessed this attitude might stem from the “city fans” who could not “forget entirely their old admiration of their onetime favorites” and that their opinions might be influenced “by the desire to see a winner and the fact that it will take several years to replace the stars who are stars no more” (Fate of Crooked Sox, 1920).

This concept can be seen as the scandal wears on. Both scandals took months to play out and public interest waned in both. And, after both parties were eventually acquitted, news reports showed that members of the public who were interviewed were much more willing to give the White Sox players a second chance, while the voices in the Roscoe Arbuckle reports were happy to see his career dead in the water.

**Research Question 2: Hometown Coverage versus National Coverage**

In answering Research Question 2: What differences emerge from newspaper coverage of scandals from hometown newspapers versus coverage from a national paper, this study found more similarities than differences. The main similarities found between the papers are seen in how they revealed each of the five stages of the scandal.

The hometown papers (*Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*) both produced more stories on the scandals than the *New York Times*. When covering the Roscoe Arbuckle scandal, the researcher found 100 more articles in the *Los Angeles Times* than it did the *New York Times*. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote 40 more articles than the *New York Times*. This difference in coverage can be attributed to a generally higher level of interest for people living in the cities where the scandals occurred. This is especially applicable in Chicago, which likely had a critical mass of White Sox fans eager to read everything they could about the scandal. In Los Angeles, home to Hollywood, people involved in the cinema colonies also had a vested interest in the scandal, given its impact on the already fragile reputation of the industry.

Aside from the breadth of coverage of the scandals, differences between hometown papers and the national paper of the day were quite subtle. Where the vast difference lies between the two scandals is in the pace of which the Roscoe Arbuckle scandal was covered in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* versus the pace of the coverage of the White Sox Scandal in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *New York Times*.

**Elements of the scandal.** This pace is set early, in Stage 1 (the trigger event) and Stage 2 (identification of the guilty party) of the scandal process. As described in the methods section, the trigger event is the incident that breaks the scandal open – the breach of morality. In the Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle scandal, the trigger event occurred when authorities arrested the actor

after the death of Hollywood starlet Virginia Rappe. Early reports, both in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*, discussed how the actor, along with other guests at his party in San Francisco, were being questioned about the hospitalization and death of Rappe. The young actress died of peritonitis four days after the party. The headlines, “Roscoe Arbuckle faces an inquiry on woman’s death” (*New York Times*, 1921) and “Arbuckle jailed for murder; bail is denied” (*Los Angeles Times*, 1921) linked the actor to the murder right way.

In contrast to Roscoe Arbuckle’s rather cut and dried trigger event, the 1919 World Series Scandal had two main trigger events. The first occurred directly after the White Sox lost the series to the Cincinnati Reds. *Chicago Daily Tribune* articles, which likely sought to explain the loss to fans of the team, referred to rumors of conspiracy, noting that the game was not won on its merits. A sub-headline to an October 10 article, just two days after the loss, read “Betting story crops up” and was followed by suggestions that “stories were out that the Sox had not put forth their best effort” and “that the big gamblers had got to them” (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1919). *New York Times* reports on that same day also alluded to rumors that ball players for the White Sox may have purposely thrown the series. Both papers noted that White Sox president Charles Comiskey was offering \$20,000 for any clue or evidence of a plot. *Chicago Daily Tribune* reporters attempted to piece together the details of a conspiracy to fix the game in a December 15 article:

. . . six, seven, or eight White Sox [the number varies according to the rumor] met in a hotel room in New York, Boston, or Chicago [the place also is [sic] variable] before the world's series and split anywhere from \$20,000 to \$100,000—depending on the narrator—of a gambling clique's bankroll under an agreement to let Cincinnati win the world's pennant. (Comiskey refutes series charges against White Sox, 1919)

However, rumors remain rumors and despite Comiskey's investigation, articles reported that no evidence was found and the conspiracy remained unsubstantiated. By the new year, reported inquiries into the series died down. Things were relatively quiet, until September 1920, when revelations of a fix between a regular season game against the Chicago Cubs and the Philadelphia Phillies surfaced. This second trigger event reignited inquiries into the 1919 World Series.

In Stage 2 (identification of a guilty party) there was also a lag when reporting on the White Sox scandal when compared to the Roscoe Arbuckle scandal. Media reports identified Roscoe Arbuckle as the guilty party in the same stories as the trigger event, because it included his arrest and questioning. Law enforcement authorities and members of the San Francisco's District Attorney's office arrested him on the word of Maude Delmont, a guest at the party who claimed Arbuckle "dragged Rappe into his room" and caused her death. Based on this witness account, the *New York Times* quoted San Francisco Detective Captain Duncan Matheson as saying that Rappe "without a doubt died as a result of an attack by Arbuckle" (Arbuckle is jailed on murder charge in woman's death, 1921). Other members of the party also were listed in the media reports, many of whom would later offer testimony during Arbuckle's three trials.

News reports of the 1919 White Sox scandal were much more reluctant to name the guilty parties, at first relying on vague terms of "dishonest players" and "crooked gamblers." This may be because of the length of the time rumors circulated with no solid proof. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* rationalized waiting, when it said, "Merely as a rumor, without including the names of the players said to be implicated, it was not a newspaper story. To name the players meant irreparable injury to men who could not then and have not been proven guilty" (Comiskey refutes series charges against White Sox, 1919).



When the *New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* did begin to identify the guilty parties, they started with gamblers allegedly involved in the fix. Two gamblers and former athletes, Bill Burns and Billy Maharg, were identified first, after sharing their story with a reporter at the *Philadelphia North American* (Confesses Sox ball plot, 1920). Serving as primary sources for the revelations of the plot and those involved, they become key witnesses for officials in Cook County who aimed to indict players on criminal charges. At this point, both the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *New York Times* listed the players involved, and their field positions.

After Stage 2, we saw coverage in three papers unite and maintain a steady pace in reporting on the next three stages of the scandals. In Stage 3 (description of a guilty action) media reports for both scandals primarily relied on witness accounts during the trials to describe the details of the scandal. In articles about Roscoe Arbuckle, the witness reports came out quickly, because of the haste in which the trials began. Witness testimony was largely from guests at the party, and from the start details of the party differed between male attendees and female attendees.

In covering the White Sox scandal, both the *New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* ran detailed reports during the trial. The *Times* covered the atmosphere in the courtroom as well as the proceedings (New setbacks halts ball player' trial, 1921) and at times, employed metaphor to describe the legal action. The coverage likened the trial to a baseball game when noting that the intense arguments between lawyers "made the courtroom wilder in appearance than the bleachers after a home run with bases full" (Came near blows at baseball trial, 1921). In the *New York Times* article "Burns tells story of plot to throw 1919 World Series" and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* articles "State looks to Burns to 'strike out Black Sox'" and "How Black Sox sold out" (1921), both papers ran the full testimony of Bill Burns.

Stages 4 and Stages 5 progressed at the same pace as well. A larger discussion of these stages, including the demonstration of prevailing moral values, calls for punishment, and industry response to large issues, will be covered during a discussion of Research Question 3.

### **Research Question 3: Revealing the Moral Values of the 1920s**

Research Question 3 explored the prevailing moral values of the 1920s and asked how the two industries responded to breaches in those values. This study revealed in both scandals that a Greek Chorus of sorts emerged to explain the societal morals of the day. In the Roscoe Arbuckle scandal, members of women's committees provided a strong voice for morality, while in the 1919 World Series scandal it was fans of the sport who declared the expectations for their heroes. Both audiences were heavily invested in the outcome of the scandals and provided a running commentary about the state of the industry and the steps needed to rectify the situation.

**Women a vigilant voice against Fatty.** Perhaps the loudest voice of morality in the Roscoe Arbuckle scandal came from the Women's Vigilant Committee. From the very first article in the *New York Times*, these women took an interest in the trial and, looking out for the "moral welfare of the city," demanded an investigation (Roscoe Arbuckle faces an inquiry on woman's death, 1921). Described by the *Los Angeles Times* as being comprised of older women involved in civic, philanthropic, and social service work, members of these clubs and committees were of high social status and came from "environments of culture" (Women want only justice, 1921). These women formed their clubs "for the purpose of assisting the police and prosecuting officials of the city in maintaining law and order" (Arbuckle to face trial for murder, 1921).

During the course of the scandal, members of the committee wrote opinion pieces, were quoted in articles, and were described as attending the grand jury and criminal trials. In a *Los Angeles Times* article, Mrs. Edward R. Place, president of the Papyrus Club, one such vigilant

committee, was quoted as saying, “it is our purpose to so watch this overwhelming indecency that nothing can thwart our high standards for truth in the proceedings” and their presence at the trial will be a show of solidarity to the women witnesses (Star to be vigorously prosecuted, 1921).

Women members of the committee were not just interested in seeing Roscoe Arbuckle held accountable, but were a loud voice against the sins of Hollywood as a whole. Above and beyond the alleged murder of Virginia Rappe, there was a tension between sobriety versus drunkenness and wholesomeness versus debauchery. “The whole American standard of life is being poisoned by the questionable cinema stories played by hoodlum men and women,” said Mrs. Robert A. Dean of the National American Women’s Suffrage Association. “...the lack of moral standard, as well as good breeding which has characterized American life in the past, reaches out from the screen, and poisons both the young people, and the old of this country today” (Arbuckle indicted, 1921).

An opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times* reinforces the tension between the drunken, debauchery of Hollywood culture and the wholesome sobriety of the rest of the country, when it stated that the film industry has “one standard of moral” while everyone else has another (The Arbuckle incident, 1921). The piece went on to suggest that the only way to solve the immoral behavior of Hollywood was through a boycott.

**Baseball fans take a stand.** Critics of baseball, similar to those of the film, noted that authority figures in each needed to clean up their respective industries by cleaning out immoral characters. But, their definition of immorality was different. As was discussed earlier, immorality in the Arbuckle scandal was connected to unacceptable social behavior; one does not drink or engage in indiscretions or lewdness. Coverage of the White Sox players, however,

explored the desired characteristics of men. This scandal defined immoral behavior as dishonest, crooked, and disloyal. In the era of 1920s baseball, a player should be loyal to his club, honest toward his fans, and square in his actions on and off the field; he should never consort with crooked gamblers.

Editorials from baseball fans echoed the sentiment that officials must clean up the sport by cleaning out disloyal players. In a piece written by Fred M. Loomis, “one of Chicago’s most enthusiastic baseball followers” and a self-reported friend of White Sox players, said that “up to this time baseball has been accepted by the public as the one clean sport ... whose honesty and integrity have been beyond suspicion or reproach ... the game must be cleaned up and it must be cleaned up at once” (Is anything wrong with White Sox?, 1920).

**Cleaning house to clean the image.** In both scandals, parallels existed between the two incidents and larger issues that existed in each industry. The desire to see the main characters punished points to such issues. Hollywood was seen as a hot bed of immoral activity, with its own set of laws, and Roscoe Arbuckle became a symbol of everything that was wrong with the industry. Likewise, professional gambling was seen as a blemish on the purity of the baseball industry, and the 1919 World Series was an example of how, if left alone, gambling could destroy the nation’s cleanest sport. The industries where the two scandals existed were handled in seemingly similar ways as both industries struggled to salvage positive reputations in the eyes of the public by restructuring and bringing in a supreme power.

Reports showed that Hollywood had a bad reputation before and during the scandal, and showed a desire by movie executives to shed that image, while film house owners sought to separate themselves from the producers in Hollywood. As was described in the discussion of society morals, baseball enjoyed a positive reputation before the scandal. From the earliest

reports through to those after the acquittal, owners, presidents, and players worked to salvage the sport's reputation in the face of the scandal.

Punishment for Roscoe Arbuckle and the White Sox players involved in the alleged conspiracy also was primarily the same. Law enforcement officials in the district attorney's offices in San Francisco and Chicago sought to see the main characters jailed for their crimes, while members of the public and heads of the respective industries called for banishment from films and professional baseball (Arbuckle is jailed on murder charge in women's death, 1921 and Bare 'fixed' World Series, 1920).

Sid Grauman's Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles was among the first to pull Roscoe Arbuckle films, withdrawing *Gasoline Gus*, from his theater just two days after the scandal broke (Arbuckle film withdraw, 1921). The *New York Times* noted that other film houses followed suit, canceling his films across the country (Arbuckle dragged Rappe girl to room, woman testifies, 1921). The banning of Arbuckle films resulted in a huge loss of revenue for the actor and the studios with which he worked.

As details of the scandal emerged, more than 3,200 exhibitors also withdrew all films in which Virginia Rappe appeared, possibly echoing the public's concern of the lewd, immoral behavior by both men and women in the film industry (Testify to bruises on Virginia Rappe, 1921). Another *New York Times* article discussed the effect the scandal had on the movie industry, noting a decline in attendance to films. In seeking to separate themselves from the producers and players in Hollywood, the Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America responded to this decline by banning any film that contained "elements of indecency or objectionable matter" (Ban objectionable films, 1921). In an *Los Angeles Times* opinion piece, the writer, Mayor C. Hodgeon of St. Paul, Minnesota, wrote that "decent people are tired of the

eccentricities of the genius” and if “Arbuckle is not punished, the moving-picture business is done for.”

Punishment for the White Sox players indicted on conspiracy charges also focused on clearing out the dishonest players in order to maintain the clean image of the sport. Even before the White Sox players involved in the conspiracy were named, media reports quoted presidents and owners of various ball clubs as coming out strongly in favor of punishment that would uphold the integrity of the sport. Comiskey issued the seven current players involved in the scandal a notice of indefinite suspension at the start of the grand jury trial, which was printed in both the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *New York Times*. Ban Johnson, president of the American league, weighed in, noting that “the integrity of professional baseball is on trial and we are content to abide by its investigation and decision” (New witnesses tell of baseball plot, 1920).

In response to the calls for punishment by fans, baseball owners restructured their commission and gave sole authority to Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis. Called the “supreme power in the national game” by both the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Landis was described as being the final word in baseball law (Landis will begin duties, 1920 and Baseball gates forever closed to Indicted Sox, 1921).

Soon after taking the job, Landis banned the eight White Sox from professional baseball and required new players to sign contracts and pledge their loyalty to the club and the American public (Judge Landis accepts control of baseball after being guaranteed supreme power, 1921). In this swift action, Landis was able to convince the public that baseball law is held to a higher standard than even civil law. This was seen in a *New York Times* article that stated players implicated in dishonesty “will have to show a clean slate before the high commissioner of

organized baseball before they can engage in the sport, regardless of what action is or is not taken by civil courts” (White Sox players banned by Landis, 1921).

The movie industry also reorganized, creating the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors’ Association (MPPD) in response to Hollywood’s tattered image, created by the infidelities, divorces, and lavish lifestyles led by some within the cinema colony. The *New York Times* reported that the MPPD appointed Will Hays as the head of the industry and in his first move at the helm “announced a campaign to ‘clean up’ and build up the movie picture industry” (Arbuckle banished from film by Hays, 1922). As a part of the campaign, Hays banned Arbuckle and his films, prompting the Los Angeles Times to report that the “first time Hays has shown his hand in public ... he certainly packs a nasty wallop” (Hays ruling startles East, 1922). Arbuckle had three completed films awaiting release, but the distributors went with the ban, even though it resulted in over a million dollars in lost revenue.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis sought to uncover parallels and differences among coverage of two scandals occurring in separate cities, in the context of different industries during the 1920s. The purpose of the study was to explore how coverage explained the scandal to its readers and if moral values of the day were revealed through that coverage.

A textual analysis of newspaper reports of both scandals showed that all four papers follow the cycle of scandal coverage. In the case of the Roscoe Arbuckle scandal, several of the steps were condensed. For example, the first few articles reported on the trigger event, identified the guilty party, and made suggestions for punishment. This was in contrast to the 1919 World Series scandal, which took months to reveal the guilty parties. However, despite the difference in timing for each stage, all four of the media outlets reported on all five stages.

The study also found that in each scandal, strong voices of morality emerged in two main audiences (women members of vigilant committees and baseball fans). These groups demonstrated the prevailing moral values of the day (sobriety, wholesomeness, honesty, and loyalty) through opinion pieces, quotes, and a strong presence in the courtrooms of each trial. The groups also sounded the call for punishment, which included banishment from the film and baseball industries, as well as jail time for Roscoe Arbuckle and the eight White Sox players.

### **Contributions to Scandal Literature**

As a study that looks at scandal from several different aspects (newspaper coverage, morality of an era, and proximity to the scandal), this research built upon the current body of literature. It combines elements, offering a new lens through which to look at scandal coverage. Much of the literature cited in this study looks at scandals within one context (political, entertainment, or sports), and this study advances those studies by blending contexts. This provided a platform from which the researcher explored the different ways main characters can be treated by newspaper coverage. The use of textual analysis then allowed the researcher to make inferences on why the main characters in each context were treated in a certain way.

### **Limitations**

This paper had several limitations. The first occurred in the selection of newspapers to study. The original study design included the *San Francisco Chronicle* in place of the *Los Angeles Times*, as this is the hometown paper of closest proximity to where the trigger event occurred, and where the scandal predominantly played out. However, several attempts to access San Francisco Chronicle archives, through three University libraries and the New York City Public Library System were unsuccessful, so the researcher instead opted to use the *Los Angeles*



*Times*. While the *Times* provided a breadth of articles, it did lack the proximity that the *Chicago Daily Tribune* lent to the other scandal.

### **Areas of Further Study**

There are several ways this study could be expanded. The two hometown papers, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*, were independently owned at the time of the scandal. A study including papers owned by William Randolph Hearst could add another layer of research, particularly in treatment of the main characters. As Hearst was notorious for scoops and yellow journalism, it would be enlightening to see how the scandals were treated and if his papers reported in line with the stages of each scandal. Additionally, both of these scandals occurred in an era prior to television and internet. A similar study, but with more recent scandals, such as the Tiger Woods infidelity scandal or the Lance Armstrong doping scandal, could be done to see if each of the five stages of a scandal hold up against the 24-hour news cycle and instantaneous sharing on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook.

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