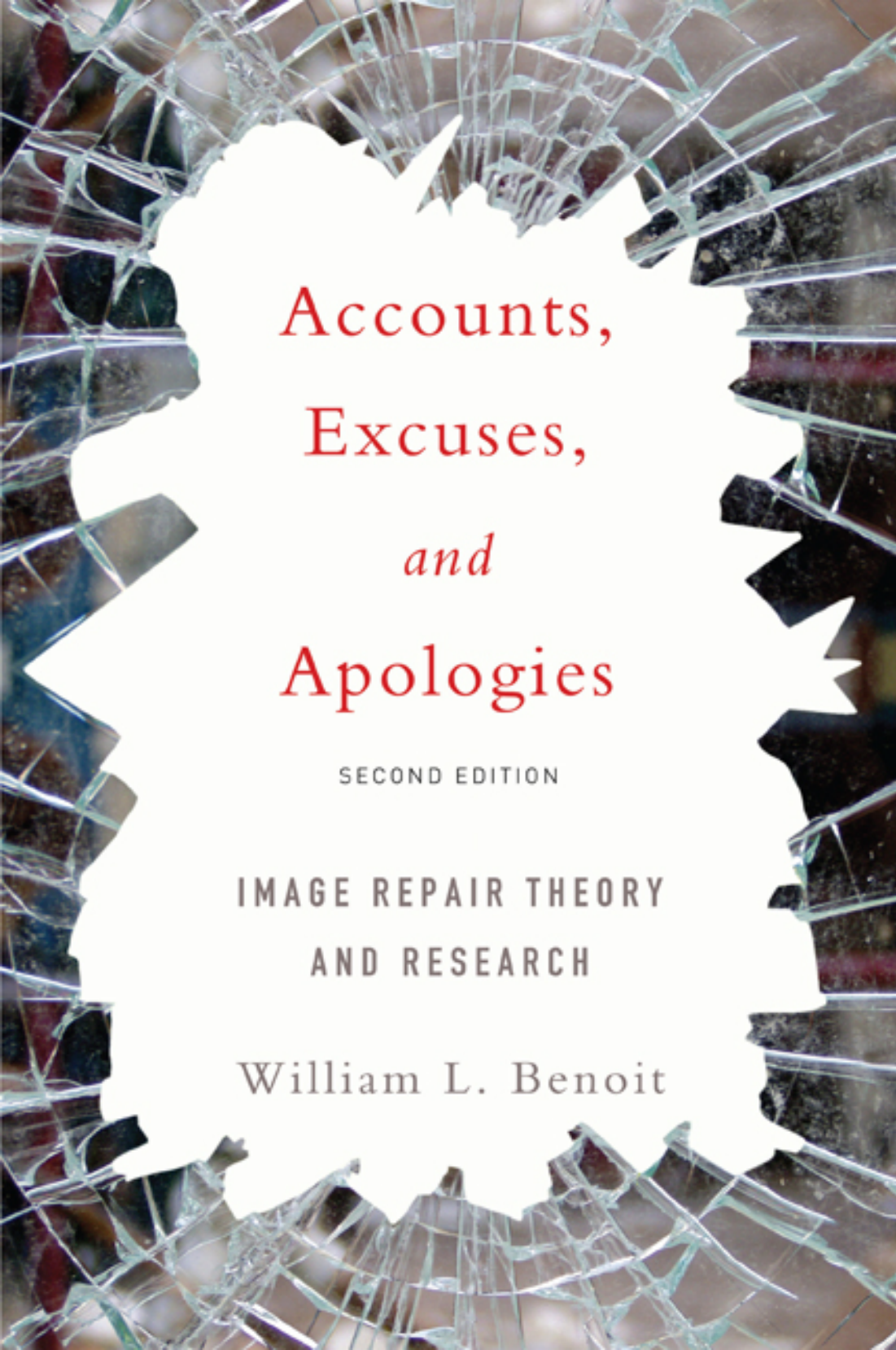

Accounts, Excuses, *and* Apologies

SECOND EDITION

IMAGE REPAIR THEORY AND RESEARCH

William L. Benoit

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Preface

The central theme of this book is that human beings engage in recurrent patterns of communicative behavior designed to repair, reduce, redress, or prevent damage to their image (reputation or face) from accusations or suspicions of wrongdoing. Accusations, attacks, and criticism are pervasive in society. Complaints are leveled at people in all walks of life—and all sorts of organizations—for all kinds of alleged misbehavior. We can be accused of doing something that is wrong, not doing something we should have, or even performing an action poorly. Accordingly, throughout life we are repeatedly faced with situations that impel us to explain or justify our behavior and offer excuses or apologies for those aspects of our behavior that offend and provoke reproach from those around us.

When faced with a threat to our image, we rarely ignore it, because our face, image, or reputation is a valuable commodity. We not only desire a healthy image of ourselves but want others to think favorably of us as well. Others are more likely to believe us, and deal favorably with us, if we have a favorable reputation. Similarly, both nonprofit and for-profit corporations, as well as governmental organizations, usually prefer to have others think well of them. Hence, the communicative activity of excuse making or image restoration deserves serious study not only because it pervades social life but also because it serves an important function in our lives, by helping to repair our precious reputations.

The first edition of this book was published in 1995 and developed the theory of image restoration discourse based on a review of the literature from rhetorical (frequently called *apologia*) and sociological ("accounts" and "excuses") perspectives. In the time since, the literature on image repair, persuasive defense, or *apologia* has blossomed. That growth in research impels me to revise, update, and extend this analysis of image repair discourse. Originally, I called this theory

"image restoration," because restoring a damaged image is the goal of such discourse. However, since then I have decided that this title might inadvertently imply that one can or should expect to be able to *completely* restore an image, obliterating any stigma in the image. In fact, in some situations the best one can hope for is to partially restore or repair the image. A broken vase is not very useful. However, it may still hold water and flowers if it is glued back together (repaired). The cracks may show after applying the glue, so the vase is not completely restored to the condition it was before it was broken, but a repaired vase is much better than a heap of pottery shards. Accordingly, I have started to refer to the theory as "image repair," hoping that this phrase avoids creating the impression that we can or should expect to complete restore all tarnished images. Persuasive messages can result in effects that range from partial to complete repair. A given image repair effort might be completely successful, fully dissipating all bad feelings, but I do not want the theory to imply that complete restoration is always possible or the only desirable outcome.

The application chapters in the first edition (Benoit, 1995a) each examined a single case study of image repair: Chapter 5 looked at trade publication ads from Coke and Pepsi; chapter 6 examined Exxon's defense of the *Valdez* oil spill; chapter 7 studied Union Carbide's image repair after a lethal gas leak in Bhopal, India; and chapter 8 investigated President Nixon's defense of America's incursion into Cambodia during the Vietnam War. As such, that edition looked more like an edited book (albeit one in which all the chapters were written by a single author and with a common method) than a more traditional book. In contrast, this edition provides case studies, but unlike the first edition, the chapters will not all be focused on a single case study each. As I explore the types and contexts for image repair, it will become clear that my placement of many case studies is arbitrary, because the topics I discuss often overlap. For example, chapter 7 on third party image repair (when one person or organization attempts to repair the image of another) contrasts defensive messages by George W. Bush, Laura Bush, and Condoleezza Rice; clearly they are engaged in political image repair in these discourses. Chapter 6 on international image repair includes both corporate and political case studies.

I want to note that I see this theory as a general theory of image repair. Of course, there are obvious and important differences between image repair undertaken by, say, actors, politicians, or corporations (for a discussion of some of these issues, see Benoit, 1997b).

Nevertheless, I believe the options identified in this theory are at least theoretically available to anyone, or any group or organization, to repair a damaged image. Some persuaders may have more resources (e.g., corporations) and may have more to fear from litigation (again, corporations), and in international image repair, cultural difference can be important to consider, but the rhetorical options are the same in every case. I continue to resist the impulse to include silence as a strategy for image repair. Some people and organizations do ignore accusations, but I am interested in messages intended to repair a damaged reputation, not in messages never sent.

The book begins by discussing the need for image repair and the accusations that prompt this activity. I discuss my understanding of communication and persuasion as a theoretical backdrop for my discussion of image repair theory. Then five chapters follow that discuss image repair in diverse situations: corporate, political, sports/entertainment, international, and third party image repair. Finally, I offer concluding thoughts and discuss implications.

I want to thank the many coauthors who generously shared their time, effort, and ideas as I explored image repair: Kate Anderson, Joe Blaney, LeAnn Brazeal, Susan Brinson, Anne Czerwinski, Shirley Drew, Kris Drumheller, Jessica Furgerson, Finn Frandsen, Paul Gullifor, Robert Hanczor, Jayne Henson, Diane Hirson, Winni Johansen, Kim Kennedy, Maria Len-Rios, Jim Lindsey, John McHale, Dawn Nill, Dan Panici, Bill Wells, John Wen, Jack Yu, Ernest Zhang, and Juyan Zhang. I also want to thank the two most important people in my life: my wife, Pamela Benoit, and my daughter, Jennifer Benoit-Bryan. They encourage and support me, and I've been fortunate enough to write with both of them.

Chapter 1

Communication, Persuasion, and Image Repair

People and organizations—including companies, governments, and nonprofit organizations—frequently face accusations or suspicions of wrongdoing. A glance at newspaper headlines, televised news stories, or Internet news confirms the ubiquitous nature of threats to image. For example, recently we heard and read about several alleged scandals, including J. P. Morgan's two-billion-dollar loss, General David Petraeus's affair with Paula Broadwell, Rutgers men's basketball coach Mike Rice's abuse of players, and GM's recall of potentially lethal automobiles. So threats to image, face, or reputation are commonplace in society.

Threats to one's image, which usually arise from persuasive messages that attack, criticize, or express suspicion and thereby prompt attempts at image repair, are inevitable for at least four reasons. First, the world in which we live and work has limited resources: There is only so much money, equipment, resources, office space, or time. For example, window offices are coveted and corner offices even more so, yet there are more cubicles than window and corner offices. Raise pools are limited, as are opportunities for promotion. We often compete fiercely for these tangible and intangible goods, which means the allocation of these scarce resources often provokes the ire of those who wanted these resources distributed differently. Second, circumstances beyond our control sometimes prevent us from meeting our obligations. We may be delayed by traffic and arrive late to meetings; documents or computer files may become lost or corrupted; or a colleague may neglect to inform us that the time or location of an important meeting has changed. Our behavior is significantly influenced by the people, events, and environment around us, and frequently these factors create problems for us and those who depend on us. Third, human beings are not perfect, and at times we commit wrongdoings,

some of which are honest errors, whereas other actions are guided too much by our self-interests. We may forget to bring a report to a meeting or to stop and buy milk on the way home from work; a self-employed individual may send the IRS an insufficient quarterly tax payment; or a contractor may substitute cheaper and inferior parts in a building. Alcohol, drugs, or even lack of sleep may cloud our judgment and hinder performance of our duties. Finally, the fact that human beings are individuals with different sets of priorities fosters conflict among those with competing goals. For example, do we want the most effective prescription drugs (desired by patients) or the least expensive drugs (wanted by insurance companies)? Should a country's leader focus more time and energy on domestic issues (e.g., job creation) or foreign concerns (e.g., national security)? How do we balance protecting society from criminals with preserving rights of those accused of crimes? How do we balance cost and access to as well as quality of health care? So four factors combine to ensure that actual or perceived wrongdoing is a recurrent feature of human activity.

When such inevitable (apparent) misbehavior occurs, others are very likely to attack, berate, blame, censure, condemn, rail against, rebuke, reproach, or object to us and our behavior. They may complain about things we said or did, they may carp about things left unsaid or undone, or they might criticize the way in which we performed an action or phrased an utterance. Indeed, the simple fact that our language is rich in synonyms for *accuse* is an indication of the ubiquity of complaints or persuasive attack. Persuasive attacks are messages that attempt to create unfavorable attitudes about a target (person or organization), and these messages have been investigated in several studies (e.g., Benoit & Delbert, 2010; Benoit & Dorries, 1996; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, & Airne, 2001; Benoit & Stein, 2009).

These attacks on our reputation are serious matters, for our image or reputation is extremely vital to us. Face, image, or reputation contributes to a healthy self-image. Others may shun us, taunt us, or mistreat us in other ways when they believe we have committed a wrongful act. We can feel embarrassed and even depressed when we become aware that others think we have engaged in wrongdoing. A damaged reputation can hurt our persuasiveness, because credibility generally and trustworthiness in particular are important to persuasion (e.g., Benoit & Benoit, 2008; Benoit & Strathman, 2004), and credibility can be impaired by fallout from actual or perceived wrongdoing. We may be liable to punishment such as fines or jail time for

our misdeeds. Although organizations, including companies, may not feel embarrassed, officers, workers, and shareholders do have feelings, and those feelings can be hurt when their organization is the target of accusations. Furthermore, in the private sector, other companies or organizations may take their business elsewhere when a company has a tarnished reputation. For example, Rush Limbaugh attacked Sandra Fluke on his talk show. Carusone (2013) reported, "It's been one year since Rush Limbaugh's invective-filled tirade against then-Georgetown Law student Sandra Fluke. With hundreds of advertisers and millions of dollars lost, the business of right-wing radio is suffering." People and companies jealously guard their reputations and work hard to repair tarnished images. Hence, attacks on one's image can be very serious concerns, and most people recognize the importance of these threats to reputation.

Those who believe that their face or reputation has been injured or even threatened rarely ignore these perils. When our image is threatened, we usually feel compelled to offer explanations, defenses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for our behavior. This book investigates verbal responses to perceived damage to reputation—image repair strategies—because threats to image are pervasive, reputation is important, and discourse has the potential to mend our face or reputation. This first chapter provides a backdrop for the remainder of this book.

Defensive utterances (justifications, excuses, apologies—i.e., image repair) are persuasive attempts to reshape the audience's attitudes, creating or changing beliefs about the accused's responsibility for an act and/or creating or changing values about the offensiveness of those acts. I distinguish image repair discourse from crisis communication, a broader category. Figure 1.1 illustrates how image repair discourse fits into crisis communication, communication generally, and human behavior. Human behavior includes both physical acts and communication. Communication includes a variety of contexts, including health communication, political communication, and crisis communication. Crisis communication includes image repair discourse, but it also includes messages about other kinds of crises, such as natural disasters and terrorism. The theory of image repair discourse focuses exclusively on messages designed to improve images tarnished by criticism and suspicion (it is also possible to try to preempt anticipated criticism).

This book updates the theory of image repair discourse (originally referred to as the theory of image *restoration* discourse) with

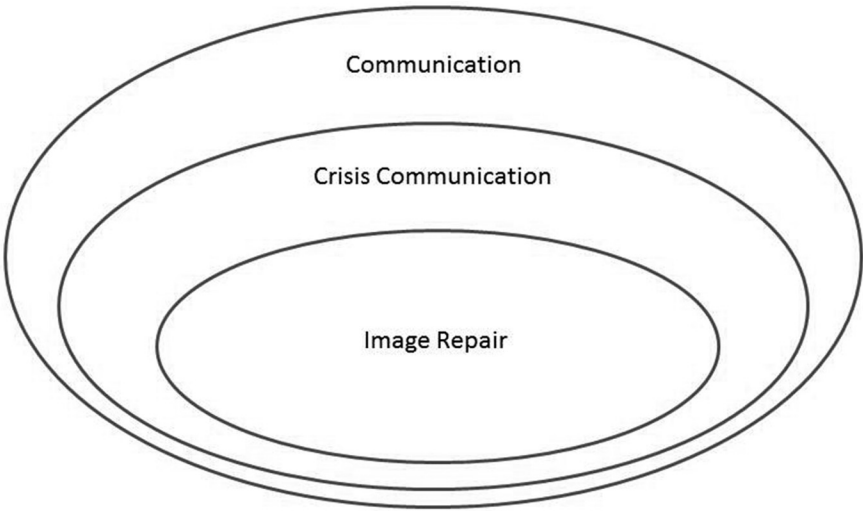

Figure 1.1. Communication, crisis communication, and image repair.

discussion of developments since the first edition was published in 1995. The case studies in this book are all new, and it extends this theory in several directions. I begin here with an overview, discussing the nature of communication, and then I proceed with addressing the nature of persuasive communication, introducing the idea of persuasive attack, and providing an initial treatment of image repair.

The Nature of Communication

Communication can be viewed as a process in which a source sends a message or messages to an audience or audiences. Of course, at times communication is an interaction where two (or more) sources exchange messages or interact in a conversation, and image repair can occur in such situations; however, in mass media situations, most often a sender disseminates a message to an audience. The source is almost always interested in learning how the audience reacts (getting some feedback in some form from the intended audience), but these mass media situations are not interactive in the same way as a conversation. Furthermore, at times even dyadic communication or conversations can be usefully understood as one person (who can be considered a source) who is trying to persuade another person

(who can be thought of as an audience). The fact that both of the participants can send messages and receive messages as an audience does not invalidate the perspective of a source sending a message to a receiver as long as we keep this duality in mind as we investigate these persuasive attempts.

Communication is vital because most of our knowledge is acquired through communication rather than from direct experience. For example, as early as the 1940s, Hayakawa (1948) explained, "Most of our knowledge, acquired from parents, friends, schools, newspapers, books, conversation, speeches, and radio, is received *verbally*. All of our knowledge of history, for example, comes to us only in words" (p. 15). For example, most people have heard of the current U.S. president, but few have met or talked with the president, and most, if not all, of what we know about the president has come from messages rather than from direct experience. Similarly, in the scandals mentioned earlier, almost no one learned about the image problems of J. P. Morgan, General Petraeus, or Mike Rice from their own direct experience with these scandals. Communication is absolutely vital as a way to change others' attitudes about us.

It is important to stress that both message sources and audiences operate on their own individual perceptions of the world and the people, things, and ideas in the world. The person (or organization) who seeks to repair a damaged image does so because he or she *believes* (or has a perception) that an important audience holds an unfavorable attitude. Of course, if the audience really has an unfavorable attitude, the source's perception of an unfavorable attitude is appropriately based on the audience's perceptions. But it is also possible that I could believe that an audience thinks badly of me even if they do not—or I could be unaware of an audience's unfavorable attitudes toward me. Similarly, when one constructs an image repair message, one does so based on perceptions of the audience's beliefs and values. These perceptions may or may not reflect an accurate understanding of the audience's perceptions, but those perceptions are what the persuader has to work with to create a persuasive message. One cannot look "inside" the audience's heads to determine their "real" attitudes, and we must realize that persuaders and audiences operate based on their perceptions or misperceptions about reality.

Often our perceptions overlap; this overlap in perceptions is what makes communication possible. However, people do not share every belief. For example, some people express doubt that President

Obama was born in the United States, although that group is in the minority. Nor does everyone share the same values: Is the idea of providing health care to every American a good one or a bad one? This is why meaning resides in people, not in words or other symbols (Berlo, 1960). We use symbols in our messages in hopes of eliciting in the audience the ideas we wish to convey to them. In other words, we believe that the audience attaches the same meaning to a symbol as we do, so using that symbol in a message should evoke in the audience the meaning we want them to experience. However, poor message design or differences in the perceptions (beliefs and values) between the source and the audience can create misunderstanding. This means the person or organization attempting to repair an image must understand the audience's perceptions—and try to create the most effective message to persuade that audience. The fact that we often have similar meanings for symbols makes communication possible; the fact that we occasionally have different meanings for symbols makes miscommunication a possibility as well.

Ultimately, meaning arises from reality, but humans and their symbols give meaning to reality. A source can, potentially, persuade an audience that road salt is good (it melts ice and makes driving less dangerous) or bad (it damages cars). The "meaning" of road salt is not inherent in the salt but arises in people from their experiences with it, including messages from others about road salt. However, we are constrained by the nature of reality. If there is an object between us with a flat top and four legs, I could probably convince you that it was a desk or a table. However, unless you were impaired by alcohol or drugs, I could not expect to convince you that this thing was a car, a duck, or made entirely of water. Burke (1984) writes about the "recalcitrance" of reality. Communication is powerful, but reality imposes some limitations on what communication is capable of doing. If I am holding a sapphire gem, I might be able to get you to agree it is blue, azure, or indigo, but probably not black, yellow, or green. The recalcitrance of reality is a feature that limits all forms of communication, including image repair discourse. Furthermore, I believe that trying to convince an audience of something that is untrue (something the source *believes* is untrue) is unethical, and I would never recommend lying in a message. Furthermore, because the audience may know or learn the truth, lying is risky as well as wrong. Because image repair discourse is a form of communication, we must understand the nature of communication before we can understand image repair.

The Nature of Persuasion

Persuasion is communication that attempts to change, create, or strengthen attitudes. Attitudes are cognitions or thoughts that are developed through direct experience and communication (no attitudes are inborn) and influence our behavior. Attitudes have two components: beliefs ("facts"; descriptions of people, objects, and events) and values (favorable or unfavorable evaluations). Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action (2010) discusses beliefs and values (see also Benoit & Benoit, 2008). In order to have an attitude, we must have both components: a belief and a relevant value. For example, we know that Mitt Romney is a Republican (a belief), and most people either like Republican ideology (a positive value) or dislike Republican ideology (a negative value). Therefore people are inclined to have a favorable attitude toward Romney if they like Republican ideology or a negative attitude toward Romney if they dislike Republican ideology. On the other hand, if we like Republican ideology but do not know whether a particular candidate is a Republican, we cannot have an attitude toward that candidate. Similarly, if we know a certain candidate is a Republican but we have no political party preference (do not have either a positive or negative value about Republicans), we cannot have an attitude toward that candidate. So we must have both a belief *and* a relevant value to have an attitude.

We know several things about some attitude objects (people, organizations, events) and have values about those beliefs, which means that many attitudes comprise multiple relevant belief/value pairs. For example, a person's attitude toward Bill Clinton can be based on a number of beliefs including the following:

- Bill Clinton was president of the United States for two terms.
- Bill Clinton is a Democrat.
- Bill Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- Bill Clinton signed the Brady Bill with a waiting period for handgun purchases.
- Bill Clinton is married to Hillary Rodham Clinton.
- Bill Clinton had an affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.
- Bill Clinton had a dog named Buddy.

A person's beliefs combine with his or her values to form an attitude. Different audience members can (and usually do) have a variety of

belief/value pairs. For example, one person may like dogs, whereas another one may dislike canines; this difference would incline the former to have a more positive attitude toward Clinton and the latter to have a more negative attitude. Or one person may, in addition to the previous beliefs, know that Bill Clinton had a cat named Socks; this belief would influence that individual's attitudes if he or she also had a value related to cats. Yet another person might know that Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton have a daughter name Chelsea. Some beliefs are associated with favorable values for many people (e.g., most people feel that presidents deserve respect). Some of these beliefs are associated with unfavorable values for many people (e.g., his affair with Monica Lewinsky). Other beliefs can polarize the audience: Some people prefer the Democratic Party, whereas others do not; similarly, some people like Hillary Rodham Clinton, whereas others intensely dislike her. Some of these beliefs may not be associated with values for some people (e.g., some do not have strong feelings about another person's pets). Some of these beliefs overlap between different people, but a given audience member can have some unique cognitions. An individual's attitude toward Bill Clinton is a conglomeration of all the belief/value pairs that are salient or remembered by that person at a given point in time.

It is important to realize that all a person's belief/value pairs might not give rise to the same attitude. For example, a person might have favorable values related to being president, being a Democrat, and signing the FMLA and the Brady Bill but have an unfavorable attitude toward Hillary Clinton and having an affair. This person might, all things considered, have a favorable attitude toward Clinton. Someone who instead had negative values associated with Democrats and the FMLA might have a negative attitude toward Clinton.

There are many, many facts (beliefs) that people can know about Bill Clinton. However, some of these facts a person does not know or might have forgotten. If you are unaware of a fact or have forgotten it, that belief cannot influence your attitude. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) explain,

> A person's attitude toward an object is, at any given moment, primarily determined by no more than five to nine readily accessible beliefs about the object. Of course, given sufficient time and motivation, people can actively retrieve additional beliefs from memory, and these additional beliefs may also influence the attitude at that point in time. We are merely

> suggesting that under most circumstances a relatively small number of beliefs serve as the determinants of a person's attitudes. (p. 99)

So a person's attitude comprises the beliefs that individual holds (and their associated values) that are salient to that person at the time an attitude is activated. Notice that allegations of a scandal are often highly publicized, likely to be salient, and therefore likely to be a large component of current attitudes toward the target of allegations.

Similarly, people have attitudes about companies and other organizations that are shaped by multiple belief/value pairs. For example, Yahoo is a company about which people have beliefs. Some people could hold these beliefs:

- Yahoo is a large company.
- Yahoo has an Internet search engine.
- Yahoo offers e-mail.
- Yahoo's former CEO Scott Thompson falsified his resume.
- Scott Thompson resigned from his position as Yahoo's CEO after the controversy arose over his resume.

People's values probably vary about whether a large company is a good thing (positive value) or a bad thing (negative value), so the belief that a person is Yahoo's CEO could be a polarizing belief. Some people may like and use Yahoo's Internet search engine and/or Yahoo e-mail; they would presumably have a favorable attitude toward Thompson. On the other hand, most people probably feel it is bad to falsify a resume (an unfavorable value); those who hold this value could be inclined to have an unfavorable attitude toward Thompson. Again, a person's attitude emerges from all the belief/value pairs about a target that are salient to that person at a given time.

As noted, different people frequently have different sets of beliefs; they often have some beliefs in common but also some unique beliefs. Different beliefs can yield different attitudes for the people holding those beliefs. Furthermore, a given belief may be polarizing—associated with a favorable value for some people but an unfavorable value for others. So even two people who have the same beliefs about a person or organization will have different attitudes if they have different values. These two factors, beliefs and values, explain why attitudes vary between individuals. Two people may have similar but not identical attitudes; it is also possible for two people to

have very different attitudes. The person or organization intending to persuade an audience to change its attitudes, including changing attitudes to repair an image, must know the basis of those attitudes, the belief/value pairs that constitute an attitude for an audience.

Persuasive Attack

A persuasive attack can be viewed as an attempt to create (or strengthen) a negative attitude toward the target. One can attack by describing a person's behavior—that is, creating a new belief ("He stole a car")—if the audience has an unfavorable value about this action ("stealing is wrong"). In fact, some messages simply report what the source believes to be true without any intent to impugn the reputation of the target. The new belief, which attributes responsibility for an action to the target, coupled with the existing value that stealing is wrong, encourages the audience to have a negative attitude toward the target. On the other hand, one can rely on an existing belief ("Mitt Romney favors lower taxes") and try to create a negative value for the audience, stressing the offensiveness of this idea ("reducing taxes increases the deficit, which is undesirable"). As noted, for a person to have a negative attitude, that individual must have a belief/value pair. Only if you have a belief about another person and hold a value relevant to that belief can that information help you form an attitude toward that person. One can also attack a group or organization in the same way. Persuasive discourse is enthymematic (see Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, 1954); this means that the persuader may be able to rely on the audience to provide some part of the argument. In other words, an attacking message does not always need to explicitly address both of these components. Pomerantz (1978) explains that when you blame someone (or criticize them), you must allege that the target committed an act (belief) and that the act is offensive (value).

Image Repair Discourse

Image repair discourse is a persuasive message or group of messages that respond(s) to attacks or suspicions that promote a negative attitude about the source of image repair (see Benoit, 1995a, 1997b, 2000a). As just noted, threats to an image have two components: blame and offensiveness (Pomerantz, 1978). These two elements correspond

to Fishbein and Ajzen's (2010) concepts of beliefs (blame) and values (offensiveness). One can respond to an attack (or to suspicions) by rejecting or reducing responsibility (altering beliefs about blame) or reducing offensiveness (altering values). It is also possible to admit wrongdoing and apologize; one may also propose to fix the problem or prevent it from happening again. These approaches can be pursued with persuasive messages that create or change the audience's beliefs or values (or their perceptions about blame and offensiveness).

Understanding that a threat to one's image is comprised of blame (belief) and offensiveness (value) means that we can use Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action to develop ideas for persuading an audience or repairing one's image. Starting with the idea that an attitude is based on salient belief/value pairs, Benoit and Benoit (2008) offer six suggestions for improving an attitude based on this theory:

1. Strengthen a belief associated with a favorable attitude.
2. Strengthen a value associated with a favorable attitude.
3. Weaken a belief associated with an unfavorable attitude.
4. Weaken a value associated with an unfavorable attitude.
5. Create a new, favorable attitude.
6. Remind the audience of a forgotten favorable attitude.

Fishbein and Ajzen's theory helps us develop strategies for repairing a damaged image. For example, if the audience has both favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward Yahoo, image repair on behalf of Thompson or Yahoo can attempt to strengthen an existing favorable attitude (by strengthening either the belief or the value component of this attitude), weaken an existing unfavorable attitude (by weakening the belief or value element of the unfavorable attitude), or create a new favorable attitude (which must have a belief and a value).

Conclusion

This book explores the pervasive human discourse form of image repair messages. The first edition of this book developed the theory of image restoration discourse based on a review of the literature from rhetorical (frequently called *apologia*) and sociological ("accounts" and "excuses") perspectives. I decided to change the name of this theory from image *restoration* to image *repair* because I thought the former might imply that persuasive defense ought to be able to completely

restore the image. Although it is possible that image repair might be completely successful, fully dissipating all bad feelings, a persuasive defense often only partially succeeds, *repairing* the damaged image. In this edition, chapter 2 presents the theory of image repair discourse, focusing on key research reviewed in the first edition and on more recent work. This theory is informed by my understanding of communication, persuasion, and persuasive attack, discussed here in chapter 1. After chapter 2, I discuss several contexts or kinds of image repair. Chapter 3 discusses corporate image repair. Political image repair is taken up in chapter 4. Chapter 5 investigates image repair in sports and entertainment. Chapter 6 discusses image repair in international contexts. Third party image repair—messages in which one person or organization defends or helps defend the reputation of another—is the subject of chapter 7. The book ends with conclusions in chapter 8.

Chapter 2

Image Repair Theory

The basic image repair situation is simple: A person or organization accuses another of wrongdoing, and the accused produces a message that attempts to repair that image. However, this basic situation can become more complex in several ways. Sometimes the alleged victim is not the attacker. For example, Benoit and Harthcock (1999) analyzed newspaper advertisements from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, which attacked the tobacco industry for addicting children to cigarettes and killing them. Children who smoke cigarettes were the victims, but it was the organization (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids) that attacked the tobacco industry. The image repair situation can become more complex when multiple alleged offenders are involved. Blaney, Benoit, and Brazeal (2002) discuss how Ford and Firestone handled deaths from blowouts of Firestone tires on Ford Explorers. Pfahl and Bates (2008) investigated image repair discourse from Formula One racing teams, Michelin (the tire manufacturer), the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (the governing body for world auto racing), Formula One Management, and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. At times, one person or organization defends another (called "third party image repair"; see chapter 7). Nelson (1984) investigated defenses of tennis star Billie Jean King from other tennis players. In 2013, Rutgers University men's basketball coach Mike Rice was fired for alleged shoving and berating his players; Assistant Coach Jimmy Martelli resigned the same day. Subsequently Athletic Director Tim Pernetti resigned for not firing Rice sooner. Eric Murdock, former director of player development, sued Rutgers, claiming that he was fired for whistle-blowing in this case. Rutgers University president Robert Barchi was criticized for not taking action against Rice more quickly. John Wolf, interim senior vice president and general counsel, also resigned (Hanna & Carter, 2013). Many people were embroiled in this scandal; this is reminiscent of the fallout after former Penn

State University defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky was accused of sexual abuse of 10 boys: Penn State fired Coach Joe Paterno and President Graham Spanier, and Athletic Director Tim Curley and Vice President Gary Shultz resigned (Chappell, 2012).

Sometimes image repair is prompted by suspicions rather than explicit accusations. It is also possible that image repair discourse can be used preemptively, attempting to forestall accusations. For example, the Post Office in Athens, Ohio, displays a sign informing customers, "On an average day, the Athens Post Office delivers over 49,920 pieces of mail to over 11,846 addresses." This sign can be viewed as a defense against complaints about problems with mail services before those concerns are expressed (see also Prime Minister Cameron's apology in chapter 7). This chapter articulates the assumptions of image repair theory, describes the theory, and compares it with other approaches to image repair.

Assumptions of Image Repair Theory

Two key assumptions provide the foundation for this theory of image repair strategies. First, communication is best conceptualized as a goal-directed activity. Second, maintaining a positive reputation is one of the central goals of communication. Each of these assumptions will be discussed separately in this section.

Communication Is a Goal-Directed Activity

The first assumption made by this theory is that communication is a goal-directed activity. One of the earliest and clearest indications of this assumption can be found in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the term used then to describe persuasive messages. In the fourth century BC, Aristotle distinguished three genres of rhetoric based on the goal of the speaker:

> Rhetoric has three distinct ends in view, one for each of its three kinds. The political orator aims at establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action. Parties in a law-case aim at establishing the justice or injustice of some action. Those who praise or attack a man aim at proving him worthy of honour or the reverse (1954, 1358b21–28).

Each of the three genres described by Aristotle is directly tied to the speaker's goal: Political rhetoric concerns whether a policy should be adopted; judicial rhetoric decides questions of justice or injustice; and epideictic rhetoric argues that a person is worthy of praise or blame.

More recently, Kenneth Burke, another important rhetorical theorist, declared that a rhetorical act "can be called an act in the full sense of the term only if it involves a purpose" (1968, p. 446). So for Burke, rhetoric is purposeful—either directly or indirectly purposive. With few exceptions, most rhetorical theorists consider rhetoric to be the art of persuasion, a declaration typically carrying with it the assumption that rhetorical discourse is purposeful (e.g., Arnold & Frandsen, 1984; Bitzer, 1968; or Scott, 1980). Thus much of the literature of rhetorical theory assumes that rhetoric is a goal-directed, purposeful, and intentional activity.

The assumption that communication is goal-directed can also be found in the literature on communication theory (e.g., Halliday, 1973). Clark and Clark, for example, declare that "speaking is fundamentally an instrumental act" (1977, p. 223); an instrument is a means to accomplish an end. Craig even declares that "a practical discipline of communication in which the concept of goal would not be central is difficult to imagine" (1986, p. 257). So the view of communication as goal-directed pervades writing in communication. It is appropriate to construe communication and rhetoric to be goal-driven activities.

Any assumption as broad as this one is likely to require qualification. First, communicators may have multiple goals that are not completely compatible. Messages that further one goal may well interfere with other goals. Still, people try to achieve the goals that seem most important to them at the time they act or to achieve the best mix of the goals that appears possible (considering the perceived costs of the behavior).

Second, at times a person's goals, motives, or purposes are vague, ill-formed, or unclear. Nevertheless, to the extent a person's goals are clear, he or she will try to behave in ways that help to accomplish them. Furthermore, even when a communicator has a clear conception of a particular goal, that does not necessarily mean that he or she is aware of (and/or is willing or able to use) the most effective means for achieving that goal. Nevertheless, to the extent a particular goal is salient to a communicator, he or she will pursue that goal by enacting the behavior that the communicator believes is likely to achieve that goal at tolerable costs.

Third, I do not claim that people devote the same amount of attention to each and every communicative encounter, micromanaging all utterances and all characteristics of an utterance, constantly identifying goals and unceasingly planning behavior to accomplish them. Some behavior is automatic rather than controlled (e.g., Hample, 1992; or Kellermann, 1992). In situations that are particularly important to us, however, we are likely to plan aspects of our utterances carefully. In other situations, we devote as much cognitive effort to producing goal-directed discourse as seems reasonable and necessary to us.

Finally, even when an individual's goals are relatively clear, it may be difficult for others to identify that person's goals. Multiple goals (including "hidden agendas") complicate matters. If one person's goals are unclear to that person, it should be difficult for others to identify them. Another problem arises because people sometimes attempt to deceive others about their true goals. Furthermore, certain artifacts (e.g., television shows, films, artwork) may not have readily identifiable persuasive purposes. Despite these reservations, communication generally is best understood as an intentional activity. Communicators attempt to devise utterances that they believe will best achieve the goals that are most salient to them when they communicate.

So communication should be thought of as an instrumental activity. Communicative acts are intended to attain goals desired by the communicators who perform them. These utterances are ones that the communicators believe will help accomplish (with reasonable cost) goals that are salient to the actor at the time they are made. Image repair messages are clearly purposeful, intended to deal with threats to the communicator's image.

Maintaining a Favorable Reputation Is a Key Goal of Communication

The second key assumption of image repair theory is that maintaining a favorable impression is an important goal in interaction. One useful typology of communication purposes is advanced by Clark and Delia (1979), who indicate that there are three

> issues or objectives explicitly or implicitly present for overt or tacit negotiation in every communicative transaction: (1) overtly instrumental objectives, in which a response is required from one's listener(s) related to a specific obstacle or problem defining the task of the communicative situation,

> (2) interpersonal objectives, involving the establishment or maintenance of a relationship with the other(s), and (3) identity objectives, in which there is management of the communicative situation to the end of presenting a desired self image for the speaker and maintaining a particular sense of self for the other(s). (p. 200)

Furthermore, Fisher (1970) distinguishes between four goals in communication about identity: "affirmation, concerned with giving birth to an image; reaffirmation, concerned with revitalizing an image; purification, concerned with correcting an image; and subversion, concerned with undermining an image" (p. 132). Persuasive attacks, which can prompt image repair, are what Fisher calls subversion, or messages intended to damage an image. Image repair discourse exemplifies Fisher's motive of purification, messages attempting to repair a damaged image.

As discussed in chapter 1, the need for discourse designed to repair our reputation arises because, as human beings, we inevitably engage in behavior that makes us vulnerable to attack. First, our world possesses limited resources: There is only so much money, time, office space, computer time, labor, and so forth. When the distribution of these scarce resources fails to satisfy a person's desires, dissatisfaction occurs. It is rarely possible to satisfy everyone, so complaints about limited resources naturally tend to recur. Second, events beyond our control can prevent us from meeting our obligations. Faulty alarm clocks can make us late, important mail may not reach us, or our computer can malfunction when a critical report is due. Third, people are human, and so we make mistakes—some honestly, others because of our self-interests. People accidentally lose things borrowed from others; they forget to attend meetings; they overcharge their clients. Alcohol, drugs, or even lack of sleep may cloud our judgment and impair our performance. Finally, and possibly most important, we often differ over goals. Conflict over goals or ends often creates dissension. These four elements—limited resources, external events, human error, and conflicting goals—combine to ensure that actual or perceived wrongdoing is a recurring feature of human behavior.

What are the consequences of inevitable offensive behavior? Semin and Manstead report that when "breaches of conduct" occur, "actors assume that they have projected a negative image of themselves, even if the breach is an unintentional one" (1983, p. 38). Human beings worry that others will think less of them when apparent

misdeeds occur, and this threat to their image is thought to increase as their responsibility increases. These "negative imputations toward the self" arise from introspection. We may worry that others think badly of us, and that concern can prompt image repair. This is clearly related to Burke's notion that guilt or embarrassment prompts purification (Burke, 1984).

However, exacerbating this tendency to feel guilty ourselves, others are often quick to criticize us when this kind of misbehavior occurs. They may complain about what we said or did, about things we did not say or do, or even about the *manner* in which we did or said something. McLaughlin, Cody, and Rosenstein (1983) identified four types of reproaches, or utterances that provoke accounts or apologies: expressing surprise or disgust, suggesting that the person being reproached is morally or intellectually inferior, requesting an account, and rebuking another person. It seems clear that a variety of possible reproaches or complaints can assail reputation or "face." The importance of persuasive attacks has been recognized by Ryan (1982), who argues for the importance of considering *kategoria* for a complete understanding of *apologia*. When others explicitly accuse us of misbehavior, there is no doubt that others think badly of us.

Thus our vulnerability to criticism leads to internal guilt and external threats to our face, both of which motivate a reaction from us. What happens when we believe that negatively perceived events threaten our reputation? Goffman explains, "When a face has been threatened, face-work must be done" (1967, p. 27). Notice also that Clark and Delia (1979) identify the identity objective as a key goal in communication, and Fisher (1970) suggests one of the basic motives of rhetoric is purification of an image. Why is face or image so important that persuasive attacks motivate defensive responses?

First, face or reputation is a crucial commodity, because it contributes to a healthy self-image. Snyder, Higgins, and Stucky explain, "Achieving and maintaining a positive self-image have been postulated as important motivational variables throughout the history of psychology" (1983, p. 29). This is true because problematic events (threats to face) have a variety of undesirable consequences, as Schlenker (1980) explains,

> The more severe a predicament is, the greater the negative repercussions for an actor. The actor should experience greater internal distress such as anxiety and guilt, receive greater negative sanctions from audiences, and produce greater damage

> to his or her identity—thereby adversely affecting relationships with the audience. (p. 131)

Thus the literature concerning communication and interaction assumes that a person's face, image, reputation, or perceived character is extremely important.

A second reason image or reputation is important concerns its role in the influence process. For example, in the *Antidosis*, Isocrates (1976; another early rhetorical theorist like Aristotle) makes it clear that he considers the speaker's *ethos*, prior reputation or credibility, to be important to the effectiveness of discourse:

> The man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character; no, on the contrary, he will apply himself above all to establish a most honourable name among his fellow-citizens; for who does not know that words carry a greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man's life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words? (p. 278)

Similarly, Aristotle writes, "We believe good men more fully and more readily than others; this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely where exact certainty is impossible and opinions divided" (1954, 1356a6–8). Thus for classical rhetoricians Isocrates and Aristotle, ethos is extremely important in persuasion. Similarly, attitude change theory and research also support the importance of credibility in facilitating persuasiveness (e.g., Benoit & Strathman, 2004). Therefore one important goal of discourse is to establish and maintain a positive image or reputation. When others believe we have behaved badly, our credibility suffers.

Because one's face, image, or reputation is so important, Brown and Levinson (1978) observe that "people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened" (p. 66). Empirical evidence confirms the fact that perceived embarrassment is positively correlated with amount of face work (or image repair; Modigliani, 1971). Therefore, when our reputation is threatened, we feel compelled to offer explanations, defenses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for our behavior. Because blame and criticism or complaints occur throughout human society, and because face is important for virtually everyone,

this phenomenon, a felt need to cleanse one's reputation through discourse, occurs in all our lives, public and private.

Image Repair Discourse

Image repair messages focus on one particular goal in discourse: repairing one's reputation. We must keep in mind that this is not the only goal, or necessarily the most important goal, for a specific person or organization in a given situation. For example, a corporation accused of manufacturing and selling a defective product confronts a threat to its image, but it could also face criminal charges and/or civil lawsuits. Ethically, a person or an organization that is guilty ought to confess and apologize to try to repair its image. However, such an admission might help with one goal (repairing reputation) while interfering with other goals (avoiding criminal or civil action). Because our face, image, or reputation is so important to us, when we believe it is threatened, we are motivated to take action to alleviate this concern (hopefully without hindering other relevant goals). The way in which these image repair strategies function to repair one's damaged reputation can be understood through an analysis of the nature of attacks, reproaches, or complaints. Fundamentally, an attack on one's image, face, or reputation is comprised of two components (Pomerantz, 1978):

1. An act occurred that is undesirable.
2. You are responsible for that action.

Only if both of these conditions are believed to be true by the relevant audience is the accused's reputation at risk (and only if the accused perceives that the salient audience believes these two conditions are true is the actor likely to employ image repair discourse). Let us consider each of these elements separately. Notice that these key concepts correspond to Fishbein and Ajzen's (2010) concepts of values and beliefs.

First, for one's reputation to be threatened, a reprehensible act must have been committed. If nothing bad happened—or if the person believes that what happened is not considered to be offensive by the salient audience—then the persuader's face is not threatened. Notice the importance of perceptions here at two levels: The *persuader* must believe that the *audience* thinks an offensive act has occurred. Note

that the perceptions of the persuader and the audience are important for different reasons. The persuader's perceptions matter because those perceptions motivate the persuader to engage in image repair and shape the nature of the image repair message. The perceptions of the audience are important because those perceptions influence whether the audience is persuaded by the image repair message. The persuader's and audience's perceptions may be similar; however, it is possible that the persuader misunderstands the audience's perceptions. Furthermore, audiences are comprised of individuals, and members of the audience can have different perceptions of the act in question.

For a persuader to be concerned about negative effects on their reputation, they must believe that a salient audience disapproves of the action. Of course, *action* must be construed broadly, to include words as well as deeds. *Action* also includes failure to perform expected actions as well as performance of dispreferred actions (in other words, acts of omission as well as commission). One can even be criticized for having performed an action poorly.

It seems reasonable to assume that the more serious the offense—the more vile the action, the more people harmed by it, the longer or more widespread the negative effects, and so forth—the greater the damage to the actor's reputation. In other words, offensiveness can be thought of as existing on a continuum: Actions vary in the degree of offensiveness attributed to them.

The second element of an accusation is that the accused must be held responsible for the occurrence of that reprehensible act by the relevant audience. No matter what happened or how terrible it was, it is not reasonable to form an unfavorable impression of a person who is not responsible for that act. Perceptions are vital here again: The key question at this point is not whether *in fact* the accused caused the damage but whether the relevant audience *believes* (perceives) the accused should be blamed for the reprehensible act. Innocence can help the defense, but perceived guilt is essential for an accusation to occur. Once again, the *persuader's* perception that the audience blames him or her for the action is necessary for image repair to appear necessary. The persuader's perceptions of the audience's thoughts about blame also influence the development of the image repair message. The *audience's* perceptions of blame (which could be similar to or different from what the source believes) influences reception or effectiveness of the image repair effort.

Responsibility for an act can take several forms. One may have performed an action, allowed others to perform an action, encouraged

others to act, or facilitated an action. Just as the undesirability of the action exists on a continuum, blame may not be a simple true or false proposition. If several persons jointly committed the action, we might not necessarily hold them all fully responsible, but we may apportion the blame among them. Some (e.g., leaders, instigators, ones who played a particularly important role in the commission of the action) might be thought to be more responsible for the reprehensible action than others. Furthermore, we tend to hold people more accountable for the effects they intended and less responsible for unintended or unexpected effects. It seems reasonable to assume that a person's reputation will suffer in proportion to the extent to which they are personally or individually held responsible for the undesirable action (including the extent to which they are believed to have intended the action and its consequences).

Typology of Image Repair Strategies

Image repair strategies are organized into five broad categories, three of which have variants or subcategories: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

Denial

Any person who is forced to defend himself or herself against the suspicions or attacks of others has several options. The speaker may deny performing the wrongful act, as Ware and Linkugel (1973) suggest. Whether the accused denies that the offensive act actually occurred or denies that he or she performed it, either option, if accepted, should absolve the actor of culpability. One strategy for dealing with attacks, then, is simply to deny the undesirable action. Denial may be supplemented with explanations of apparently damaging facts or lack of supporting evidence.

However, when a person uses denial, others may wonder, "Well if you didn't do it, who did?" Burke (1970) discusses victimage, or shifting the blame. This strategy can be considered a variant of denial, because the accused cannot have committed the repugnant act if someone else actually did it. This strategy may well be more effective than simple denial, for two reasons. First, it provides a target for any ill will the audience may feel, and this ill feeling may be shifted away from the accused. Second, it answers the question that

may make the audience hesitate to accept a simple denial: "Who did it?"

A popular defense strategy in criminal trials is the alibi. This is basically a witness who testifies that the accused was elsewhere at the time of the crime—and hence cannot have committed the crime. Of course, the effect of an alibi is to provide evidence that—if accepted—denies that the defendant committed the crime.

Evasion of Responsibility

Those who are unable to deny performing the act in question may be able to evade or reduce their apparent responsibility for it. Four variants of this strategy can be identified. Scott and Lyman's (1968) version of scapegoating—renamed *provocation* here to avoid confusion with shifting blame—suggests that the actor may claim that the act in question was performed in response to another wrongful act, which understandably provoked the offensive act in question. If the other person agrees that the actor was justifiably provoked, the provocateur may be held responsible instead of the actor.

A second strategy for evading responsibility is defeasibility (Scott & Lyman, 1968), pleading lack of information about or control over important factors in the situation. Rather than denying that the act occurred, the persuader attempts to suggest that lack of information, volition, or ability means that he or she should not be held fully responsible for the act. For example, when people are late to a meeting, we may not hold them completely responsible if unforeseeable traffic congestion caused their tardiness. This strategy, if effective, should reduce the perceived responsibility of the accused for the offensive act.

Third, the accused can make an excuse based on accidents (Scott & Lyman, 1968). We tend to hold others responsible only for factors they can reasonably be expected to control. Inadvertently missing (forgetting) a meeting is an example of an offensive act that occurred by accident. Here again, rather than deny that the offensive act occurred, the accused attempts to provide information that may reduce his or her apparent responsibility for the offensive act.

A fourth possibility is for the actor to suggest that performance of the action in question may be justified on the basis of intentions (discussed by Ware & Linkugel, 1973, as a part of denial). Here the wrongful act is not denied, yet the audience is asked not to hold the actor fully responsible, because it was done with good, rather than

evil, intentions. People who do bad while trying to do good are usually not blamed as much as those who intend to do bad.

Reducing Offensiveness

A person accused of misbehavior may attempt to reduce the degree of ill feeling experienced by the audience. This approach to image repair has six variants: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking one's accuser, and compensation. Each one will be briefly explained here.

First, bolstering (Ware & Linkugel, 1973) may be used to mitigate the negative effects of the act on the actor by strengthening the audience's positive affect for the actor. Here those accused of wrongdoing might relate positive attributes they possess or positive actions they have performed in the past; the persuader attempts to add new beliefs (or remind the audience of forgotten beliefs) that are associated with positive values. Although the amount of guilt or negative affect from the accusation remains the same, increasing positive feeling toward the actor may help offset the negative feelings toward the act, yielding a relative improvement in the actor's reputation. Dewberry and Fox (2012) examined image repair from Governor Rick Perry after he fumbled during a Republican primary debate. They argued that he used self-deprecation, which should be considered a useful form of bolstering.

Second, it is possible to attempt to minimize the amount of negative affect associated with the offensive act. If the source can convince the audience that the negative act isn't as bad as it might first appear, the amount of ill feeling associated with that act is reduced. To the extent this strategy is successful, the person's reputation is repaired. Sykes and Matza (1957), Scott and Lyman (1968), Schonbach (1980), Schlenker (1980), Tedeschi and Reiss (1981), and Semin and Manstead (1983) all discuss denial or minimization of injury and/or victimhood as accounting strategies.

A third possible strategy for minimizing the offensiveness of an action is to engage in differentiation (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Here the actor attempts to distinguish the act performed from other similar but less desirable actions. In comparison, the act may appear less offensive. This may have the effect of lessening the audience's negative feelings toward the act and the actor. Joanna Fan and her husband, Ziming Shen, were accused of taking "approximately $1.8 million of program funds in 2008 and 2009. She acknowledged in a written

statement to the Agriculture Department that she had taken the money, but stated that she had 'borrowed' it" (Otterman, 2011, p. A15). Borrowing without asking sounds better than stealing (assuming the audience believes this defense).

Fourth, the actor can employ transcendence (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). This strategy for image repair functions by placing the act in a different context. Ware and Linkugel specifically discuss placing the action in a broader context, but it can also be useful to simply suggest a different frame of reference. For example, Robin Hood might suggest that his actions were meant to help the poor and downtrodden. Similarly, a person accused of wrongdoing might direct our attention to other, allegedly higher values, to justify the behavior in question (Scott & Lyman, 1968). For example, a police officer could attempt to justify illegally planting evidence on a defendant as the only way to protect society from a dangerous but clever criminal. This positive context may lessen the perceived offensiveness of the act and help improve the actor's reputation.

Fifth, at times those accused of wrongdoing attack their accusers, as suggested by Rosenfield (1968) and Scott and Lyman (1968). If the credibility of the source of accusations can be reduced, the damage to one's image from those accusations may be diminished. If the accuser is also the victim of the offensive act (rather than a third party), the apologist may create the impression that the victim deserved what befell him or her, lessening the perceived unpleasantness of the act in question (Semin & Manstead, 1983), again improving the actor's reputation. It is also possible that attacking one's accuser may divert the audience's attention away from the original accusation, reducing damage to the actor's image.

Compensation is a final potential strategy for reducing the offensiveness of an action (Schonbach, 1980). Here the person offers to remunerate the victim to help offset the negative feeling arising from the wrongful act. This redress may take the form of valued goods or services as well as monetary reimbursement. I was on a Southwest Airlines flight that experienced a delayed departure; Southwest sent me a coupon to help repair its image (it worked for me; Southwest Airlines, personal communication, 2011). In effect, compensation functions as a bribe. If the accuser accepts the proffered inducement, and if it has sufficient value, the negative affect from the undesirable act may be outweighed, repairing reputation.

None of these six strategies of decreasing offensiveness denies that the actor committed the objectionable act or attempts to diminish

the actor's responsibility for that act. All attempt to reduce the unfavorable feelings toward the actor by increasing the audience's esteem for the actor or by decreasing their negative feelings about the act.

Corrective Action

In this strategy for image repair, the accused vows to fix the problem. This approach can take the form of restoring the situation to the state of affairs before the objectionable act and/or a promise to "mend one's ways" and make changes to prevent the recurrence of the undesirable act. If the problem is one that could recur, the actor's position may be enhanced by provision of assurances that changes will prevent it from happening again. Goffman (1971) mentions this possibility as a component of an apology. However, one can take corrective action without admitting guilt, as Tylenol appropriately did in introducing tamper-resistant bottles after their customers were poisoned (Benoit & Lindsey, 1987). The difference between this strategy and compensation is that corrective action addresses the actual source of injury (offering to rectify past damage and/or prevent its recurrence), whereas compensation consists of a gift designed to counterbalance, rather than correct, the injury.

Mortification

As Burke (1970, 1973) recognizes, the accused may admit the wrongful act and ask for forgiveness, engaging in mortification. If we believe the apology is sincere, we may choose to pardon the wrongful act. Schonbach (1980) also discusses concessions, in which one may admit guilt and express regret. It may be wise to couple this strategy with plans to correct (or prevent recurrence of) the problem, but these strategies can occur independently.

Mortification is a particularly complex image repair strategy. No universally agreed conception of "apology" stipulates exactly what an apology must include. It can include an explicit acceptance of blame, expression of regret or remorse, or a request for forgiveness. However, the phrase "I'm sorry" (at least in English) is ambiguous. It can reflect an admission of guilt, as in "I'm sorry I hurt you," or it can be an expression of sympathy, as in "I'm sorry you have been hurt" (implicitly by someone else). A persuader who admits blame risks further damage to his or her reputation by admitting wrongdoing. Hopefully the audience will forgive, but forgiveness is not certain. Because of

the inherent risk of accepting blame, some persuaders exploit the ambiguity in language. They hope that "I'm sorry" will "get them off the hook" without actually admitting guilt. Furthermore, persuaders who admit guilt can be vague about exactly what they are confessing. General David Petraeus resigned as director of the CIA after revelations that he had an affair with biographer Paula Broadwell. In a speech at the University of South Carolina, Petraeus (*USA Today*, 2013) said, "Please allow me to begin my remarks this evening by reiterating how deeply I regret—and apologize for—the circumstances that led me to resign from the CIA and caused such pain for my family, friends and supporters." This vagueness ("the circumstances") could occur because it is embarrassing to rehash details of the offensive act and/or because persuaders try to avoid specific admissions.

Thus the actor who desires to repair an image through discourse has five basic options: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Several of these basic strategies have variants. These strategies for repairing sullied reputations are summarized in Table 2.1. Having articulated the assumptions supporting this theory and described the strategic options available for image repair, this chapter now considers three other questions: how the strategies work, the relationship of persuasive attack and defense, and the relationship of this theory to previous work.

Viewing the image repair event in terms of the elements of attacks—beliefs/blame and offensiveness/values—explains how image repair strategies work. A defense can attempt to *deny* that an undesirable act occurred or that the accused was the one who performed it, trying to change the audience's beliefs about whether the accused is to blame.

Another defensive possibility is to attempt to evade or reduce responsibility for the undesirable act. In such cases, one may not be able to completely deny responsibility but may attempt to reduce perceived responsibility for the act by adding new beliefs. One may claim to have been *provoked* and thus not solely responsible. A person may offer a defense of *defeasibility*, stating that the action was due to lack of information or ability, and hence not entirely one's own fault. A third possibility is to declare that the action occurred *accidentally*. One may also claim that the act was performed with *good intentions*. Each of these strategies seeks to reduce the accused's perceived responsibility for the reprehensible act and hence mitigate the damage to reputation from that act. Successful use of strategies to evade responsibility should improve the image of the accused but may not restore it completely.

Table 2.1. Image Repair Strategies

General strategy	*Tactic*	*Example*
Denial		
	Simple denial	I did not embezzle money.
	Shift blame	Steve took your wallet, not me.
Evade responsibility		
	Provocation	I insulted you but only after you criticized me.
	Defeasibility	I was late because traffic delayed me.
	Accident	Our collision was an accident.
	Good intentions	I didn't tell you because I hoped to fix the problem first.
Reduce offensiveness		
	Bolstering	Think of all the times I helped you.
	Minimization	I broke your vase, but it was not an expensive one.
	Differentiation	I borrowed your laptop without asking; I didn't steal it.
	Transcendence	Searching travelers at the airport is an inconvenience, but it protects against terrorism.
	Attack accuser	Joe says I embezzled money, but he is a chronic liar.
	Compensation	Because the waiter spilled a drink on your clothes, we'll give you desert for free.
Corrective action		Because the waiter spilled a drink on your suit, we'll have it dry cleaned.
Mortification		I'm so sorry I offended you. I regret hurting your feelings and I apologize.

These image repair strategies attempt to alter the audience's existing beliefs or to create new beliefs in the audience.

It is also possible to reduce the perceived offensiveness of the act through several strategies. *Bolstering* attempts to improve the accused's reputation in hopes of offsetting or making up for the damage to the image from the undesirable act (this strategy uses beliefs and values about *good things* the accused *has done*). *Minimization* reduces the magnitude of the negative feelings attributed to the act, in hopes of lessening the ill feelings directed to the accused. It works by changing beliefs about the magnitude of the offensive act. *Differentiation* and *transcendence*, in their different ways, attempt to reduce the negative affect associated with the act. Both strategies address the audience's values. *Attacking the accuser* attempts to create new beliefs about the accuser to undermine the attack. *Compensation* is a strategy designed to reduce the perceived severity of the injury. This strategy relies on beliefs and values ("I am giving the victim [belief] something nice [value] to compensate them for my offensive act"). Hence, these strategies all function to reduce the offensiveness of the event. Because the threat to the accused's image should be a function of the offensiveness of the act, successful use of these strategies should help to repair reputation.

We often think better of people who clean up messes they created, promising *corrective action*. The persuader tries to create new beliefs about the accused's plans to remedy the problem. Persuaders who engage in *mortification* (an apparently sincere apology, expression of regret, or request for forgiveness; see Battistella, 2014). does so by creating beliefs in the audience. For example, I can try to persuade you that I feel remorse, that I accept blame for the offensive act, or that I hope to receive your forgiveness (see Table 2.2).

Relationship of Attack and Defense

Ryan (1982) emphasized the importance of understanding image repair events in the context of the specific attacks provoking face repair work. First, persuasive attack is important because accusations of (and suspicions about) wrongdoing prompt or motivate image repair effort. Second, it is important to understand the nature of the accusations facing a person or organization. One might decide a particular accusation is not serious enough to warrant a response, but it is very risky to accidentally ignore an important criticism because the defender

Table 2.2. Image Repair Strategies and Fishbein and Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action

General strategy	*Tactic*	*Example*
Denial		
	Simple denial	Change belief about accused's blame for offensive act
	Shift blame	Create new belief ("real" perpetrator) and change belief (that accused is guilty)
Evade responsibility		
	Provocation	New belief about the accused's blameworthiness
	Defeasibility	New belief about the accused's blameworthiness
	Accident	New belief about the accused's blameworthiness
	Good intentions	New belief about why the accused performed the offensive act
Reduce offensiveness		
	Bolstering	New belief about a desirable trait or act of the accused
	Minimization	Change belief about extent of the act's offensiveness
	Differentiation	New belief that offensive act is not as offensive as similar acts
	Transcendence	New value about the offensive act
	Attack accuser	New belief reducing credibility of accuser (and, if the accuser is the victim, about how victim deserved what happened)
	Compensation	New belief about accused providing something of value to victim
Corrective action		New belief about accused fixing or preventing recurrence of the problem
Mortification		New belief about accused's remorse

did not understand all the accusations. Understanding the accusations expressed to the audience (blame or beliefs and offensiveness or values) may provide insights into potential image repair messages (see Table 2.3). One cannot expect a successful image repair effort without clearly understanding the attacks one faces.

Importance of the Audience

Persuasion is all about trying to change the audience's attitudes; in image repair, the goal of persuasive messages is to change the audience's attitudes concerning accusations or suspicions about the target of attack. As Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) explain, changing attitudes means changing existing beliefs or values and/or creating new beliefs and values. Audience analysis means understanding the audience's existing attitudes and the beliefs and values that constitute those attitudes. For example, in auto repair, if my car does not start, I need to know the nature of the problem before I can repair it: Is the battery dead? Is the car out of gas? Is the starter broken? Is the battery not connected properly to the car? Similarly, in image repair, I must understand the audience's beliefs about me, as well as the values associated with those beliefs, before I have any hope of changing their attitudes to repair my image. It is vital for a persuader to understand the audience.

Understanding an audience's attitudes is complicated in several ways. First, an organization might be concerned about several audiences. For example, a company with a tarnished image could want to improve its image with employees, stockholders, government officials, and other citizens. Different audiences can have different beliefs and values. This could mean that a message designed for one audience will not persuade another audience, or even make things worse with

Table 2.3. Relationship of Image Repair Strategies and the Elements of Persuasive Attack

Element of attack	*General image repair strategy*
Blame	Denial, evade responsibility
Offensiveness	Reduce offensiveness
Both	Corrective action, mortification

another audience. For example, government regulators might want to hear (expensive) plans to correct problems at the company. Stockholders might not be thrilled to hear the company promise to spend money on the problem. Second, even within a particular audience, such as stockholders, beliefs and values can vary, making persuasion more difficult. Benoit and Benoit (2008) discuss ways of dealing with multiple audiences and hostile audiences. Understanding the audience or audiences and their attitudes (beliefs and values) is vital in image repair.

Antapologia

Stein (2008; 2010; see also Husselbee & Stein, 2012) introduced and developed the concept of *antapologia*, a response to an *apologia* made by the accuser. An American U2 spy plane, piloted by Francis Gary Powers, was shot down over Russia in 1960. Initially, the United States denied that this was a spy plane, claiming instead that it was a weather plane. The Soviet Union then revealed that it had captured the pilot and recovered equipment consistent with spying. It also argued that it was ridiculous to claim the pilot had wandered 2,000 kilometers off course into Russian territory. By keeping some of its evidence and arguments in reserve until after the American *apology*, Russia was able to intensify the accusations (although surely one would not be surprised that a country would lie about a spy mission). This approach extends our understanding of image repair and persuasive attack, and Stein (2008) articulates a typology of strategies for responding to an *apology*.

It is important to understand that image repair encompasses far more than the archetypal case of a single attack followed by a single defense. Multiple persuaders can attack, and as Stein points out, attacks can continue after a defense. Image repair is not limited to messages from the accused, as chapter 7 on third party image repair explains. The first edition of this book (Benoit, 1995a) discussed a series of advertisements from Coke and Pepsi in the trade publication *Nation's Restaurant News* that in some ways resembled a conversation in which attacks and defenses were exchanged over time.

The Theory of Image Repair Discourse and Other Research

This section discusses the relationship of this theory to other work in the literature. It should be obvious that the theory of image repair

discourse is heavily indebted to previous work. I have adopted categories directly from the works of the other scholars (e.g., Burke, 1970; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Ware & Linkugel, 1973) who made extremely important contributions. Toner (2009) reviews the literature on *apologia*, image repair, and reconciliation. This means the theory of image repair discourse is compatible in many regards with much research.

Rosenfield's Theory of Mass Media Apology

Rosenfield's (1968) theory offers four characteristics of mass media apologies, one of which describes the situation (a "short, intense, decisive clash of views," p. 449), and two of which concern content at a very general level (facts cluster in the middle; reusing arguments). Invective, or attacking one's opponent, is an option for those attempting to repair their reputations. His theory offers an important starting point.

Burke's Theory of Guilt

Burke (1970) discusses only two strategies for reducing guilt: victimage and mortification (Brummett [1981], drawing on Burke, adds transcendence). Although it is clear that these are important strategic options, they simply do not exhaust the possibilities available for image repair. Burke discusses the purgative-guilt cycle, where humans inevitably violate the social order, requiring redemption. Guilt is an important motivation for image repair.

Burke sees an important similarity in the way in which mortification and victimage deal with guilt, symbolically "killing" it. Burke suggests that they are both a form of death: mortification a kind of suicide and victimage a kind of homicide (1970, p. 248). I separate these image repair strategies, however, because of the effects they engender: Mortification accepts the blame (placing it on one's "bad" self) and begs forgiveness, while victimage shifts the blame elsewhere to a scapegoat. Hence I consider victimage, or shifting the blame, as closer in effect to denial than mortification.

Ware and Linkugel's Theory of Apologia

Ware and Linkugel's (1973) approach offers more strategies for image repair (which they term *apologia*): denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (these concepts were derived from Abelson, 1959).

Still, the strategies of attacking one's opponent, shifting the blame, mortification, minimization, and compensation are not discussed. One difference between Ware and Linkugel's (1973) theory and the theory of image repair lies in the treatment of good intentions. They consider good intentions to be simply a part of denial (p. 276). However, I argue that an apologist who says, "I did not do the bad thing you accuse me of," is employing a distinctly different approach than one who says, "Yes, I did the bad thing you accuse me of, but I didn't intend for any harm to come from it." Another difference between the theory of image repair and Ware and Linkugel's theory of *apologia* concerns their use of postures. Although they admit that more than one strategy may be present, they assert that two will predominate. Perhaps this was true in the speeches they examined to illustrate the initial presentation of their theory, but no conceptual justification was presented for this assertion.

Ware and Linkugel advance four postures—absolutive, vindicative, explanative, and justificative—created by combining either denial or bolstering with either differentiation or transcendence. These postures are puzzling. For example, it is not clear how the source who denies that he or she is associated with an action (or object) that repels the audience would benefit from associating that action with a broader, more positive context (transcendence) or from distinguishing it from other similar but less desirable objects (differentiation). If she or he *did not do it*, what is the point of differentiating or transcending the action? Yet the vindicative posture, one of the four fundamental apologetic postures, employs denial and transcendence, and the absolutive stance combines denial and differentiation. On the other hand, it seems reasonable to me that an apologist might wish to bolster his or her reputation after denying wrongdoing. However, they identify no stance that relies primarily on denial and bolstering. Therefore the theory of image repair, while adopting Ware and Linkugel's four basic strategies (denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence) as important means for image repair, eschews their four postures.

Ware and Linkugel begin the title of their landmark essay with the words "They spoke in defense of themselves." Most image repair efforts are performed by the accused. However, as explored in chapter 7, image repair can also originate with other people and organizations besides, or in addition to, the accused. Image repair theory encompasses self-defense but also covers image repair discourse from other sources.

Hearit and Crisis Management by Apology

Hearit (2006; see also 1994; 1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1997; 1999) discussed crisis management, indicating that there are three responses to guilt: denial, shifting blame, and mortification. He talked about legal liability and ethics and crisis communication. Then he investigated three general contexts: individual (politicians, athletes, and celebrities), organizational (retail and manufacturing businesses and nonprofit organizations), and institutional (governments and their agencies, including universities and religious organizations). This work is a useful addition to the literature, but the list of strategic options is incomplete.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is an important and popular approach to image repair by organizations. I will describe elements of this theory and then evaluate it.

The Nature of SCCT

Coombs and Holladay (1996; see also Coombs, 1995; 2013) identify four basic crisis types based on attribution theory: accident (unintentional and internal), transgressions (intentional and internal), faux pas (unintentional and external), and terrorism (intentional and external). Coombs explains that "*crisis type* is the frame that is being used to define the crisis" (2013, p. 264). Five crisis response strategies are identified: denial (labeled nonexistence in Coombs, 1995), distance, ingratiation, mortification, and suffering of the accused (p. 284). Then a matrix is developed relating the first two crisis types (accidents, transgressions) and the dichotomy of a one-time offensive act versus a repeated offensive act with the appropriate crisis response strategy (p. 286; see Table 2.4). Coombs (2012) also observes that this study establishes the recommendation that "as reputational threat increases, crisis teams should use more accommodations" (p. 158). He also offers a much more complex set of response contingencies (1995; 2012, Table 8.3, p. 159).

Another study (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; see also Coombs, 2012) employed factor analysis to identify three crisis types based on perceived responsibility. These crisis types are victim (very little attribution of responsibility to organization), accident (low attribution of responsibility), and preventable (high attribution of responsibility).

Table 2.4. SCCT Crisis Type and Appropriate Crisis Response Strategy

Crisis type	*Crisis response strategy*
One time, accident	Excuse: no intent to do harm
Repeated, accident	Compensation
One time, transgression	Remedial
Repeated, transgression	Remedial

Coombs (2012, p. 155; see also 2013) also offers a list of crisis response strategies organized into four postures. These are displayed in Table 2.5. This list is consistent with the five response strategies identified in Coombs and Holladay (1996); noticeably absent from both is corrective action, a strategy that was included in Coombs (1998) and Coombs and Holladay (2004).

SCCT (Coombs, 2013, p. 267) also identifies three other situational factors: *veracity* of evidence a crisis exists (true, ambiguous, false), *severity* of the damage from the crisis (major or minor), and *performance history* (prior reputation). He also identifies two potential audiences: "victims of the crisis or nonvictims" (p. 267).

Evaluation

As Coombs and Holladay note, "One consistent theme in communication research is that situations influence the selection of communication strategies (Bitzer, 1968; Black, 1965; Metts & Cupach, 1989; Ware & Linkugel, 1973; Wilson, Cruz, Marshall, & Rao, 1993)" (p. 281). An important advance was the incorporation of attribution theory: Clearly the perceived blame of the accused for the offensive act matters. Further, there is no doubt that the situation in which discourse arises is a very important factor in understanding messages; however, the situation is only one of several factors influencing the production of discourse (see Benoit, 2000b). I am also very sympathetic to the motivation for Situational Crisis Communication Theory, which attempts to determine which communication strategies are most effective in repairing an image. However, I have several fundamental reservations about this approach.

First, SCCT assumes the crisis type can be determined a priori. At times it is easy to identify the crisis type of a given situation. However, our perception of reality, such as whether blame should be internal

Table 2.5. SCCT Postures and Crisis Response Strategies

Posture	*Crisis response strategy*
Denial	
	Attack accuser: confront source who identified crisis; can include threats, such as lawsuits
	Denial: claim that no crisis exists
	Shift blame: blame person or group outside organization for crisis
Diminish	
	Excuse: minimize responsibility
	Justification: minimize damage from offense
Rebuild	
	Compensate: offer gifts to victims
	Apologize: take responsibility and ask for forgiveness
Bolstering	
	Bolstering: remind stakeholders of organization's past good deeds
	Ingratiation: praise stakeholders
	Victimage: claim that organization is victim, not offender

to an organization or assigned to an external target, is socially constructed through messages. Persuaders can use persuasive messages to attempt to change the audience's perceptions—exactly what image repair is about. For example, an organization in a situation for which it appears to be responsible (internal attribution) can try, and sometimes succeed, at persuading an audience that it is not responsible (e.g., shifting blame for the offensive act and persuading the audience that the attribution for the offensive act should be external). In 1982, seven people died after taking Tylenol pain reliever because of cyanide in the pills. At first this appeared to be Tylenol's fault (internal attribution). Tylenol's image repair effort successfully denied that it was to blame, shifting blame to an unknown "madman" (external attribution; Benoit & Lindsey, 1987). Does this mean that an effective defense changed the underlying situation here? Furthermore, audiences are not monolithic; for example, some may think that a crisis is internally caused, whereas others may think it is externally caused.

The possibility of multiple audiences with different perceptions of the crisis means than in some cases there is no single crisis type, and no single appropriate defensive strategy can be identified in a particular situation. Furthermore, at times multiple accusations or suspicions concerning a scandal threaten an image. If some of the concerns appear internal and some external, does that mean the individual or organization is simultaneously in multiple situations?

Second, SCCT's crisis response suggestions ignore the audience's beliefs and attitudes. Decisions about which strategy to use in an attempt to persuade an audience ought to be based, in large part, on the audience's attitudes (their beliefs and values about the accused and the offensive act). However, SCCT asserts that the situation type dictates the defensive response without considering the audience's beliefs and values—and without considering the fact that different people in the audience, or different audiences, can have different sets of beliefs and values. SSCT acknowledges that crisis communication can address victims or nonvictims, but (1) it is possible that some victims would have different beliefs and values from other victims and (2) the category "nonvictims" covers a wide array of audiences with potentially different attitudes and knowledge about the crisis. Image repair strategies should be selected that are appropriate to the situation but also that have a reasonable chance of persuading the specific audience addressed. Additionally, at times a person or organization faces different audiences. For example, in the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, several audiences were in play, including BP's stockholders, Gulf residents, those who fished the Gulf, businesses that depended on tourists, government regulators, and potential tourists. The likelihood that a single strategy would be most persuasive for all audiences is very low. The audience's attitudes are a vital element in persuasive communication generally and image repair specifically.

Third, consider two organizations (or two people) facing similar accusations: one innocent and one guilty (and, as suggested earlier, the audience may not be able to determine guilt or innocence). SCCT apparently recommends the same strategy for both. Unless the audience is clearly unwilling to listen to the accused, a person (or organization) who is innocent should use denial (using evidence and arguments to support that denial as available). On the other hand, I think an accused who is guilty should *not* use denial. Ordinarily I would recommend mortification and corrective action for the guilty, although other considerations, such as the risk of lawsuits following an admission of guilt, might suggest a different defensive strategy or

strategies (such as bolstering, minimization, transcendence, or defeasibility). It is a mistake to recommend the same image repair strategies for innocent and guilty alike. I want to acknowledge that guilt or innocence is not always clear; for example, at times even those accused and convicted of a crime may believe they are innocent. Nevertheless, sometimes guilt or innocence is obvious (even to the accused), and it is a mistake to advocate the same defense for both.

Fourth, corrective action is an important potential image repair strategy, identified decades ago in political (Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991) and corporate (Benoit & Brinson, 1994) image repair. However, SSCT does not discuss this option in its current formulation.

Fifth, research on SCCT has found no difference between crisis response strategies. Coombs and Holladay (2008), arguing that apology is not the "best" crisis response strategy (a claim I fully support), conducted a study of a responses to a chemical explosion. An information only control message was less effective than messages with defensive strategies, but no differences were found between compensation, apology, and sympathy messages (see also Coombs and Holladay [2009] for another study that found no main effect for sympathy versus compensation responses). Of course, I would not argue that there are never differences in persuasiveness between image repair strategies, but this evidence makes it clear that it is a mistake to assume that one strategy is best for a given crisis situation type.

A sixth concern is the limited empirical evidence for SCCT's predictions. The study by Coombs and Holladay (1996), which is cited for two claims—that responses are more effective when matched to crisis type and that higher threat situations need more accommodation—had very low reliability (Cronbach's α of .57 for external control and .44 for stability; apparently a "final" measure was created, but I cannot find a report of reliability for that measure) and accordingly does not provide a firm basis for this claim. Furthermore, a study by Clayes, Cauberghe, and Vyncke (2010) found that "matching crisis types and crisis responses does not lead to more positive perception of firm reputation than nonmatches" (p. 261; see also Brown & White, 2011). So questions exist about the empirical support for SCCT's predictions.

Finally, SCCT does not consider the "truth," by which I mean here what the accused believes is true in a given case. For example, SCCT states that organizations should "use denial strategies in rumor crises" (p. 159) without regard for whether the rumor is true or false. We must realize that the "truth" will not always work: Sometimes an audience is utterly close minded. However, I believe it is immoral to

lie to an audience (to make arguments that one believes are false). This makes it wrong to issue a blanket declaration about using denial in image repair. Further, in many cases the truth eventually comes out, which means the accused will still face the original accusation and now face an additional one: lying about it (see, for example, the analysis of Lance Armstrong's image repair in chapter 5). This means in addition to being unethical, using denial when the accused is guilty may well backfire when the truth emerges. The truth, insofar as human beings perceive it, must be considered in all persuasion, including image repair. Coombs notes that one situational factor is *veracity* of evidence about the crisis, but a discussion of *evidence* does not adequately consider the consequences for image repair of the fact that some organizations are innocent and others are guilty of an offensive act.

At base, SCCT makes the same basic assumptions about persuasive discourse as Bitzer's "Rhetorical Situation." Bitzer (1968) declares that the situation "dictates the significant physical and verbal responses" (p. 5) and "prescribes its fitting response" (1968, p. 11). He explicitly rules out other potential influences on rhetorical responses: "The situation controls the rhetorical response . . . Not the rhetor and not persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity—and, I should add, of rhetorical criticism" (p. 6). SCCT does not explicitly rule out other influences as Bitzer does, but the only factor that it suggests should influence selection of crisis response strategy is crisis situation type. In addition to situation, message development should be guided by other factors (e.g., Benoit, 2000b), including the persuader's purpose (e.g., to clear its name or avoid lawsuits), the nature of the persuader (including credibility), the means at hand (including evidence for a crisis response message), and perceptions of the audience's attitudes (beliefs and values).

The Rhetoric of Atonement

Koesten and Rowland (2004; see also Jerome, 2008; Shepard, 2009) advance a theory of "The Rhetoric of Atonement," arguing that "recently" the focus of public apologies from political and religious leaders "has shifted away from an emphasis on self-defense toward the theme of atoning for past sins" (p. 68). Atonement differs from image repair in that the former uses an indirect approach to obtain forgiveness, orienting toward long-term rather than short-term image repair. They note that "the rhetoric of atonement functions as a purgative-redemptive device" (p. 69). The authors observe, "Many rhetorical

critics . . . (see for instance Ware & Linkugel, 1973; Kruse, 1977; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit, 1995) have focused on apologetic strategies that in some way deny that wrongdoing has been done or that redefine or transcend that wrongdoing" (p. 70). They list the five main strategies from image repair theory ("denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification as the primary strategies involved in image restoration," p. 70) but then conclude, "In each case the focus has been on denial, deflection, or justification to restore a damaged image, as opposed to accepting responsibility as a sinner" (p. 70). Many of those accused of wrongdoing deny, whether innocent or not, but it is simply false that "in each case the focus has been on denial, deflection, or justification . . . as opposed to accepting responsibility as a sinner" (p. 70). This claim completely overlooks mortification, despite having just listed it as one of image repair's five major strategic options. Image repair theory's discussion of mortification references Burke's purgative-guilt cycle. Furthermore, mortification has been used to understand defenses in several cases (e.g., Ronald Reagan in Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991; Hugh Grant in Benoit, 1997a; Bill Clinton in Blaney & Benoit, 2001; AT&T in Benoit & Brinson, 1994; and Dow Corning in Brinson & Benoit, 1996).

The Rhetoric of Renewal

The "Rhetoric of Renewal" (e.g., Seeger & Griffin-Padgett, 2010; Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, & Sellnow, 2005; Sellnow & Seeger, 2013; Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007) is proposed as an alternative to image repair discourse. Four characteristics make up this kind of response to crisis situations, as Ulmer, Seeger, and Sellnow (2007; see also Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, & Sellnow, 2005) explain:

> Post-crisis communication that focuses on renewal is provisional as opposed to strategic . . . [Renewal] discourse is a more natural and immediate response to an event . . . The second characteristic of this framework is that renewal exhibits prospective rather than retrospective communication . . . [R]enewal is concerned with what will happen and how the organization will move forward. The third characteristic of renewal focuses on the ability of the organization to reconstitute itself by capitalizing on the opportunities embedded within the crisis . . . Finally, renewal is a leader-based communication form. (pp. 131–132)

The authors contrast the rhetoric of renewal with image repair theory. This approach is somewhat like the rhetoric of atonement, but it focuses on corrective action rather than mortification. Seeger and Padgett (2010) explain that the rhetoric of renewal "seeks to go beyond the parameters of image restoration to address the communication exigencies associated with rebuilding, recovery, and revitalization" (pp. 132–133). Ulmer, Seeger, and Sellnow (2007) contrast renewal with image repair: The latter "focuses on explaining and interpreting what has happened and who is at fault . . . renewal is concerned with what will happen and how the organization will move forward" (p. 132). Similarly, Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, and Sellnow (2005) declare that "traditional understandings of post-crisis discourse . . . focus almost exclusively on strategic portrayals of responsibility, blame, scapegoating, denial of responsibility, justification, and related strategies" (p. 82). Those accused of wrongdoing, in fact, frequently deny responsibility, shift blame, and offer justifications or excuses. However, corrective action is clearly oriented to the future. It is one of the five main strategic options in image repair theory. Furthermore, case studies have investigated situations in which those accused of wrongdoing employ corrective action (e.g., Tylenol in Benoit & Lindsey, 1987; Ronald Reagan in Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991; AT&T in Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Hugh Grant in Benoit, 1997a; Firestone in Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002; Sears in Benoit, 1995b; Dow Corning in Brinson & Benoit, 1996).

The authors note that "natural disasters and crises that are massively destructive often create a context and a space more conducive to renewal" (Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007, p. 133). I think the best way to conceptualize these two theories is to say that they include a common element, corrective action (a defining characteristic of renewal, an option in image repair), but operate in different realms. The rhetoric of renewal is most suitable for responding to natural disasters, such as fires or floods, whereas image repair is most suitable for responding to threats to image from alleged offensive actions. Recall Figure 1.1; crisis communication includes natural disasters and the effects of terrorism, which is not per se image repair, One can be blamed for an inappropriate response to crisis, and President Bush needed to try to repair his image after the federal government's botched response to Hurricane Katrina (Benoit & Henson, 2009), but he cannot be blamed for the hurricane itself. This approach is similar to the concept of "restorative rhetoric" proposed by Griffin-Padgett and Allison (2010), which is related to discourse responding to natural disasters or terrorism.

Accounts and the Theory of Image Repair

Some theories of accounts choose not to include apologies or mortification (e.g., Sykes & Matza, 1957; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Semin & Manstead, 1983), preferring to focus on excuses and justifications. Thus the theory of image repair offers a more complete list of strategies available to the actor. However, Goffman (1971) does discuss apologies, and Schonbach (1980) includes concessions. Only Goffman includes compensation (and then as a component of apology), despite the fact that plans for correcting the problem can be a very important rhetorical strategy for image repair that has been unjustly overlooked in the literature (e.g., Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991; Benoit & Lindsey, 1987). Thus although some discussions of accounts mentioned here are more detailed than the theory of image repair, it includes more general options. Although a matter of preference, I choose to focus at higher levels of abstraction rather than on details of subcategories.

Many of those who write about accounts have developed much more extensive lists of image repair strategies than have rhetorical theorists and critics. Although this work may include illustrations, unlike rhetorical criticism their focus tends not to be on the discussion of particular rhetorical artifacts. These writers often incorporate previous lists in their new work, adding further refinements in the form of additional categories and subcategories. For example, Scott and Lyman (1968) discussed defeasibility, which concerns lack of knowledge or will, as a possible accounting strategy. Tedeschi and Reiss (1981, p. 282) break this category down into failure to foresee consequences (with eight subcategories, including both "mistake" and "inadvertancy") and lack of volition (including four physical and six psychological varieties). A limitation of these lists is that their complexity renders them unwieldy. It would be fruitless to deny, for example, that a source can develop defeasibility as an account in a variety of ways (just as a source can bolster in many different ways), but it seems preferable to me to simply group these variants of defeasibility together, rather than list drugs, alcohol, illness, and so forth as separate subcategories. Unless we have evidence that, say, drugs is a more readily acceptable excuse than alcohol, how important is it to devote separate categories to these variants of defeasibility? Similarly, Schonbach (1980) distinguishes between accounts based on past restitution or compensation and those based on future restitution or compensation. It is not clear what advantage is gained from this

distinction. We could also divide such offers in other ways (e.g., compensation worth less, the same, or more than the injury), but these sorts of choices can add needless intricacy. If we had evidence that, for example, future compensation was more (or less) persuasive than past compensation, this could be a useful distinction. However, it is not clear how the lists of image repair strategies benefit from some of the fine nuances of these lists of accounts.

Of course, those who desire extremely detailed lists of these strategies can consult Schonbach (1990), who lists almost 150 categories and subcategories. There is certainly a place for such exhaustive analyses. However, I find it more useful to list image repair strategies at a higher level of abstraction. Taking this approach results in a list of image repair strategies that is exhaustive at a more general level and is arguably easier to conceptualize. It is clearly a matter of preference and convenience rather than a theoretical or a conceptual decision, though.

Benoit et al. (2014) report a meta-analysis of the effects of accounts on perceptions of the offender. Providing an account improves perception of the communicator across situation (organizational, interpersonal, accident victims, trials, and church leaders). Accounts help with violations of high, medium, and low severity. Accounts reduced punishments recommended for the offender, improved communicator credibility, created impressions of remorse, reduced perceived blame, and increased perceived morality of the offender. Accounts helped across type of violation (relational/personal, role/organizational, and public violations). The data show that image repair messages are capable of persuading the audience.

Conclusion

This chapter articulates the theory of image repair discourse. Two key assumptions are outlined (communication is goal-driven; identity maintenance is a key goal of communication), and a list of strategies for repairing a damaged reputation is developed. An analysis of attacks as comprising blame and offensiveness is advanced to explain how strategies function. The relationship of this analysis to Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action (2010) explains that blame is a belief and offensiveness is a value. This analysis also explains why the audience, and the beliefs and values held by the audience, are vital to effective image repair. Image repair theory stresses the importance of

perceptions: The accused's perceptions of audience attitudes motivate image repair and help develop image repair messages; the audience's perceptions determine how well the image repair effort works. Stein's concept of *antapologia* extends our understanding of this process; it is too limiting to assume that image repair always consists of a single attack followed by a single defense. This chapter ends by comparing image repair theory with other approaches found in the literature.

It is important to acknowledge that this theory has a limited domain. It does not address related questions, such as the initial development of a positive image or reputation. Similarly, while acknowledging the importance of persuasive attack to understanding image repair (and discussing the basic elements of an attack), it does not develop a typology of attacking strategies. Nor does image repair theory attempt to address other forms of crisis beyond threats to image, such as responses to terrorism or natural disasters. The purpose of this theory is to understand how messages can respond to accusations or suspicions of wrongdoing.

Chapter 3

Corporate Image Repair

One of the most popular contexts for studying image repair discourse is the corporate sphere. Corporations are a large source of employment and are key players in the economy. Scandals and crises in corporations are particularly newsworthy. This chapter does not attempt to review all the available literature; the purpose is to illustrate work in this area.

Scholars discuss the stages of a crisis. For example, Coombs (2012) argues for a three-stage model. The "precrisis" stage concerns "actions to be performed before a crisis is encountered" (p. 11). The intent is to prevent crises or minimize the consequences of crises when they occur. The second phase is the "crisis event," which "begins with a trigger event that marks the beginning of a crisis" and "ends when the crisis is considered to be resolved" (p. 12). Image repair theory addresses this phase—defensive messages developed after the crisis emerges that hopefully resolve it. Finally, the "postcrisis" stage occurs after the crisis is resolved: The organization considers what to do next, revising crisis response plans and reflecting on whether its practices need to be modified to prevent or minimize future crises.

Coombs (2012) also identifies three kinds of crisis situations: victim (little responsibility), accidental (low responsibility), and preventable (high responsibility). Remember that chapter 2 argued that the amount of responsibility is not always obvious, that perceptions of the kind of situation can vary among members of an audience or between audience groups, and that the person or organization can attempt to alter perceptions of responsibility in an image repair message.

In a case study of actor Hugh Grant's apology for patronizing a prostitute, I contrasted corporate image repair with image repair in politics and entertainment (Benoit, 1997). Corporations are more

liable to attacks from competitors than entertainers are (although corporations are perhaps less susceptible to rival attacks than politicians). Corporations often have resources for designing and disseminating image repair messages and have options not available to entertainers: It may be possible to limit damage by firing one or more employees, but Hugh Grant cannot fire himself. Persuaders often face multiple goals; corporations are probably at greater risk from lawsuits than politicians or entertainers. Finally, corporations, like politicians, are more likely to make decisions that affect many people, compared with actors. Next some of the literature on corporate image repair will be reviewed, followed by two new case studies.

In 1991, AT&T experienced a power outage that interrupted its long-distance service. Air traffic controllers relied on land lines, so in addition air travel was affected. A full-page newspaper ad effectively used mortification, corrective action, and bolstering to repair AT&T's image (Benoit & Brinson, 1994).

Sears auto repair centers were accused of consumer fraud by the California Department of Consumer Affairs in 1992. Sears used newspaper advertisements, television spots, and other messages to disseminate its defense. In the first phase it used denial and attacked its accuser. When these accusations were corroborated in New Jersey, Sears announced corrective action. It never apologized for fraud, however, and the defense was evaluated as largely ineffectual (Benoit, 1995b).

Dow Corning was criticized in 1991–1992 about the safety of its breast implants. Initially it denied accusations. Later it used a mild form of mortification (e.g., saying it did not express its concerns for women adequately) without admitting to wrongdoing and deployed a form of corrective action by ceasing production of the implants (Brinson & Benoit, 1996). Criticism abated after the corrective action.

After an airplane crash killed 132 people in 1994, USAir used full-page newspaper advertisements to repair its tarnished image. Three image repair strategies were employed: bolstering, denial, and what Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) termed "pseudo-corrective action." The changes USAir announced "were not designed to actually improve its safety, but simply to convince the flying public of USAir's current safety" (p. 51). This was not an effective defense. ValuJet experienced a crash in 1996. Fishman (1999) identified several image repair strategies: accident, minimization, denial, shifting blame, and corrective action (including changing its name to AirTran).

In 1996, a secret tape recording of executives at Texaco was made public. In it, African American employees were characterized

as "black jelly beans" who were "glued to the bottom of the jar" (Brinson & Benoit, 1999, p. 484). These revelations prompted outrage, and Texaco attempted to repair its image with several messages with multiple strategies: bolstering, corrective action, mortification, and shifting blame. The most interesting strategy in the successful defense was shifting the blame to "bad apples" in the company, who were punished.

Garry Trudeau's comic strip *Doonesbury* made repeated attacks on the tobacco industry in 1989, arguing that tobacco is dangerous and addictive and purposely marketed to children (Benoit & Hirson, 2001). The Tobacco Institute (an industry organization) created a brochure to respond to these charges: "Smoking and Young People: Where the Tobacco Industry Stands." This message used denial, corrective action, shifting blame, bolstering, and good intentions. These strategies did not work well together. Corrective action is not consistent with denial (why change marketing procedures if the companies were not marketing to children?); key accusations were ignored, as tobacco is widely believed to be dangerous; and the implementation of the strategies in discourse was weak (e.g., the pamphlet denied that advertising caused smoking, without any evidence and contrary to common sense).

Several hundred people were killed when Firestone tires failed; fatalities were reported in 1992 when reports of tire separation began. The company attempted to shift the blame to Ford (many accidents occurred in Ford Explorers). Firestone also used bolstering and denial, which were undermined by mortification and corrective action. Corrective action was too vague to be persuasive. The image repair effort was poorly designed (Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002).

Caldiero, Taylor, and Ungureanu (2009) examined 17 cases of fraud to investigate production (not persuasiveness) of image repair strategies. They found that organizations most frequently used corrective action. Good intentions, transcendence, and bolstering were also common strategies.

British Petroleum's Gulf Coast oil spill occurred in 2010. Muralidharan, Dillistone, and Shin (2011) sampled BP's image repair strategies on social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr). They identified four strategies: corrective action, compensation, simple denial, and accident.

This chapter offers two additional case studies on corporate image repair: BP and the Gulf oil spill, and Grunenthal Group's apology for thalidomide drug birth defects.

British Petroleum and the Gulf Oil Spill: We Will Make This Right

On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico experienced a fire and an explosion. Workers were killed and injured, and thousands of gallons of oil began to leak into the Gulf each day (*Guardian*, 2010). Reed (2012) reported that "on television screens and in the pages of magazines, bewildered Americans saw oil plumes rising, livelihoods crumbling and seabirds dying in the viscous crude" (p. B3). The leak was sealed 5 months later, on September 19 (*Guardian*, 2010), after 4.9 million barrels of oil had flowed into the Gulf, "the largest oil spill in the industry's history" (Harish, 2012). The U.S. attorney general announced a criminal investigation into the spill (Cooper & Baker, 2010). The spill affected BP's stock price (Maouawad & Schwartz, 2010) and profits (Werdegier, 2010). The federal government assessed a record fine for safety violations at the refinery (Greenhouse, 2010). This tragedy was a disaster not only for the Gulf area and the victims but also for BP's image. Choi (2012) examined the frames employed in BP's press releases, whereas Smithson and Venette (2013) analyzed BP's congressional testimony. Muralidharan, Dillistone, and Shin (2011) investigated BP's use of social media, and this section examines messages directed at the public.

This analysis focuses on two forms of image repair messages: eight full-page newspaper ads (most ran multiple times) and 15 television commercials (see, for example, BP, 2011). The same themes—and indeed the same sources—tended to be used in both types of messages, so newspaper and television ads will not be analyzed separately. The newspaper advertisements were taken from the print version of the *New York Times* (and at least one of the ads also appeared in *USA Today*). Television commercials were obtained from BP's webpage (http://www.BP.com) and YouTube.

The messages presenting BP's defense employed three strategies: mortification, bolstering, and corrective action. The greatest emphasis was placed on corrective action. The way in which these three strategies were enacted in BP's messages will be discussed separately in this section.

Mortification

First, BP apologized for the oil spill. Tony Hayward, BP's CEO, used a television commercial to apologize: "To those affected and your

families, I'm deeply sorry." The newspaper advertisement "We Will Make This Right" (BP, 2010b) said, "The spill and the hardships endured by Gulf families and businesses never should have happened." BP was careful not to explicitly accept the blame for the oil spill, but in these messages it did not attempt to shift the blame or to deny responsibility.

Bolstering

The second strategy BP employed in its image repair effort was bolstering. The company argued that many of its employees were from the Gulf area and understood the people and the problems they were experiencing. "We Will Make This Right" (BP, 2010b) declared, "The region is home to thousands of BP employees, so we also feel the impact." A television spot on "Claims" featured Darryl Willis, who said, "I was born and raised in Louisiana. I volunteered for this assignment [processing claims for reimbursement] because this is my home." He said the same thing in a newspaper ad (BP, 2010c). Another employee who appeared in a commercial was Fred Lemond (BP, 2010d), who explained, "I grew up on the Gulf Coast and I love these waters." Iris Cross similarly declared in a television advertisement, "I was born in Louisiana. My family still lives here." In a newspaper ad, she said, "I was born here. I'm still here, and so is BP. We're committed to the Gulf. For everybody who loves it, and everyone who calls it home." The company's employees argued that they were from the Gulf, so they cared deeply about the area.

Corrective Action

Without question, the bulk of this image repair discourse focused on corrective action. The television spot from CEO Tony Hayward declared, "We know it is our responsibility to . . . do everything we can so this never happens again." Preventing recurrence of the oil spill is a clear instance of corrective action. None of the other messages in the texts examined here included this argument. Like mortification, this aspect of corrective action was fleeting.

BP's sustained use of corrective action had two major elements across several topics. The two major elements were promises to correct problems and descriptions of success in corrective action. The topics were similar although not identical in both elements, including stopping the oil spill, cleaning up the oil, cleaning the beaches, helping businesses,

helping wildlife, and funding future research on the environment in the Gulf. I also want to discuss BP's use of spokespersons in the defense.

Promises to Correct Problems

Stopping the Oil Flow

The ad "Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill Response" stated that "BP has taken full responsibility for dealing with the spill." Notice that this statement, which was repeated in several newspaper advertisements (such as "Making This Right: Clean-Up") does not accept responsibility *for the spill* but *for the cleanup*. As such, it enacts corrective action rather than mortification. In "Making This Right: Clean-Up" (BP, 2010d, p. 7), BP explained that one element of corrective action was finding and capturing oil from the spill:

> Every morning, over 50 spotter planes and helicopters search for oil off the coast, heading to areas previously mapped with satellite imagery and infrared photography. Once oil is found, they radio down to the 6,000 ships and boats of all sizes that are supporting the clean-up effort and working to collect the oil. There are thousands of local shrimping and fishing boats organized into task forces and strike teams, plus specialized skimmers mobilized from as far as the Netherlands.

The message describes the size of the cleanup effort ("over 50 spotter planes and helicopters," "6,000 ships and boats of all sizes"), the advanced technology employed ("satellite imagery and infrared technology"), and the organization ("task forces and strike teams"). The television commercial "Gulf of Mexico Response: Clean-Up" makes these arguments and shows video of airplanes, helicopters, maps, and cameras. These advertisements acclaim the tremendous cleanup effort deployed by BP. BP noted that it was paying for the cleanup: "We're paying for all legitimate clean-up costs" (BP, 2012, p. 10). BP's image repair effort promised to stop the oil leaking and to clean up the oil.

Cleaning Up Beaches

The company also promised to clean up the beaches: "Our beach cleanup operations will continue until the last of the oil spill has been skimmed from the sea, the beaches and estuaries have been cleaned up,

and the region has been pronounced oil free" (BP, 2010e, p. 9). This is also a clear example of corrective action promising to fix the problem.

$20 Billion Claim Fund

A television commercial ("Continuing Commitment") reported the fund set aside for recovery: "The $20 billion BP committed has helped fund environmental and economic recovery." Another television advertisement added that this fund would be "administered independently" and would come "at no cost to the taxpayers" ("Gulf of Mexico Response: Beaches"). A *New York Times* advertisement explained,

> Our focus has been on helping the fishermen, small businesses, and others who haven't been able to work until the spill is cleaned up, by making payments to replace their lost monthly income. These payments will continue for as long as needed. (BP, 2010c, p. A9)

BP's defense repeatedly touted the $20 billion claim fund as part of its corrective action.

Wildlife

BP also discussed its work to help wildlife affected by the Gulf oil spill:

> We have rehabilitation centers all over the Gulf, 30 teams of specialists from top wildlife organizations. When we bring the animals in, we stabilize them, we clean them up, and then we help them recover. We release them into safe, oil-free environments [video of teams cleaning wildlife, releasing to wild]. ("Gulf of Mexico Response: Wildlife")

This utterance discussed BP's commitment to helping wildlife in the Gulf.

$500 Million Research Fund

A television commercial reported that BP had created a research fund to study the environment and wildlife in the Gulf: "We've established a $500 million fund so independent researchers can study the Gulf's wildlife and environment for ten years" ("Gulf Coast Update: Our

Ongoing Commitment"). This fund shows BP's long-term commitment to the environment in the Gulf.

Success: Performance, Not Just Promises

The image repair messages from BP offered several arguments about success in repairing damage from the oil spill: The flow of oil into the Gulf has stopped, oil has been collected, beaches are open, claims have been paid, and businesses have been restored. Each of these ideas will be discussed in this section.

Stopping the Oil Spill

The second major element of corrective action touted BP's success in responding to the Gulf oil spill. In addition to the claims fund, the television advertisement explained that "another $14 billion has been spent on response and cleanup" ("Continuing Commitment"). This money was well spent because "oil is no longer flowing into the Gulf" (BP, 2010f, p. 5). This argument is repeated in another advertisement: "No oil has flowed into the Gulf for weeks" ("Making This Right: Economic Investment Environmental Restoration," p. 18). BP touted its success in stopping the flow of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Collecting the Oil

BP's defense reported, "We have recovered more than 27 million gallons of oil-water mixture from the Gulf. Other methods have also helped remove millions of additional gallons of oil from the water" (BP, 2010d, p. 7).

Beaches Are Open

A television commercial informed viewers that "all beaches and waters are open for everyone to enjoy" ("Gulf Coast Update: Our Ongoing Commitment"). This was good news for tourists and those who made a living from tourism.

Claims Paid

BP explained in a television commercial ("Gulf of Mexico Response: Communities 1"), "We've made over 120,000 claims payments." Another

commercial reported, "We've paid over $400 million in claims" ("Gulf of Mexico Response: Communities 2"). Claims had been paid from the $20 billion fund.

Business Restored

The television commercial "Tourism in the Gulf" featured people from four states discussing the great tourism season they experienced:

> This was the Gulf's best tourism season in years. All because so many people wanted to visit us in Louisiana [Bill Kearney, Galatoire's Restaurant, New Orleans, LA]. They came to see us in Florida [Ron Hardy, Gulf World, Panama City Beach, FL]. Nice try. They came to hang out with us in Alabama [Shaul Zislin, The Hangout, Gulf Shores, AL]. Once folks heard Mississippi had the welcome sign out, they couldn't wait to get here [Karen Sock, Gulf Coast Business Council, Biloxi, MS].

Three of these people are from businesses and one from a business association, talking up tourism in Louisiana, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Similarly, the television spot "Voices from the Gulf: Best Place" featured multiple spokespersons touting the Gulf as a great vacation spot:

> Everybody knows the best place for a good time is Mississippi [Rip Daniels, Harrison County Tourism Commission, Gulfport, MS]. And that's only till they've visited us in Louisiana [Tom Hymel, Delcambre Direct Seafood, Delcambre, LA]. Which is a distant second to sunny Florida [Dawn Moliterno, Visit South Walton, South Walton, FL]. For a beautiful vacation, nothing beats Alabama [Bill Barrick, Belingrath Gardens, Theodore, AL]. OK, we'll never agree on who's best, but we can all agree on one thing: The Gulf's the world's number one vacation spot. And we've gone all out to make this year the best ever. Mississippi has wonderful people, great music, and the beautiful outdoors. Louisiana has the best seafood you'll ever eat: shrimp gumbo, crab cakes, etouffee. Florida means beautiful beaches and sugar white sand. Actually, experts agree that the best beaches are here in Alabama. Which can't compare to a good time

> on the Gulf in Mississippi. Louisiana fresh catch. Florida beaches. Alabama beauty. Mississippi outdoors. Don't miss the world's good time headquarters. And we're 100% open for business. I'm glad we got that settled. [A cordial invitation to visit the Gulf. Sponsored by BP.]

Like the previous ad, this message featured three people from businesses and one from a business association, all discussing the Gulf as a fantastic vacation destination. Other ads featured positive statements from vacation rental brokers from Florida ("Voices from the Gulf: Florida Business Owners"), Louisiana restaurant owners ("Voices from the Gulf: Florida Business Owners"), a Mississippi fisherman ("Voices from the Gulf: Mississippi Fishermen"), and an Alabama beach service ("Voices from the Gulf: Alabama Beaches"). For example, Ike Williams (Ike's Beach Service) appeared in the television advertisement "Voices from the Gulf: Alabama Beaches":

> BP said they were gonna clean it up and help people impacted. They kept their word. Beaches are clean, our snowbirds are happy, my boys are busy, we're getting equipment ready for the season, management companies are taking reservations every day.

Spokespersons

An important aspect of BP's image repair effort is its use of sources for these messages. First, the CEO made a public statement in a television commercial. Hayward's presence showed that BP's management was committed to dealing with the oil spill. Second, several people featured in both newspaper ads and television commercials were BP employees who stressed their roots, and their families' roots, in the Gulf. This placed a local face on the image repair effort. It showed that the more "ordinary" employees of BP understood those affected by the spill, probably shared their values, and had credibility from their background. Finally, BP television commercials employed multiple spokespersons from Gulf businesses and business organizations (often noting in the advertisement that the speakers were not compensated for their appearance) talking about help from BP and the resurgence of business and tourism in the Gulf. Use of people who were "victims" of the oil spill to tout BP's success in its response to the Gulf oil spill adds an additional kind of credibility to the image repair effort.

Evaluation

This analysis is not designed to assess BP's responsibility for the spill but to evaluate how well the image repair effort was designed and executed. BP took responsibility for the cleanup (if not for the spill itself). Use of people in the organization who were born and raised in the Gulf area bolstered the image repair effort; use of those who probably had been hurt by the oil spill enhanced the credibility of the image repair effort. Most important of all, corrective action (with multiple components) had two elements: promises and performance. The newspaper and television ads touting the successes of BP's response to the oil spill were effectively designed, given the situation the company faced. Showing the success of corrective action is not standard practice in image repair; most instances of corrective action merely promise corrective action. BP provided considerable evidence, including statistics (six thousand ships and boats used for cleanup, a $20 billion claim fund, more than 120,000 claims paid, another $14 billion in response and cleanup), quotations (on the resurgence of tourism), as well as pictures and video (of the cleanup in action, clean beaches, and tourists flocking to the Gulf) to support its image repair strategies. BP's use of evidence was impressive. BP's image repair effort may have established a new "gold standard" for image repair.

I also want to mention a road not taken. In September 2010, BP issued a report that shared blame for the tragedy with two of BP's corporate partners: Transocean and Halliburton (Urbina, 2010). The image repair messages examined here, however, made no attempt to blame others, even in part, for the spill. That argument might have been useful for litigation, but blaming others would have compromised BP's image repair effort. Although it might be possible to differentiate between taking full responsibility for the *cleanup* and blaming others for the *spill*, that was a distinction BP would have had difficulty conveying to the public. So BP's image repair effort was generally well designed. However, bad news leaked out during BP's campaign, undermining this defense. For example, during the trial for fines and penalties, the Justice Department's lead prosecutor Michael Underhill declared, "Reckless actions were tolerated by BP, sometimes encouraged by BP" (Krauss & Meier, 2013, p. B1). One cannot control messages from others, and at times such messages can interfere with an image repair effort.

Conclusion

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was a tragedy on many levels. The purpose of this paper is not to determine to what extent BP was "really" responsible but to assess its image repair efforts and to understand and evaluate that discourse. Two key features of BP's defense are (1) its reports on the outcomes of its corrective action and (2) its use of spokespersons (employees from the Gulf and those adversely affected by the spill). BP's image repair effort clearly would not have persuaded everyone, but it was very well designed. BP reported profits of almost $8 billion for the fourth quarter of 2011 (Krauss & Werdigier, 2012), so the company has managed to weather this disaster. This case study also illustrates the fact that other sources (e.g., the Justice Department) can create messages that may undermine image repair efforts.

Grunenthal's Apology for Thalidomide

Thalidomide was a drug developed by German pharmaceutical company Grunenthal in the 1950s and used to treat morning sickness and difficulty sleeping. It spread from Germany to other countries: "By 1957, thalidomide was sold over-the-counter in Germany. By 1960, it was sold throughout Europe and South America, in Canada, and in many other parts of the world" (Bern, 2011). Reports surfaced that

> women were giving birth to terribly deformed babies. Some had abnormally short limbs, with toes sprouting directly from the hips, and flipper-like arms—a condition known as phocomelia. Others had malformed internal organs or eye and ear defects. Women were miscarrying or giving birth to infants who died shortly after. (Bern, 2011)

Ultimately, "more than 10,000 children in 46 countries were estimated to have been born with deformities as a consequence of thalidomide use" (Bern, 2011). This was a terrible tragedy with victims throughout the world.

On August 31, 2012, Grunenthal's chief executive Harald Stock gave a speech at the dedication of a memorial for the victims of Thalidomide. This message consisted mainly of mortification and corrective action, as well as defeasibility and differentiation.

Mortification

Stock began by acknowledging a responsibility related to this drug: "Thalidomide is and will always be part of our company's history. We have a responsibility and we face it openly." He also said, "We are aware of our responsibility and will continue to fulfil it in demand-oriented projects and initiatives." Although he was vague about the nature of this responsibility, he explicitly stated regret: "We learned how much it is publicly desired that we express our deep regrets to those affected by thalidomide, and in particular to their mothers." Another passage also singled out the anguish suffered by the mothers: "Therefore we want to address this message particularly to all the affected and their mothers. We realise that the mothers are carrying a heavy burden." Another passage repeated his regrets and expressed his sympathy for everyone involved in the thalidomide tragedy:

> On behalf of Grunenthal with its shareholders and all employees, I would like to take the opportunity at this moment of remembrance today to express our sincere regrets about the consequences of thalidomide and our deep sympathy for all those affected, their mothers and their families. We see both the physical hardship and the emotional stress that the affected, their families and particularly their mothers, had to suffer because of thalidomide and still have to endure day by day.

Furthermore, he said, "We wish that the thalidomide tragedy had never happened." Although acceptance of responsibility for this tragedy was extremely vague, his expressions of regret and sympathy were quite clear.

Stock also apologized for the 50 years of his company's silence on thalidomide: "We also apologise for the fact that we have not found the way to you from person to person for almost 50 years. Instead, we have been silent and we are very sorry for that." Thus the company apologized to victims both for the original thalidomide disaster and then for decades of silence.

Corrective Action

Stock's speech also discussed corrective action undertaken by Grunenthal. He explained,

> Over the past few years the intensified dialogue led to our endowment of 50 million euros in 2009 as well as to projects in Germany and abroad, such as the Belgian patient card or the direct support of hardship cases which started about one year ago, to support those needs of individual affected people that are not covered by the foundation or social services.

He also mentioned future corrective action: "We have begun to mutually develop and implement projects with them, to improve their living situation and assist in hardship situations easily and efficiently. We will continue to pursue this path in the future." It was good to know that the corrective action wasn't over, but there was no way to tell exactly what additional corrective action would occur in the future.

Defeasibility

The speech from Stock also offered an excuse for the thalidomide tragedy. He explained to the audience,

> The thalidomide tragedy took place 50 years ago in a world completely different from today . . . Grunenthal has acted in accordance with the state of scientific knowledge and all industry standards for testing new drugs that were relevant and acknowledged in the 1950s and 1960s. We regret that the teratogenic potential of thalidomide could not be detected by the tests that we and others carried out before it was marketed.

The first part of this statement asserts that Grunenthal followed all industry standards for drug testing that were in place at the time. Stock expressed regret that the drug's side effects "could not be detected by the tests" conducted when the drug was developed. The clear implication is that the company was not responsible for the infant deaths and birth defects from its product.

Differentiation

Stock also tried to explain why it took so long for the company to address this tragedy: "We ask that you regard our long silence as a sign of the silent shock that your fate has caused us." The infant deaths

and birth defects were clearly shocking. It is unclear why this would prevent the company from speaking about it for decades.

Evaluation

This defense cannot be evaluated as effective. This image repair effort stated, in effect, "We regret the tragedy, we have sympathy for the victims, we have a (vague) responsibility, but it wasn't our fault." Of course, Stock might be correct in saying that the drug tests of the 1950s could not have revealed these side effects. However, waiting almost 50 years to say, essentially, "It wasn't our fault," probably was not very persuasive to victims and those who sympathize with the victims. Given that the company had not admitted specific blame (discussing only a vague responsibility), defeasibility was not needed (that defense could always be raised in any future law suits) and undermined Grunenthal's use of mortification. Not surprising, the response from those affected was not positive. "Freddie Astbury, the president of campaign group Thalidomide UK, who was born in 1959 without arms or legs, said it was too little, too late" (Smith-Spark, 2012). Similarly, Geoff Adams-Spink (2012), who suffered birth defects from thalidomide, argued that Grunenthal should "admit that the drug was not adequately tested prior to release; admit that evidence of harmful side-effects was ignored and concealed; and admit that crucial documents 'went missing.'"

Conclusion

Corporate image repair is both pervasive and important and has been studied by many scholars. The new case studies in this chapter reveal or confirm three things. First, corporations can do more than announce or promise corrective action. BP followed through with reports detailing the positive effects from its programs. Second, the BP case also illustrates the fact that other sources can make statements that can undermine image repair efforts. Third, the Thalidomide apology illustrates the adage that some efforts are "too little, too late." More work can expand our understanding of corporate image repair.

Chapter 4

Political Image Repair

A popular context for image repair research is politics. Politicians—particularly those at higher levels of office—are newsworthy in general. When they are accused of wrongdoing, interest in them increases substantially. In chapter 3, I compared image repair by an actor with corporate and political image repair (Benoit, 1997). Politics is highly partisan, so politicians have opponents who often promulgate or repeat attacks. Opponents may work to sustain suspicions against a politician. Politicians daily make decisions that influence the lives of constituents. The image repair strategies are the same across domains, but nevertheless there are important contextual differences in image repair. This chapter does not attempt to provide an exhaustive review of this literature but to illustrate the research published in this area.

The first study to articulate and apply image repair theory investigated President Reagan's messages on the Iran-Contra affair (Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991). The President was accused of trading arms for hostages in Iran and funneling some of the proceeds to support the Contras in Nicaragua. The analysis examined 11 of Reagan's messages to look for patterns over time. His use of denial tended to shift from denying that he traded arms for hostages to denying that he diverted money to the Contras. His use of differentiation shifted as well. Initially he argued that the weapons were defensive rather than offensive; later he argued that he had negotiated with moderates rather than extremists in Iran. After the Tower Commission issued its report, the president he admitted that he was wrong and announced corrective action. At that point his popularity began to rebound.

Kennedy and Benoit (1997) investigated image repair by Newt Gingrich. He signed a book deal with HarperCollins, owned by Rupert Murdoch, with a $4.5 million advance. Not only was this a huge advance, but legislation was pending before Congress that affected Fox Television, also owned by Murdoch. Gingrich denied that accepting

the advance was wrong, bolstered his reputation, attacked his accusers (Democrats and the media), and implemented corrective action by declining the advance. Important questions were raised by this defense: Why return the advance if it was not wrong? If it was wrong to take the advance, why deny it was wrong and why not apologize for a mistake? This defense is not evaluated as particularly effective.

Judge Clarence Thomas's nomination to the Supreme Court was threatened when Professor Anita Hill accused him of sexual harassment. Benoit and Nill (1998a) found that Thomas used three image repair strategies: he denied the charge, he bolstered his reputation, and he attacked his accusers. He wisely did not attack Hill; other Republicans were doing that for him. To attack her could have created an impression that she had been his victim earlier. Instead, he attacked the senators questioning his nomination, especially Democrats. He suggested that he was being lynched, a particularly vivid image. He succeeded in the nomination, becoming a Supreme Court justice.

President Bill Clinton's inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky has been studied (Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Kramer & Olson, 2002). Kenneth Starr, who led the investigation of President Clinton, came under fire for engaging in a vendetta against the president. Starr offered image repair on the television program *20/20* (Benoit & McHale, 1999). He denied wrongdoing and bolstered his image. His denials were evaluated as ineffectual and his disapproval rating was essentially unchanged after his defense.

Suspicions arose when Congressman Gary Condit was apparently less than cooperative with police investigating the disappearance of his intern Chandra Levy. He was also accused of having an affair with her. In an interview with Connie Chung on *Prime Time* he denied wrongdoing (complicity in her disappearance, not cooperating with policy). However, when confronted with contradictory evidence (e.g., after he denied that she had called him on April 24, her phone records showed several such calls), he shifted to differentiation. This was not an effective defense (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004).

In 2003 and 2004, President Bush was attacked repeatedly, particularly by Democrats during the presidential primary campaign, for mistakes in the war on terrorism in general and in invading Iraq for nonexistent weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in particular. The president held a nationally televised press conference in April 2004 to respond to these accusations (Benoit, 2006a). He relied mainly on three main strategies: transcendence (Hussein was a threat and Iraqis deserve freedom), bolstering (he was compassionate), and denial (I

made no mistakes). He also used defeasibility (perhaps WMDs had not been found because Hussein hid them). Although many continued to support the president, his discourse did not help repair his image with others. For example, his secretary of state had declared that we knew where the WMDs were; obviously at least some mistakes had been made. The ideas that Hussein was evil and that the Iraqi people deserve freedom do not justify an invasion (other leaders are evil and their people deserve freedom, too).

President Bush appeared on *Meet the Press* in 2004 to defend against two accusations: that the war in Iraq was unjustified and the economy was in trouble (Benoit, 2006b). He used transcendence, characterizing himself as a "war president," suggesting that his special circumstances excused his behavior. He denied mistakes, argued for defeasibility (Hussein may have hidden WMDs), and used transcendence (Hussein was dangerous). On the economy, he claimed corrective action (recent actions would improve the economy) and defeasibility (he had inherited a bad economy). His denials were ineffectual and, although circumstances might have been beyond his control (defeasibility), it was a mistake for a president to make this argument: People want to believe the president is in charge of events.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) botched the recovery after Hurricane Katrina. President Bush gave a speech to repair his image (Benoit & Henson, 2009). He used bolstering (his compassion), defeasibility (Katrina was a terrible natural disaster), and corrective action (recounting federal aid efforts). However, no justification was presented for the slow response (although we did not know exactly where Katrina would make landfall, we could have done a better job preparing for it in the days before it hit).

Kaylor (2011) examined discourse from Democratic political candidates during the 2004 and 2008 campaigns. This rhetoric attempted to repair the image of the Democratic Party from the belief that it was not concerned with religion. Transcendence was employed to argue that separation of church and state justified the party's approach to religion. Democrats attacked accusers: Republicans and the media. The most extensive strategy used was corrective action, which took two forms: urging fellow Democrats to appeal directly to religious voters and including more religious discourse in their messages.

Hornes (2012) investigated the image repair discourse of six female politicians from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden who had been attacked for a variety of alleged acts of wrongdoing. Although differences occurred between the rhetors, they used attack accuser, denial,

defeasibility, bolstering, corrective action, and mortification. Five of the six resigned.

Image repair theory has been applied to many instances of political accusations and scandals. It has been used to understand messages in the United States and abroad, from politicians at various levels of government, and in different branches of government. This chapter will investigate two other instances of image repair in politics from Senator David Vitter and Representative Anthony Weiner.

Senator David Vitter's Image Repair on the "D.C. Madam"

Republican David Vitter currently serves as the junior senator from Louisiana; Mary Landrieu, a Democrat, is the other senator from the Pelican state. After serving as a representative for Louisiana from 1999 to 2004, Vitter won election to the Senate in 2004. This was a notable victory, because he was "the first Republican from Louisiana elected to the Senate since Reconstruction" (CBS/AP, 2009). Vitter supported "family values" and "made his name decrying public corruption and demanding that President Bill Clinton resign for lying about an affair with a White House aide" (Alpert, 2010; see also Blaney & Benoit, 2001).

In 1987, Vitter faced three interrelated accusations. First, it was alleged that he had used the services of a prostitute in Washington, D.C. Second, critics charged that this action revealed him as a hypocrite, given his public remonstrations over President Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Finally, it was claimed that Vitter also patronized prostitutes in New Orleans. It seems clear that the first accusation was the most serious of the three. Fox News (2007) reported,

> On Monday, Vitter acknowledged being involved with the so-called D.C. Madam. A day later, new revelations linked him to a former madam in New Orleans and old allegations that he frequented a former prostitute resurfaced, further clouding his political future.

Vitter's response to each of these accusations will be discussed in turn. His initial statement of July 10 (an e-mail to the Associated Press) and his press conference with his wife on July 16 are the texts for this analysis. He explained the timing in his press conference, saying

that he and his wife "thought it was very important to have some time alone with our children" (CNN, 2007).

Bolstering

Vitter said that he is committed to "advancing mainstream conservative principles" and noted that he and his wife are lectors at their hometown church (Murray, 2007). These statements function to bolster his reputation generally; they do not directly respond to a particular accusation. It is possible that his use of bolstering could help counteract the threat to his image, reinforcing responses to other accusations.

Patronizing the D.C. Madam

Minimization

The statement containing Vitter's apology said his telephone number was included on phone records of Pamela Martin and Associates dated from before he ran for the Senate in 2004 (Murray, 2007). However, Vitter did not rely heavily on minimization: "No matter how long ago it was, I know this has hurt the relationship of trust I've enjoyed with so many of you . . . I will work every day to rebuild that trust" (CNN, 2007). At the end of this statement, he slides into corrective action: "I will work every day to rebuild that trust."

Mortification

Several statements enact the strategy of mortification. Vitter accepted blame for this offensive act, stating, "This was a very serious sin in my past for which I am, of course, completely responsible" (Murray, 2007). Furthermore, he said that he sought and obtained forgiveness for his lapse: "I confronted it in confession and marriage counseling. I believe I received forgiveness from God; I know I did from Wendy" (CNN, 2007). Vitter also apologized to those he disappointed: "I certainly offer my deep and sincere apologies to all I have disappointed and let down in any way" (Murray, 2007). He accepted responsibility, asked for forgiveness, and apologized for his transgression: a clear instance of mortification.

Furthermore, Vitter's wife, Wendy Vitter, reinforced his use of mortification, saying she had forgiven her husband when she first

learned about his use of an escort service several years ago: "I made the decision to love him and to recommit to our marriage. To forgive is not always the easy choice, but it was, and is, the right choice for me" (CNN, 2007).

Corrective Action

Vitter's statement said that he had undertaken marriage counseling, an instance of corrective action: "I've gotten up every morning, committed to trying to live up to the important values we believe in" (CNN, 2007).

Transcendence

Vitter argued that his family deserved privacy (a more important value): "Out of respect for my family, I will keep my discussion of the matter there—with God and them" (Murray, 2007). His wife also made a plea "as a mother" to the media to give her family some privacy, noting that reporters have been staking out their home and church. "I would just ask you very respectfully to let us continue our summer, and our lives, as we had planned" (CNN, 2007). Wendy Vitter observed that "in most any other marriage, this would have been a private issue between a husband and a wife. Very private. Obviously, it is not here" (CNN, 2007). These statements all work to suggest that the Vitter family's privacy was important and should supersede prurient interest in this case. David Vitter also briefly suggested that he needed to return to more important work in the Senate: "From here I'll go directly to the airport and to Washington for votes, because I'm eager to continue my work in the U.S. Senate to help Louisiana move forward" (CNN, 2007). He argued that his family's privacy and the Senate's work are more important than an old scandal.

Hypocritical Behavior

Corrective Action

Vitter, who established part of his reputation as a family-values Republican when he criticized President Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinski, said he has been "trying to live up to the important values we believe" since admitting to his mistakes (CNN, 2007). Although he may have engaged in hypocritical behavior in the past, he was no

longer a hypocrite, given that he changed his sinful ways. Of course, only Vitter knows what is in his heart, but he seemed sincere in his desire to mend his ways.

Attack Accuser

He suggested that it was inappropriate for his critics to continue harping on his past: "If continuing to believe in and acknowledge those values causes some to attack me because of my past failure, well, so be it" (Palfrey, 2007). He also suggested that his critics were trying to make money rather than do good: the criticism "might sell newspapers but it wouldn't serve my family or my constituents well at all" (CNN, 2007).

New Orleans Prostitution

Denial

Vitter called this allegation "absolutely and completely untrue" (Murray, 2007); "Those stories are not true" (Palfrey, 2007). "With his wife by his side, [he] denied allegations he had relationships with New Orleans prostitutes" (Palfrey, 2007). Given the fact that he apologized for the D.C. Madam, this denial might have been persuasive for many in his audience.

Attack Accuser

As with those who continued to bring up the "D.C. Madam," Vitter criticized those who claimed he had patronized a New Orleans prostitute, calling the accusation "just crass Louisiana politics" (Murray, 2007). Vitter "attributed those charges to 'long-term political enemies' and people seeking money" (Palfrey, 2007). If these criticisms of his accusers were accepted by the audience, it would have reduced the credibility of these accusations against Vitter.

Evaluation

Senator Vitter's image repair effort was well designed. He bolstered by stressing conservative values. Arguably the most serious accusation was his relationship with the D.C. Madam. He admitted his transgression and apologized (engaged in mortification) and said he was

reforming his behavior (corrective action). He claimed that God and his wife had forgiven him, and his wife confirmed her portion of that forgiveness (the idea of one person attempting to repair the image of another, as Wendy Vitter did here, is explored more in chapter 7). Surely her statement strongly reinforced his use of mortification. Without directly addressing the question of whether he had been a hypocrite in the past, he suggested that by reforming his behavior he was no longer a hypocrite. He seemed sincere, and people tend to believe that most offenders deserve a second chance. Vitter was able to reject the accusation that he had patronized prostitutes in New Orleans, offering the plausible explanation that false attacks were politically motivated. Given the fact that he confessed his transgression with the D.C. Madam, his denial of involvement with the New Orleans prostitute was likely to be accepted. Transcendence (that his family deserves privacy, that he had more important business to attend to in the Senate) played a relatively minor role in his defense, but both points were worth making. His use of minimization was minor, and it would have been a mistake to stress this idea any more than he did. Thus Vitter's image repair effort was well thought out and implemented. The day following the joint press conference, *ABC News* reported, "For the most part, Vitter's tribulations have been met with support from those in his party. After all, as Jesus said, 'let he who is without sin cast the first stone.'" All his critics were not completely silenced, but it was clear he had weathered the initial storm.

Although his defense was probably effective when he made it in 2007, Vitter did not face a true test of his image, because he did not have to run for reelection to the Senate until 2010. This gave him the opportunity to show that he had reformed. The polls certainly showed his image repair had been effective: "Three years later, independent polls have consistently shown Vitter comfortably ahead of his Democratic challenger, maintaining a double-digit lead" (Alpert, 2010). His opponent, Democrat Charlie Melancon, reminded voters of Vitter's immoral behavior. However, Vitter won the election 57% to 38% despite the fact that his opponent campaigned by "playing the prostitution card." Thus Vitter's success in his campaign for reelection shows that he had successfully overcome his image problem.

Conclusion

In 2007, Louisiana senator David Vitter was implicated in the "D.C. Madam" scandal. He dealt effectively with the minor accusations (that

he was a hypocrite and that he had patronized a prostitute in New Orleans). His principle defense was to admit he had transgressed (accepting blame), apologize, correct his behavior, and show forgiveness from his wife. We should not underestimate the importance of his wife's statement that she had forgiven him. Despite the fact that his opponent in the Senate race dredged up this scandal, Vitter easily won reelection to the Senate in 2007. His image repair effort was successful.

Vitter used two image repair messages: a brief e-mail followed by a press conference with his wife. Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici (1991) examined a series of messages from President Ronald Reagan on the Iran-Contra affair: His popularity continued to decline until he confessed to wrongdoing (mortification) and introduced corrective action. Similarly, President Bill Clinton initially denied having a relationship with intern Monica Lewinsky; ultimately he was forced to confess (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). However, Vitter did not have to change his defense, because his initial statement embraced mortification and corrective action. Vitter's press conference allowed him to address the allegations in a more extended message—and more important, address them with his wife standing by his side. Multiple messages are not necessarily problematic, as Vitter's image repair effort shows. Perhaps more important, his wife stood solidly with him. Arguably, one's wife would be hurt even more by infidelity than one's constituents. If she was willing to publically forgive him, that gave others a strong reason to do so as well.

Anthony Weiner's Failed Image Repair Effort

Background

A photograph of a man in underwear appeared on Congressman Anthony Weiner's Twitter account on May 27, 2011. Initially he claimed that his account had been hacked. He dodged questions and claimed that this event was being investigated—although it turned out that neither the capital police nor the FBI had been notified of this by Weiner. He denied posting the photograph and avoided questions about whether it was actually a photograph of him (CNN, 2011). On June 7, he held a press conference to confess his wrongdoing.

Image Repair Effort

Weiner offered several instances of mortification in this statement (2011). He admitted that he had engaged in wrongdoing:

> Over the past few years, I have engaged in several inappropriate conversations conducted over Twitter, Facebook, email, and occasionally on the phone with women I had met online. I have exchanged messages and photos of an explicit nature with about six women over the last three years.

He characterized his behavior as "inappropriate," and most people would agree that when someone who is married exchanges "explicit" messages and photos with multiple people, that is offensive. Weiner also accepted blame for his behavior:

> I'd like to . . . take full responsibility for my actions. At the outset, I'd like to make it clear that I have made terrible mistakes that have hurt the people I care about the most, and I'm deeply sorry. I have not been honest with myself, my family, my constituents, my friends and supporters, and the media.

He not only confessed to inappropriate behavior; he also acknowledged that he had not been honest about it—in other words, he admitted that he lied about these events. Weiner also said he was sorry, expressed regret, and apologized for the harm he did to several people:

> I am deeply sorry for the pain this has caused my wife, Huma, and our family, and my constituents, my friends, supporters and staff.
>
> This woman [Gennette Cordova] was unwittingly dragged into this and bears absolutely no responsibility. I am so sorry to have disrupted her life in this way.
>
> I haven't told the truth, and I've done things I deeply regret. I brought pain to people I care about the most and the people who believed in me, and for that I'm deeply sorry. I apologize to my wife and our families, as well as to our friends and supporters. I'm deeply ashamed of my terrible judgment and actions.

These statements—acknowledging harm to others, expressing regret, and apologizing—are all instances of mortification.

His statement included two other relatively minor strategies. Weiner attempted to minimize his transgressions: "For the most part, these relation—communications took place before my marriage, though some have sadly took place after." Surely this behavior would appear even worse for someone who was married; his offensive behavior continued after his wedding. Weiner also differentiated his behavior from other, more offensive behavior: "To be clear, I have never met these any of these women or had physical relationships at any time." Messages and photos are less offensive than illicit physical contact.

Evaluation

The mortification came too late to help his image very much: The fact that he lied initially undermined his image repair. If Weiner had come clean at the very beginning, his use of mortification might have worked better. The basic ideas—admitting wrong doing, expressing regret, apologizing for inappropriate behavior—were well chosen, but they came too late, after he lied. The attempt at minimization was ill chosen—saying part of his offensive behavior occurred before his marriage means some of it occurred afterward. Differentiation may have helped a bit, but outrage over his lies meant that his image was still damaged. Furthermore, many people may have found his behavior inexplicable. You may deplore the actions of a bank robber or an affair by an adulterer, but most people understand the idea of trying to obtain money or have sex. Why Weiner sent pictures and messages is difficult to understand and, accordingly, more difficult to forgive. What was he thinking?

Conclusion

Politics is inherently partisan, competitive, and newsworthy. Accordingly, image repair is an important aspect of this context. This chapter offers new case studies of successful (Vitter) and unsuccessful (Weiner) image repair. Politicians can be counted on to defend themselves and their policies (for the latter, see Benoit, 2007). Political scandal will endure, and work on this should continue.

Chapter 5

Sports/Entertainment Image Repair

Sports is a multibillion-dollar enterprise, accounting for $435 billion in the United States alone (Plunkett Research, 2012). The entertainment industry, including film and television, adds billions more. People spend substantial time and money on sports and entertainment. Athletes and other celebrities encounter threats to image as do other people—and not surprisingly we find image repair in this arena. This chapter investigates image repair in sports and entertainment.

Image repair from celebrities is different than image repair from corporations and politicians, as discussed in earlier chapters (Benoit, 1997). Hugh Grant faced reports of his wrongdoing (patronizing a prostitute), but in contrast to politicians, it was unlikely that other actors would attack him. Celebrities can be important role models, but they do not affect the lives of others the way politicians and corporations do. Corporations can sacrifice employees, firing them in an attempt to cleanse their image; actors do not have this option. This chapter will review some of the research in this area and then examine two new case studies: the New Orleans Saints' bounty program and Lance Armstrong's interview with Oprah Winfrey.

Kruse (1981) argues that team sport is "a phenomenon of cultural import" (p. 270) in an early investigation of image repair in sports. She explained that athletes who attempt to repair their images must understand the "ethic of team sport," which "holds that the team is greater than any of its individual members" (p. 273). She concludes,

> In defending their characters, sport figures use the same strategies other apologists employ. However, it is incumbent upon those who have violated the sport ethic to assure fans that equilibrium has been restored, and a stable relationship exists between the team and the fates. Consequently,

> sport apologists assert their positive attitudes toward the game. For this reason, too, they express sorrow for their behaviors. (p. 283)

Since then, several studies have investigated image repair from sports and other celebrities.

Nelson (1984) examined defenses by other sports figures after revelations that tennis star Billie Jean King had engaged in an affair with her former secretary; she used bolstering (stressing her marriage and family life, showing honesty) and differentiation (she had an affair with another woman but she did not embrace a homosexual lifestyle). Others employed strategies not used by King in her defense. King's peers in the sport of tennis used a different approach to bolstering, stressing the good she had done (e.g., advancing the cause of women) and arguing that this affair was a private choice. The media collaborated in this defense, covering King's remarks and generally being supportive.

American figure skater Tonya Harding was accused of involvement in the attack on rival Nancy Kerrigan prior to the 1994 Winter Olympics (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994). Harding could not compete in the U.S. Championships but did skate in Lillihammer. Harding participated in an interview on *Eye to Eye with Connie Chung* in which her main strategies were bolstering, denial, and attacking accusers. Benoit and Hanczor evaluate this defense as ineffective.

Actor Hugh Grant was arrested for lewd behavior with a prostitute. He attempted to repair his image on several late-night talk shows, relying mainly on mortification, bolstering, and attacking accusers (the news media was attacked for hounding his family, not for stories about Grant's misbehavior). His defense was evaluated as successful (Benoit, 1997a).

Benoit and Nill (1998b) investigated director Oliver Stone's defense of his film *JFK*. Stone's direction of the film, his sources, and the conspiracy theory of Kennedy's death were all criticized in the wake of his film. He attacked his accusers, bolstered the credibility of his major sources, denied the lone-gunman theory, and denied charges of inaccuracy in the film. This defense was evaluated favorably.

Brazeal (2008) investigated the image repair strategies of Terrell Owens, an American football player who was publicly critical of his team, the Philadelphia Eagles. Owens made a vague apology without admitting any fault on his part. His manager provided a more extensive defense, attacking Owens's accusers (the team had not supported

him). The spokesperson bolstered Owens's character, claimed good intentions, and offered mortification for Owens (again without conceding any specific faults). Neither Owens nor his manager employed corrective action, and the image repair effort was unsuccessful.

Bruce and Tini (2008) apply image repair theory to public relations efforts on behalf of the Australasian men's rugby league cap scandal. The Canterbury Bulldogs were accused of cheating by violating the league's salary cap restrictions. The Bulldogs primarily employed denial, moving to scapegoating when their CEO resigned. This strategy was employed again as the Bulldog's entire board resigned. The Leagues Club employed provocation and mortification, shifting to scapegoating the Bulldogs team first and then the Leagues Club spokesperson, who resigned. Bruce and Tini argue for a new strategy, diversion, as the Bulldogs tried to shift attention away from management and toward the welfare of the players.

Fortunato (2008) studied the Duke University lacrosse scandal, in which three of the team's players were alleged to have sexually assaulted an exotic dancer hired for a party. He argued that the university employed mortification (accepting responsibility for the incident), bolstering (stressing positive traits of the university), and corrective action (working to prevent recurrence of the incident). Len-Rios (2010) performed a content analysis on statements from Duke along with newspaper stories on the scandal. When discussing the athletes, the university used denial (of the rape allegation) and mortification (for a lapse in judgment in holding the party). When discussing the university, Duke used bolstering, attacking of accusers, corrective action, and separation (suggesting that the coach was in part to blame and that he would be replaced). The defense was more effective at repairing the athletes' images with the local community than at reaching other audiences.

Pfahl and Bates (2008) investigated events surrounding a problem with apparently defective Michelin tires at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. After two crashes during practice, Michelin asked the international racing organization, the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), to change the rules for the race. FIA employed transcendence (it is important to uphold the rules of the sport and apply them consistently) and attack accuser (blaming Michelin for problems and suggesting Michelin reimburse fans). Michelin used transcendence in a different way, arguing safety was the most important consideration. It shifted blame to FIA for not adopting any of Michelin's alternative solutions. The tire company also used corrective action, vowing to investigate the problem and fix it. Michelin-supported

racing teams blamed Michelin and also argued for the importance of safety (transcendence). Finally, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway also blamed Michelin and used defeasibility (the problems were beyond the speedway's control). It is clear that image repair in team sport deserves further research.

Vice President Dick Cheney injured Harry Whittington in 2006 during a hunting party. Although he was vice president at the time, this incident did not concern his elected office. He was criticized for the accident as well as for maintaining a public silence about the incident for 4 days. Theye (2008) offers a narrative analysis of his defense, arguing that his narrative defense for shooting his hunting partner was generally effective, but his attempt to respond to charges of his handling of the situation was less successful.

Cyclist Floyd Landis was accused of using illegal performance-enhancing substances to win the Tour de France in 2006. Glantz (2009) argued that his use of denial and differentiation was inconsistent, his use of attack accuser was unpersuasive, and the supporters who offered third party defenses lacked credibility. Thus his image repair effort was ineffectual.

Wen, Yu, and Benoit (2009) investigated defenses of Taiwanese major league pitcher Chien-ming Wang after lost games. They examined defenses by Wang and by Taiwanese newspapers. They argued that the newspapers could utilize strategies such as blaming his teammates that Wang could not (or should not) employ.

Swimmer Michael Phelps earned distinction for winning more Olympic medals than anyone in history. A picture appeared in a tabloid that showed him smoking marijuana from a pipe. Walsh and McAllister-Spooner (2011) found that he effectively used mortification, bolstering, and corrective action to repair his image.

Brown, Dickhaus, and Long (2012) report data from a laboratory study about basketball star LeBron James's decision to leave the Cleveland Cavaliers for the Miami Heat in 2010. They created a newspaper article about this incident and manipulated the image repair strategy described in the story. Mortification was more effective at repairing James's image than shifting the blame or bolstering.

Benoit (2013) investigated Tiger Woods's image repair discourse after the revelation of his marital infidelity. He relied mainly on mortification and corrective action for his infidelity, also using transcendence (right to privacy) and attacking accusers for hounding his family. His choice of strategies was appropriate, but some wondered why he waited so long to give his speech and questioned his sincerity.

Blaney, Lippert, and Smith's 2013 book offers many other analyses of image repair in sports. Husselbee and Stein (2012) used the concept of *antapologia* (Stein, 2008; critical response to an apology) to examine newspaper responses to Tiger Woods's 2010 apology for his infidelity. Content analysis revealed that coverage stressed the athlete's character flaws, argued that he had not sufficiently accepted responsibility for his offense, and questioned his motive for apologizing.

Actor Ricky Gervais created controversy when he hosted the *Golden Globe Awards* in 2011; critics thought his jokes crossed the line of good taste. Kauffman (2012) looked at his image repair effort on *Piers Morgan Tonight*. Gervais used denial, minimization, bolstering, good intentions, transcendence, and attack accuser; he threw out a half-hearted attempt at mortification (saying he was sorry if some were offended but he did not do anything wrong). This defense was evaluated as ineffective.

Research into image repair in the entertainment domain has examined athletes and other celebrities. Most research focuses on the discourse provided by the accused, but some research examined newspaper coverage and conducted audience effects experiments in the laboratory. This chapter offers two additional examples of image repair in sports: the New Orleans Saints football team's response to allegations that bounties were paid for injuring opposing players, and Lance Armstrong's interview with Oprah Winfrey about his doping.

New Orleans Saints Bounties

In 2012, the New Orleans Saints football program admitted to the existence of a "bounty" program in which players were paid bonuses to hit players from the opposing team so as to knock the other player out of the game (CNN, 2012; see also New Orleans Saints, 2012). Football is a contact sport, but creating financial incentives to *intentionally* injure opposing players is going too far. This practice is morally reprehensible; it would be bad enough for a player on his own initiative to try to hurt an opponent so badly that opponent would have to leave the game, but to institutionalize this practice by paying players bonuses for engaging in unsportsmanlike conduct deserves severe condemnation.

CNN (2012) reported on the accusations about the bounty program leveled against the New Orleans Saints football organization:

> The National Football League reported Friday that the Saints paid defensive players a bounty for injuring opponents, as

> well as making interceptions and fumble recoveries, during the 2009–2011 seasons. The program involved as many as 27 players and at least one assistant coach, the league concluded. The league said the program was administered by then-defensive coordinator Gregg Williams, with knowledge of other coaches. Players regularly contributed cash to a pool, which may have topped $50,000 at its peak. The players were paid $1,500 for a "knockout," when an opposing player was not able to return to the game, and $1,000 for a "cart-off," when an opposing player had to be carried off the field. In some cases, particular players on the opposing team were targeted.

This scandal damaged the reputation of the New Orleans Saints football team. *Sports Illustrated* (2012) declared, "Make no mistake: the New Orleans bounty saga will go down as one of the worst chapters in NFL history." The team's image was clearly damaged.

The New Orleans Saints responded with image repair discourse. Head Coach Sean Payton and General Manager Mickey Loomis issued a statement, saying they accepted "full responsibility" for this program, which "happened under our watch" (CNN, 2012). They acknowledged that these were "serious violations, and we understand the negative impact it has had on our game" (CNN, 2012). These statements illustrate mortification: Payton and Loomis admitted that an offensive action had occurred and they accepted responsibility for it.

Although the head coach and general manager accepted responsibility themselves, they were quick to deny that the Saints' owner Tom Benson was involved in the bounty program. Payton and Loomis said they were "sorry for the 'undue hardship' the violations had caused Benson, 'who had nothing to do with this activity'" (CNN, 2012). This can be considered a (brief) instance of third party image repair, where one party (Payton and Loomis) issues an image repair effort on behalf of a third party (Benson; see chapter 7 for more on third party image repair).

Payton and Loomis also made use of corrective action, declaring, "Both of us have made it clear within our organization that this will never happen again, and make that same promise to the NFL and most importantly to all of our fans" (CNN, 2012). Saints owner Tom Benson said that "the team cooperated with the [NFL's] investigation" (CNN, 2012).

This scandal also tarnished the National Football League's reputation. *Sports Illustrated* pointed out that "the backdrop of this story

is the 1,200 or so former NFL players who are in the process of suing the league over concussion and head-trauma issues" (2012). The possibility that some of these injuries might be intentional rather than accidental makes the problem even worse. NFL commissioner Roger Goodell sent a message that this kind of misconduct would not be tolerated, a form of corrective action for the league (not just for the New Orleans Saints). Goodell suspended four players for 31 games in 2012; Jonathan Vilma, who was reported to have been the key instigator in the bounty program, was suspended for the entire season. Former defensive coordinator for the Saints Gregg Williams was suspended indefinitely; Head Coach Sean Payton was suspended for a year; General Manager Mickey Loomis was suspended for eight games; and Assistant Head Coach Joe Vitt received a six-game suspension (*Sports Illustrated*, 2012).

This image repair effort was not particularly impressive. Mortification and corrective action are appropriate responses, but the idea of paying bounties to injure players is simply not justifiable. Apologizing and stopping this offensive behavior was the right thing to do, but still the bounty program was simply wrong. The game of football will continue, and the New Orleans Saints will continue playing it. However, the bounty scandal was a large bump in the road that required image repair discourse from both the Saints and the NFL to navigate. It may take some time for the damaged images to recover.

Lance Armstrong on Oprah Winfrey

Lance Armstrong is a legendary cyclist who successfully fought cancer, founded the Livestrong Foundation, and won the Tour de France seven times. Armstrong was diagnosed with cancer in 1996 and underwent surgery and chemotherapy. In 1997 he established the Lance Armstrong Foundation, later renamed the Livestrong Foundation, to support people with cancer. He won the Tour de France in 1999 and went on to win the next six of these races, an unprecedented accomplishment (CNN, 2013). However, allegations that Armstrong doped (used banned performance-enhancing substances) started emerging. Weislo (2012) lists some of the many accusations of doping made against Armstrong over the years, including allegations from *L'Equipe* in 1999, Walsh and Ballester's book *L.A. confidential: Les secrets de Lance Armstrong* in 2004, and teammate Floyd Landis in 2010 after Landis admitted his own doping. Armstrong's supporters did not remain

silent and neither did he, issuing numerous denials of doping (Associated Press, 2013). Furthermore, Armstrong actively worked to stifle criticism. For example, Thompson, Vinton, O'Keeffe, and Red (2013) reported that

> Armstrong unleashed a shotgun blast of litigation at virtually everyone involved with *L.A. confidential: Les secrets de Lance Armstrong*. Just as the book was hitting shelves in Europe, Armstrong sued the authors, the publisher, the sources (including Emma O'Reilly [a cycling team masseuse]), a magazine that ran an excerpt, and the *Sunday Times of London*, the British newspaper that ran a preview of the book.

The Department of Justice investigated Armstrong but did not bring charges (CNN, 2013). In October 2012, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) issued a report condemning Armstrong. CEO Travis Tygart began by stressing the quality of the evidence used to draw conclusions:

> The evidence of the US Postal Service Pro Cycling team-run scheme is overwhelming and is in excess of 1000 pages, and includes sworn testimony from 26 people, including 15 riders with knowledge of the US Postal Service Team (USPS Team) and its participants' doping activities. The evidence also includes direct documentary evidence including financial payments, emails, scientific data and laboratory tests that further prove the use, possession, and distribution of performance enhancing drugs by Lance Armstrong and confirm the disappointing truth about the deceptive activities of the USPS Team, a team that received tens of millions of American taxpayer dollars in funding.

Lance Armstrong was accused of doping and distributing performance-enhancing drugs. Tygart noted that several athletes came forward to help the investigation: "Lance Armstrong was given the same opportunity to come forward and be part of the solution. He rejected it." Some cyclists on the USPS Team contested the charges; in contrast, Armstrong "exercised his legal right not to contest the evidence and knowingly accepted the imposition of a ban from recognized competition for life and disqualification of his competitive results from 1998 forward." The accusations against Armstrong appeared very damaging, particularly when he decided not to challenge his ban and he was stripped of his titles. The

charges he faced were (1) that he doped (which meant he cheated in his sport and allegedly defrauded the USPS and American taxpayers by accepting sponsorship), (2) that he distributed performance-enhancing drugs to the USPS Team and encouraged doping, and (3) that he lied about doping and falsely attacked his accusers.

In January 2012, Armstrong appeared in an interview with Oprah Winfrey broadcast over 2 days (BBC, 2013a, 2013b). *Yahoo!TV* (2013) reports that the 9:00 p.m. broadcast had 3.2 million viewers, making it the second-highest-rated program on the Oprah Winfrey Network. The episode was rebroadcast at 10:30, when 1.1 million viewers watched. And of course, Armstrong's defense was widely discussed in the media. So directly and indirectly, this image repair effort had a huge audience. Armstrong used four strategies in his image repair interview: mortification, defeasibility, denial, and differentiation.

Mortification

He admitted that he had taken banned substances, including EPO, testosterone, and human grown hormone, and that he used blood transfusions to enhance his performance. Furthermore, he did not dispute the statement, "You were defiant, you called other people liars." He also said that "a lot of people" helped promote his false story but "all of the fault and all of the blame here falls on me." He stated, "They are my mistakes and I am sitting here today to acknowledge that and to say I'm sorry for that." He also agreed that he felt disgraced: "I also feel humbled and ashamed . . . Do I have remorse? Absolutely. Will it grow? Absolutely. This is my first step and these are my actions. I am paying the price but I deserve it." Armstrong continued, "People who believed in me and supported me . . . have every right to feel betrayed and it is my fault and I'll spend the rest of my life trying to earn back trust and apologize to people." In discussing his lawsuit against Emma O'Riley, he said that "we sued so many people I don't even [know if we sued her]. I'm sure we did." Admitting that accusations are true, accepting blame, and expressing remorse are all aspects of mortification.

Defeasibility

Armstrong also used defeasibility, asserting that "I didn't invent the culture" even while conceding he "didn't try to stop the culture."

When he said he was sorry, he ended by saying, "The culture was what it was." He also implied that he used testosterone because he was "running low" on testosterone after his battle with cancer.

Denial

He also selectively used denial in his defense. When Oprah quoted Tygart's accusation that Armstrong was involved in the "biggest, most sophisticated, professional, and successful doping program sport has ever seen," Armstrong said that was false because the "East German doping program in the '70s and '80s" was bigger. He claimed he did not use doping or blood transfusions after 2005. He also denied that there was a positive test for banned substances in the 2001 Tour de Suisse: "That story isn't true. There was no positive test."

Differentiation

Oprah said, "You've said dozens of times in interviews that you never failed a test." He responded, "No, I didn't fail a test. Retroactively, I failed one. The hundreds of tests I took, I passed them. There was retroactive stuff later." Armstrong argued that when the tests were originally taken, they did not reveal use of banned substances. However, when samples were retested later, banned substances were found. He also argued that he did not cheat; his use of performance-enhancing substances leveled the playing field, on which others doped. This statement attempted to differentiate what he did from cheating.

USADA Antapologia

Stein (2008) developed the concept of *antapologia*, an attacking message issued *after* an image repair effort designed to respond to and undermine that defense. An instance of this phenomenon occurred in the Armstrong scandal. After the Oprah interview, Tygart (CEO of the USADA) declared that Armstrong "misled Winfrey and the many viewers tuning in" to the interview (Fitzgerald, 2013):

> It's not true that the former cyclist tried a clean comeback. Just contrary to the evidence . . . His blood tests in 2009, 2010—expert reports based on the variation of his blood

> values—from those tests, one to a million chance that it was due to something other than doping.

Furthermore, Tygart stated that Armstrong

> also wasn't telling the truth when he said he used only small amounts of the blood booster EPO . . . He used a lot of EPO. You look at the '99 Tour de France samples and they were flaming positive, the highest that we've ever seen. And he's now acknowledged those were positive.

Tygart attempted to undermine Armstrong's defense by disputing some of the claims made in the interview.

Evaluation

Lance Armstrong was an inspiration to many, as he won seven Tour de France races, and his story was even more impressive knowing that he overcame cancer to achieve these feats. The Livestrong Foundation he established was an important organization that he promoted off the field. However, these accomplishments pale in light of the revelation that he cheated competitors, fans, and taxpayers by doping and strenuously lied about using performance-enhancing drugs for years. He ruthlessly destroyed the lives of others who tried to expose his wrongdoing.

His image repair effort used mortification, which was clearly needed in this situation. However, four things hampered his attempts to cleanse his reputation. First, he lied for years, he lied vigorously, and he repeatedly attacked those who attempted to expose his wrongdoing. This pattern of lies left his fans with little sympathy and inclined them to be skeptical of his defense. In particular, his relentless use of denial made it difficult for his audience to believe his remorse was genuine. The fact that he only "came clean" after the USADA released the evidence of his doping, banned him from recognized competition for life, and disqualified his results after 1998 does not make this look like a voluntary and remorseful mortification. He admitted that his doping did not "feel wrong" to him. Second, his defense was inconsistent, veering back and forth between saying it was his fault and then using other strategies, such as shifting blame (others helped tell his false story) or using the culture of the sport as

an excuse (defeasibility). He simply could not admit to wrongdoing without adding excuses, differentiation, and denial. Using strategies such as these tended to undermine his defense: It was clear that he did *not* accept full responsibility for his offensive acts, because he tried to make excuses (e.g., "It wasn't my fault, it was the culture where you had to dope to win"). Third, some of his arguments were so weak as to be silly—for example, arguing that his doping was not the biggest instance in history because one other doping scandal was bigger (that of the East Germans, he claimed). So is the argument that we should forgive him because he only ran the second-biggest doping operation in history? Similarly, arguing that the original test did not detect the banned substance, which was detected later, does not prove him innocent of doping but only that his guilt wasn't established until later. Can a person who robbed a bank 5 years ago claim innocence because his guilt wasn't proven until this year? Fourth, the *antapologia* from Tygart also undermined his defense. It appeared as if Armstrong's pattern of lies continued. For these reasons I evaluate Lance Armstrong's image repair interview on Oprah Winfrey a failure.

Conclusion

Athletes and other celebrities commit real or imaged offenses, giving rise to the need for image repair discourse. In the case of the New Orleans Saints' bounty program, the scandal tarnished not only the Saints (and individual players and coaches who were with the team) but also the National Football League. This shows that an offensive act can tarnish more than the perpetrator: At times others are responsible for oversight and for preventing the offensive actions. The Armstrong case illustrates the limits of image repair; Armstrong lied for so long about his doping that it was difficult for the audience to accept anything he said in his defense. This analysis of Armstrong's interview shows again that using weak arguments is detrimental in image repair. This case also illustrates Stein's concept of *antapologia* in Tygart's statement contradicting some of Armstrong's defenses.

Chapter 6

International Image Repair

Most studies of image repair concern discourse that arises in the United States. However, it is obvious that threats to image, and discourse intended to repair damaged images, occur throughout the world. International image repair can be conceptualized as occurring in two distinct situations. First, simply because current image repair research mainly investigates American crises, studies of image repair occurring in other countries are important contributions to the literature (this can be considered non-U.S. image repair). Second, and perhaps even more interesting, are studies of image repair that cross borders, involving a clash of cultures (this situation will be called international image repair). Previous research has investigated image repair discourse in both situations. After reviewing some of the research in this area, new case studies on international corporate and diplomatic image repair are presented.

Benoit and Brinson (1999) examined the controversy over the tragic death of Princess Diana, illustrating non-U.S. image repair. Royals are often reserved, and some accused the royal family of not caring about Princess Di's death. Queen Elizabeth employed image repair, using denial and bolstering and, to a lesser extent, defeasibility and transcendence. Although the world was interested in Princess Di, the Queen's image repair appeared mainly designed for a British audience, her subjects. Her defense is evaluated as generally effective in this instance.

In other cases, image repair originating in one country is intended for an audience in another country. In the wake of the tragic events of 9/11, Saudi Arabia engaged in image repair, as 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudis. The country was accused of supporting terrorism and refusing to support a possible U.S. invasion of Iraq. Zhang and Benoit (2004) analyzed the country's campaign to repair its image in the United States via advertisements on television

and radio and in publications. The image repair effort relied heavily on denial and bolstering and was evaluated as generally persuasive.

In 2001, the USS submarine *Greeneville* destroyed a Japanese trawler, the *Ehime Maru*, killing nine people. Drumheller and Benoit (2004) studied the United States' image repair discourse. The defense primarily employed mortification. However, the U.S. government apparently did not fully understand Japanese cultural norms, which hold that the offender should apologize directly to the families of the victims. The Japanese government, perhaps because of the importance of Japanese-U.S. relations, was more accepting of the apology than the Japanese people. This case study illustrates international image repair.

Kampf (2008) investigated 273 apologies by public and political figures in Israel between 1997 and 2004. More apologies were accepted than rejected. He argued that (1) apologies are more likely to be accepted when the offender appears embarrassed and (2) severity of the offense is inversely related to acceptance.

In 2007, exports from China faced several crises involving the safety of such products as pet food, candy, toothpaste, toys, and pajamas. Products were banned and recalled. Peijuan, Ting, and Pang (2009) investigated China's image repair discourse on products "Made in China." The image repair efforts employed denial, shifting blame, bolstering, and corrective action. Use of denial and bolstering at the same time as corrective action was judged to be ineffective.

Chinese health minister Zhang Wenkang was accused of an ineffectual response to the SARS outbreak in China as well as an attempt to cover up the severity of the epidemic. Zhang employed a variety of strategies—denial, defeasibility, bolstering, minimization, differentiation, attack accuser, and, near the end, corrective action. This defense was evaluated as ineffective, and Zhang was removed as health minister (Zhang & Benoit, 2009).

Meng (2010) looked at SK-II, which sold cosmetics in China. The company was accused of false advertising and not disclosing its products' ingredients. The image repair effort used denial, accident, bolstering, minimization, and eventually corrective action. Meng criticized the company for not using apology or compensation and evaluates the defense as generally ineffective. In these case studies of image repair in non-U.S. countries, the primary audiences were from the same country as the image repair rhetor (see also Wen, Yu, & Benoit's 2009 analysis of Taiwanese pitcher Chien-ming Wang, reviewed in chapter 5).

The United States and Taiwan experienced devastating weather when Hurricane Katrina and Typhoon Morokot struck. Both governments were accused of inordinately slow responses to these disasters. Low, Varughese, and Pang (2011) investigated news reports of the image repair efforts of these governments. Taiwan relied mainly on mortification and corrective action, whereas the United States predominantly used defeasibility and bolstering.

After a case of mad cow disease occurred in the United States in 2003, American beef was banned by 65 countries, including Taiwan. The image repair effort employed denial, bolstering, minimization, attack accuser, and a thinly veiled threat. This defense was evaluated as generally ineffective (Wen, Yu, & Benoit, 2012). This case study illustrates image repair discourse that is genuinely international, with a source in one country (in this case, the United States) attempting to persuade an audience in other country (Taiwan). Sometimes disparate cultural norms can complicate this situation.

Chapter 7 on third party image repair also reviews research that can also be considered international image repair, including several studies on Japanese apologies for the use of "comfort women" (sex slaves) for the Japanese Armed Forces in World War II. This chapter now turns to additional case studies on image repair discourse around the world: non-U.S. corporate image repair and international diplomatic image repair.

Non-U.S. Corporate Image Repair

This section of the chapter offers illustrations of image repair discourse about Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World* and the phone hacking scandal and Apple's apology to China over criticisms of its warranty practices. Opt (2013) examines this controversy using the Rhetoric of Social Intervention Model.

Rupert Murdoch and News of the World

One of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers, *News of the World*, became embroiled in a scandal over phone hacking. In November 2005, *News of the World* published a story about Prince William that raised suspicion that the newspaper had illegally hacked into phone messages. An editor, Clive Goodman, and a private investigator were convicted of hacking into the voicemail of royals and sent to jail.

Several settlements from *News of the World* to victims were paid (Hume & Wilkinson, 2012). Hume and Wilkinson (2012) summarized the main elements of the scandal: "Accusations that journalists at Rupert Murdoch's British newspapers hacked into the phones of politicians, celebrities and unwitting people caught up in the news—including child murder victims—have severely bruised his media empire." This was a scandal with serious consequences:

> The scandal forced the closure of Britain's top-selling paper, the *News of the World*, resulted in the withdrawal of his bid for the satellite broadcaster BSkyB, and led to criminal charges being laid against former senior News International figures, including his trusted UK chief executive Rebekah Brooks. It also led to a wide-ranging inquiry into press standards by Lord Leveson. (Hume & Wilkinson, 2012)

There is no doubt that Rupert Murdoch, *News of the World*, and the parent company, News Corp, faced a serious image threat in this case.

This analysis examines two newspaper ads run in mid-July 2011 by Murdoch (ironically, he paid to have them printed in other newspapers, including the *Guardian*, which had carried stories about this scandal). The first one was a letter titled "We are Sorry" and relied mainly on two strategies: mortification and corrective action. The letter, signed by Rupert Murdoch, started by elaborating on the headline:

> The News of the World was in the business of holding others to account. It failed when it came to itself. We are sorry for the serious wrongdoing that occurred. We are deeply sorry for the hurt suffered by the individuals affected. We regret not acting faster to sort things out. (Reuters, 2011)

This is a clear illustration of mortification. It acknowledged wrongdoing, apologized for hurting people, and expressed regret. Second, Murdoch promised corrective action: "I realize that simply apologizing is not enough . . . In the coming days . . . we [will] take further concrete steps to resolve these issues." He also briefly used compensation, declaring that they would "make amends for the damage they have caused, you will hear more from us." These statements, promising to "resolve" problems and "make amends" for harm, are clear examples of corrective action.

This message was immediately followed up with another advertisement, titled "Putting Right What's Gone Wrong," a clear reference to

corrective action (*Telegraph*, 2011). This message begins with mortification: "We are appalled by the allegations that some individuals at the News of the World failed to uphold the values of decency and the rule of law." The ad then mentions one instance of corrective action: "This led to the closure of the newspaper." The *Telegraph* (2011) reported that the ad also acknowledged that the parent company's "obligation" includes "Full co-operation with the Police"; News Corp is "committed to change" and promises, "We will not tolerate wrongdoing and will act on any evidence that comes to light." In addition to corrective action, the advertisement briefly mentions "compensation for those affected."

This image repair effort employed three strategies: mortification, corrective action, and compensation. These are plausible choices in this situation, but the corrective action was too vague. For example, Murdoch could have established oversight for his remaining media outlets, such as an ombudsman. Closing the *News of the World* was a very dramatic form of corrective action. Generally, these messages were good choices and may eventually help News Corp's and Murdoch's images. When you do something that is clearly wrong, it is appropriate to admit wrongdoing (if image repair is the primary goal) and undertake corrective action. However, eventually doing the right thing is not as good for one's image as never having done something wrong.

Apple Apologizes to China

As Cheng (2013) notes, China is "an important market to Apple." Complaints arose concerning Apple's warranty service in China, prompting a letter from Apple CEO Tim Cook. Cheng (2013) explained,

> The letter comes about a week after Chinese state media began its open criticism of Apple and its response—or lack thereof—to warranty complaints. The *People's Daily* even ran a front-page piece calling Apple "arrogant" in dealing with Chinese consumers, saying Apple ignored customers and offered sub-par customer service.

This case study relies on a translation of the letter, which, appropriately for the intended audience, was written in Chinese (He, 2013).

Cook's image repair effort relied primarily on mortification and corrective action, with brief use of minimization and bolstering. Cook stated that

> We are aware that insufficient communications during this process has led to the perception that Apple is arrogant and disregard[s], or pays little attention to, consumer feedback. We express our sincere apologies for any concern or misunderstanding arising therefrom. (He, 2013)

His statement apologizes for the concerns that arose in China over Apple's warranty policies.

Next, he used corrective action, highlighting four actions designed to improve the quality of Apple's service:

> In order to further improve our service levels, we are implementing the following four major adjustments:
>
> - Improve the repair policy for iPhone4 and iPhone4S.
> - Provide a concise and clear repair and warranty policy statement on Apple's official website.
> - Strengthen supervision and training efforts on Apple's authorized service providers.
> - Make sure that consumers can easily contact Apple for feedback on our service and other related issues.

Each of these four points was elaborated in the letter. Cook also stressed that his goal was to "give the best user experience and customer satisfaction, even more it is our promise. It has been deeply rooted in Apple's corporate culture. We will make unremitting efforts to achieve this goal" (He, 2013). These four points, and Apple's declaration of intent to improve its warranty service, constitute a clear use of corrective action.

While acknowledging the complaints that prompted his statement (and Apple's corrective action), Cook attempted to minimize the problem. He noted, "Nearly 90% [of] customers have expressed their satisfactions to [*sic*] our repair service" (He, 2013). Cook also attempted to bolster Apple's relationship with China: "We give our heartfelt thanks to everyone for valuable feedback. We always bear immense respect for China and the Chinese consumers are always our priority among priorities" (He, 2013). Stressing the company's respect for China helped bolster the company's reputation.

This image repair effort is well designed—both mortification and corrective action were needed—although the Chinese might remain skeptical until proof of Apple's resolve is established. This incident is

also interesting because the Chinese state media conveyed the accusations against Apple.

International Diplomatic Image Repair

In 2013, Israeli's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, apologized to Turkey for the deaths of eight Turkish citizens resulting from an Israeli raid on a Gaza flotilla (Madhani, 2013). Netanyahu "acknowledged 'operational mistakes' in the raid and said he 'regretted' the incident had led to a deterioration of the two countries' relationship" (Madhani, 2013). This image repair effort occurred in a telephone call and used mortification. In 2011, Israel apologized to Egypt for an incident in which five Egyptian border guards were killed by Israeli troops who were pursuing militants who crossed into Israel from Egypt and killed Israeli citizens (Flower, 2011). Initially Israel issued a statement of regret, but Egypt was not satisfied and threatened to recall its ambassador. Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak ordered an investigation and then "decided to express his apology to Egypt over the death of every Egyptian policeman who was killed on duty as a result of Israeli fire" (Flower, 2011). This incident also illustrates how a country (in this case, Egypt) can prompt image repair.

The following section illustrates another example of international image repair: the U.S. image repair following the accidental killing of Pakistani soldiers in 2011.

U.S. Image Repair for Pakistani Soldiers

In November 2011, a NATO airstrike killed 24 Pakistani soldiers. Pakistan wanted an apology and, as leverage, threatened to raise fees charged on trucks carrying NATO supplies from Pakistan to Afghanistan from $250 to $5,000 per truck (Schmitt, 2012). U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton spoke on the telephone with Pakistan's foreign minister, Rabbani Khar, and issued a statement about their conversation (Associated Press, 2012). Clinton used three strategies in her image repair effort: mortification, corrective action, and bolstering.

The secretary of state began the statement with mortification:

> I once again reiterated our deepest regrets for the tragic incident in Salala last November. I offered our sincere

> condolences to the families of the Pakistani soldiers who lost their lives. Foreign Minister Khar and I acknowledged the mistakes that resulted in the loss of Pakistani military lives. We are sorry for the losses suffered by the Pakistani military.

Expressions of regret and condolences as well as admitting mistakes clearly enact mortification. However, as Schmitt (2012) explained,

> Mrs. Clinton and her top aides, working closely with senior White House and Pentagon officials, carefully calibrated what she would say in her phone call to Ms. Khar to avoid an explicit mention of what one top State Department official called "the A-word"—"apology." Instead, Mrs. Clinton opted for the softer "sorry" to meet Pakistan's longstanding demand for a more formal apology for the airstrikes.

Using the words *apology* or *apologize* may have made the United States look weak. As discussed earlier, mortification can include several elements, and Clinton's statement attempted to appease Pakistan without creating the impression that America was weak.

Clinton also employed corrective action, pledging, "We are committed to working closely with Pakistan and Afghanistan to prevent this from ever happening again." She also explained that

> Foreign Minister Khar and I talked about the importance of taking coordinated action against terrorists who threaten Pakistan, the United States, and the region; of supporting Afghanistan's security, stability, and efforts towards reconciliation; and of continuing to work together to advance the many other shared interests we have, from increasing trade and investment to strengthening our people-to-people ties. (Associated Press, 2012)

Thus the secretary of state talked about preventing this kind of tragedy from occurring again; she also talked about working together with Pakistan to fight terrorism and pursue other shared interests.

Finally, her statement used bolstering, declaring that "America respects Pakistan's sovereignty." She also declared that

> our troops—Pakistani and American—are in a fight against a common enemy. We are both sorry for losses suffered by

> both our countries in this fight against terrorists. We have enhanced our counter-terrorism cooperation against terrorists that threaten Pakistan and the United States, with the goal of defeating Al-Qaida in the region. (Associated Press, 2012)

This statement stresses goals that the United States and Pakistan share.

This incident illustrates two key points. First, mortification includes a variety of options, and in this case the secretary of state did not wish to use the words *apology* or *apologize*; given the ambiguity of saying you are sorry and expressing regret, you could be accepting blame *or* expressing sympathy. Second, actors need to be concerned about the possibility that an apology could provide evidence that could be used against them in a lawsuit. Image repair may not be the only goal at stake in an image repair effort. In this case, Clinton wanted to placate another country (Pakistan) and avoid threatened reprisals (increasing the truck fee from $250 to $5,000). Repairing one's image can be extremely important, but we must keep in mind that at times other goals are in play as well.

Conclusion

Image repair is a fundamental component of human communication. Although most research has focused on image repair in the United States, a growing number of studies address image repair in other countries—and between countries as well. This chapter illustrated several corporate and governmental image repair efforts—and of course, image repair by individuals and other organizations occurs as well. Image repair discourse, like other forms of persuasive communication, must keep in mind the audience and its culture for maximum persuasiveness. Further exploration of image repair beyond the United States and between countries is imperative.

Chapter 7

Third Party Image Repair

The literature on image repair generally investigates messages from those who are accused or suspected of wrongdoing (Benoit, 1995). Consistent with this emphasis, Ware and Linkugel's (1973) landmark essay is titled "They Spoke in Defense of *Themselves*" (p. 273; emphasis added). In most image repair situations, the accused attempts to repair his or her image with an audience. On some occasions, however, an image repair is offered on another's behalf by someone who did not actually commit the offensive act. Such image repair efforts from others can be considered "third party apologies" (the victim and the perpetrator can be considered the first two parties in an offensive event). Third party image repair efforts appear to be occurring more frequently (e.g., Nobles, 2008; Sugimoto & Sugimoto, 1999; Yamazaki, 2006). For example, Brooks (1999) observes that

> with apologies coming from all corners of the world—Britain's Queen Elizabeth apologizing to the Maori people; Australia to the stolen aboriginal children; the Canadian government to the Canadian Ukrainians; President Bill Clinton to many groups, including native Hawaiians and African American survivors of the Tuskegee, Alabama, syphilis experiment; South Africa's former president F. W. de Klerk to victims of Apartheid; and Polish, French, and Czech notables for human injustices perpetrated during World War II—we have clearly entered what can be called the "Age of Apology." (p. 1)

Yamazaki (2006) discussed public apologies, image repair messages from governments. She explained,

> Public apologies of national governments for historical misdeeds have become a familiar, if not commonplace,

> phenomenon of public life. The phenomenon may have begun in the aftermath of World War II as Germany repeatedly apologized for crimes associated with the Nazi regime and the Holocaust . . . More recent examples include the US apology in 1988 to Japanese Americans interned during World War II . . . and an apology in 1993 to Native Hawaiians for the role of US Marines in overthrowing the Hawaiian government in the 1890s . . . Internationally, Taiwan President Li Teng-hui apologized in 1995 for the Nationalistic Chinese government massacre of local Taiwanese in a 1947 revolt (Baum 1995). Queen Elizabeth signed a New Zealand statement of apology in 1995 for confiscation of Maori land. There is even a joint Czechoslovakia/Germany apology in 1996 as Czechoslovakia apologized for mistreatment of German inhabitants of the Sudetenland and Germany apologized for having taken the Sudetenland in World War II in the same document (Caryl, 1996). (p. 1)

Nobles's (2008) appendix lists 52 apologies from governments and government leaders, 12 from religious groups, and 8 from other organizations. Clearly, third party image repair merits scholarly attention.

It seems likely that there are differences between image repair by the alleged perpetrator of wrongdoing and image repair from third parties. Presumably, an apology would be more effective coming from the actual wrongdoer than from someone else. On the other hand, it is possible that a third party might have more credibility than the alleged wrongdoer, and third parties could have options that the offender cannot or should not employ. Harkins and Petty (1981) demonstrate that multiple sources advocating the same viewpoint can be more persuasive than single sources; the confluence of several sources working together to restore a damaged image could be more persuasive than a defense from the accused alone. Second, it is possible that a third party can lend a degree of objectivity to the image repair effort. Of course, this depends on the identity of the third party; some sources can appear less biased than others. When the third party is the victim (e.g., Wendy Vitter defending her husband David Vitter after it was revealed that he patronized the "D.C. Madam," mentioned in chapter 4), that should improve credibility. It is also possible that a third party can offer particular defenses that the accused cannot, or should not, make. Benoit and Kennedy (1999) discuss one aspect of credibility: reluctant testimony. A prosecutor arguing for lenient sentences

can be more persuasive than a criminal giving the same message; on the other hand, a criminal advocating harsh sentences should be more persuasive than a prosecutor. Furthermore, a third party may be better able to make some arguments than the alleged offender. For example, an athlete probably should not blame teammates for a poor performance, but a third party could make that argument (Wen, Yu, & Benoit, 2009). For these reasons, third party image repair deserves our attention.

Third party image repair can occur in very two different circumstances: Third party image repair can occur historically—attempting to repair an image from past offenses—or contemporaneously—attempting to repair an image from relatively recent offenses. An example of contemporary third party image repair occurred after sexually explicit pictures of a Canadian judge were posted on the Internet with solicitation for group sex. Her husband claimed that she had no knowledge that these photos had been posted on the Internet (Lambert, 2012). This chapter will discuss both of these third party image repair situations.

Historic Third Party Image Repair

A considerable amount of research has investigated historic third party image repair (e.g., Dodds, 2003). Much of this work relates to the Japan's use of "comfort women" who were forced into sexual slavery (e.g., Izumi, 2011; Sugimoto & Sugimoto, 1999; Yamazaki, 2006). This research focuses on instances in which a government official apologizes for actions of his or her government in the past (before he or she was in office; before he or she was responsible). Harter, Stephens, and Japp (2000) and Carmack, Bates, and Harter (2008) examined President Bill Clinton's apology for the Tuskegee syphilis experiments. Edwards (2010) examined Japanese prime minister Murayama's apology for wartime crimes.

Contemporary Third Party Image Repair

Research on contemporary third party image repair is relatively rare. Nelson (1984) offered the earliest example of this phenomenon, although he did not conceptualize his study as such. Billie Jean King was a tennis star in the 1980s. She engaged in a love affair with her (female) secretary, Marilyn Barnett. King's image was threatened in two ways: She had been unfaithful to her husband, and she had

engaged in a lesbian affair. In the 1980s sexual mores were more conservative than today. The theory of image repair discourse had not yet been articulated when this article was written; Nelson used Ware and Linkugel's theory of *apologia* (1973; my discussion of this discourse will use concepts that Nelson did not use in this article). King's image repair discourse used mortification (saying the affair was a mistake), denial (claiming that she was a heterosexual and that one "slip" did not make her a lesbian), bolstering (stating that she was honest), and attacking her accuser (for being "unstable" and for blackmailing King). Third party defense was provided by King's "peers in the tennis world" who bolstered King by discussing "the tremendous good she had accomplished not only for women in tennis but in all walks of life" (p. 95). Other tennis stars also used transcendence, arguing that King's personal life should remain private. Nelson also argued that the news media contributed to King's defense in two ways: providing news coverage of King's defense, and making comments that were largely favorable to King (the latter is an instance of bolstering). Nelson explains that King's peers had "a good deal of prestige," which could "help to shape and change attitudes" (p. 95). He also argued that "the apologist and cohorts need not employ the same apologetic factors as each other. As long as they do not contradict each other, varying strategies can work together to the defendant's advantage" (p. 100). So this study provides a clear illustration of how an accused's supporters can strengthen the image repair effort. Nelson also argues that the supporters' prestige is an asset and that the accused and supporters need not employ identical strategies.

More recently, Wen, Yu, and Benoit (2009) investigated another episode of third party image repair. Chien-ming Wang was a Taiwanese-born athlete who in 2009 pitched for the New York Yankees' major league baseball team. His native country was very proud of Wang, and the major newspapers in Taiwan defended his image after each loss. Analysis of newspaper articles and statements by Wang provided evidence for their assumption that image repair from an accused and from third parties can differ. The newspapers relied on evasion of responsibility and reduction of offensiveness; Wang used mortification and corrective action. Wen, Yu, and Benoit argued that "mortification and corrective action are more suitable strategies by the accused rather than the third party" (p. 186). "The media can hardly promise to improve Wang's performance on the mound," and "it would probably not be effective for the media to apologize for Wang's losses" (pp. 186–187). On the other

hand, one argument for reducing responsibility (defeasibility) used by the media was to blame losses on errors committed by Wang's teammates. Had Wang used this argument in his own defense that could have had unfortunate consequences for the pitcher. It could have also damaged his credibility, creating the impression that he was not a team player.

This chapter will offer two other examples of third party image repair. First, an instance of historic third party image repair from British prime minister David Cameron will be discussed. Then contemporary third party image repair of President George W. Bush by his wife Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will be examined.

Historic Third Party Image Repair: Prime Minister David Cameron on "Bloody Sunday"

On January 30, 1972—"Bloody Sunday"—26 unarmed protesters and bystanders were killed—some shot in the back—by British troops in Northern Ireland. This event was the subject of a song by the rock band U2: "Sunday Bloody Sunday."

I can't believe the news today
Oh, I can't close my eyes and make it go away
How long . . . How long must we sing this song
How long, how long . . .

Broken bottles under children's feet
Bodies strewn across the dead end street
. . . Sunday, Bloody Sunday

Prime Minister Tony Blair initiated an inquiry into these events in 1998. More than 10 years later, and nearly 40 years after the massacre, on June 15, 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech on "Bloody Sunday." Because Cameron himself had no responsibility for this massacre—he was only 5 years old at the time—this can be considered an instance of historic third party image repair: He apologized for an offensive act committed by others, illustrating historic third party image repair. He also attempted to preempt an unfavorable reaction to his apology from supporters of the British military.

Cameron's Historic Apology

Prime Minister Cameron's speech provides an apology for a historic wrongdoing. It also attempts to preempt hostility that might arise from the apology itself. The textual analysis will be divided into two parts, consistent with the dual purposes of the discourse.

Mortification

Cameron offers a clear and direct apology for the events of Bloody Sunday. He admits that the actions of British soldiers were wrong and not justifiable: "What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong." He explains that "some members of our Armed Forces acted wrongly." He recognizes the suffering of the victims' families:

> I would also like to acknowledge the grief of the families of those killed. They have pursued their long campaign over thirty-eight years with great patience. Nothing can bring back those that were killed but I hope, as one relative has put it, the truth coming out can set people free.

Cameron also accepts responsibility and gives a direct apology: "The Government is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the Armed Forces. And for that, on behalf of the Government—and indeed our country—I am deeply sorry." These elements—expression of regret, acknowledgment of the victims' suffering, clear apology—are the hallmarks of mortification.

Cameron also explains to his audience why he is offering an apology at this point in time, rather than earlier:

> I know some people wonder whether nearly forty years on from an event, a Prime Minister needs to issue an apology. For someone of my generation, this is a period we feel we have learned about rather than lived through. But what happened should never, ever have happened. The families of those who died should not have had to live with the pain and hurt of that day—and a lifetime of loss.

This statement makes it clear the Cameron understood that he was offering what I term an "historic third party apology," trying to heal

old wounds. This address also briefly offers a denial, however. The report "makes no suggestion of a Government cover-up."

Preemptive Image Repair

Cameron's speech can also be seen as an example of preemptive image repair: messages designed to head off anticipated criticism. The preemptive aspect of Cameron's image repair discourse has more elements: bolstering, denial, and defeasibility. Each element will be discussed in turn in this section.

Bolstering

Early in the speech, Cameron bolsters his patriotism generally and his support for the British Armed Forces in particular:

> Mr Speaker, I am deeply patriotic. I never want to believe anything bad about our country. I never want to call into question the behaviour of our soldiers and our Army who I believe to be the finest in the world. And I have seen for myself the very difficult and dangerous circumstances in which we ask our soldiers to serve.

These sentiments do not sound like they would come from one who hates the military; their function is to bolster the speaker's image.

The prime minister also takes the opportunity to praise the military in another section of his speech:

> And let us also remember, Bloody Sunday is not the defining story of the service the British Army gave in Northern Ireland from 1969–2007. This was known as Operation Banner, the longest, continuous operation in British military history, spanning thirty-eight years and in which over 250,000 people served. Our Armed Forces displayed enormous courage and professionalism in upholding democracy and the rule of law in Northern Ireland. Acting in support of the police, they played a major part in setting the conditions that have made peaceful politics possible and over 1,000 members of the security forces lost their lives to that cause.

Again, by praising the military, Cameron attempts to bolster his reputation in this speech.

Denial

Cameron takes a very strong position that the actions of the British soldiers were not justified, denying that there was any justification for these killings:

> The conclusions of this report are absolutely clear. There is no doubt. There is nothing equivocal. There are no ambiguities . . . Lord Saville concludes that the soldiers of Support Company who went into the Bogside "did so as a result of an order . . . which should have not been given" by their Commander—on balance the first shot in the vicinity of the march was fired by the British Army . . . that "none of the casualties shot by soldiers of Support Company was armed with a firearm" . . . that "there was some firing by republican paramilitaries . . . but. . . . none of this firing provided any justification for the shooting of civilian casualties" . . . and that "in no case was any warning given before soldiers opened fire."

Furthermore, Lord Saville declares that "despite the contrary evidence given by the soldiers . . . none of them fired in response to attacks or threatened attacks by nail or petrol bombers" and that many of the soldiers "knowingly put forward false accounts in order to seek to justify their firing." Cameron does not stop at saying there was no provocation for the shootings. The prime minister also reports that

> Lord Saville says that some of those killed or injured were clearly fleeing or going to the assistance of others who were dying. The Report refers to one person who was shot while "crawling . . . away from the soldiers" . . . another was shot, in all probability, "when he was lying mortally wounded on the ground" . . . and a father was "hit and injured by Army gunfire after he had gone to . . . tend his son."

No justification can be advanced for killing wounded who are crawling away from the carnage, for shooting those who are mortally wounded, or for killing a father who was trying to help his wounded son.

In another passage, the prime minister argues that the blame rests with the British soldiers:

> For those looking for statements of innocence, Saville says: "The immediate responsibility for the deaths and injuries on Bloody Sunday lies with those members of Support Company whose unjustifiable firing was the cause of the those deaths and injuries" and—crucially—that "none of the casualties was posing a threat of causing death or serious injury, or indeed was doing anything else that could on any view justify their shooting."

If the British soldiers are to blame, then their actions are not justified. The prime minister therefore should not be criticized for telling the truth about this tragedy.

Cameron builds to a general conclusion, arguing that we should not try to justify the actions of those soldiers:

> You do not defend the British Army by defending the indefensible. We do not honour all those who have served with distinction in keeping the peace and upholding the rule of law in Northern Ireland by hiding from the truth. So there is no point in trying to soften or equivocate what is in this Report. It is clear from the Tribunal's authoritative conclusions that the events of Bloody Sunday were in no way justified.

The prime minister develops several arguments to support his denial that the killings were justified. Although Cameron was unwilling to criticize the British military generally, in this tragedy he argues that there is no justification for the killings. This claim reinforces his attempt to preempt criticism for his apology and for blaming British soldiers for this massacre.

Defeasibility

Prime Minister Cameron also describes the context in a way that suggests an excuse for the actions of the British soldiers on Bloody Sunday:

> Mr. Speaker, while in no way justifying the events of January 30th 1972, we should acknowledge the background to

> the events of Bloody Sunday. Since 1969 the security situation in Northern Ireland had been declining significantly. Three days before "Bloody Sunday," two RUC officers—one a Catholic—were shot by the IRA in Londonderry, the first police officers killed in the city during the Troubles. A third of the city of Derry had become a no-go area for the RUC and the Army. And in the end 1972 was to prove Northern Ireland's bloodiest year by far with nearly 500 people killed.

Despite having begun by saying the context can "in no way" justify the killings, the prime minister describes events leading up to the massacre. That year 500 people had been killed, and only 3 days before Bloody Sunday two police officers had been killed by the IRA. The upshot is that the British soldiers had (some) reasons to react as they had on Bloody Sunday; the situation reasonably made the soldiers feel threatened.

Evaluation

A historic apology is, by definition, late. This one occurred almost 40 years after the tragedy. Some people surely believed that this apology—and Lord Saville's investigation, which led to the apology—should have occurred much sooner than it did. However, a British prime minister eventually did the right thing, apologizing for this tragedy. Cameron did so, as the British say, "with knobs on." He declared that the killings were wrong, he argued (extensively in the preemptive element of his message) that these actions were unjustifiable, he acknowledged the grief of relatives, and he expressed his deep sorrow over this tragedy. This is a well-designed instance of mortification. The apology was clear and direct. It may not erase all ill feelings, but it was appropriate and should have helped the healing process.

The preemptive portion of this image repair effort was, for the most part, well designed as well. The prime minister bolstered his attitudes toward the military and praised them (for actions other than Bloody Sunday). He argues in some detail, based on Lord Saville's report, that no justification can be made for the killings. I found his statement "You do not defend the British Army by defending the indefensible" to be particularly apt in these circumstances. Again, some may refuse to accept any criticism of the British military, regardless of its merit, but generally the prime minister struck the right tone.

The prime minister employed evidence to reinforce the persuasive strategies that constitute his defense, frequently quoting Lord Saville. Cameron did not want the audience to think he was trying to attack the United Kingdom's armed forces and used Lord Saville as cover, attributing specific accusations, such as the lack of justification for the shootings, to the report. Evidence can be useful to reinforce image repair strategies.

A minor problem in this image repair discourse is the fact that defeasibility is not entirely consistent with denying that there is any justification for the killings. Cameron's discussion of the context provides a reason (not, in my opinion, enough of a reason to exonerate the soldiers) for the British soldiers to have reacted as they did. He argues in effect that there was no justification for the killings but yet there was some justification for the soldier's actions. Perhaps Cameron believed that some justification existed for their actions, so he included this idea, but he wanted the primary idea in the speech to be that the killings were unjustified. Including defeasibility is a compromise and, as such, it waters down the image repair effort.

Conclusion

In 1972, British soldiers in Northern Ireland killed 26 people on the day that became known as "Bloody Sunday." Nearly 40 years later, on June 15, 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech apologizing for this tragedy. His image repair effort had two main components. First, he enacted a historic third party defense (the rhetor was not personally responsible for the offensive act, which occurred in the past). Second, the discourse attempted to preempt negative reactions to an apology that blamed the British military. I evaluate his attempt at both third party defense and preemptive image repair to be generally well designed; one flaw is denying that the killings were justified and then employing defeasibility to suggest that the soldiers had reasons to overreact.

Image Repair Discourse by George W. Bush, Laura Bush, and Condoleezza Rice

George W. Bush, 43rd president of the United States, served two terms in the Oval Office from 2001 to 2009. Controversies arise in every presidency, but President Bush seemed particularly dogged by

criticism (much like President Bill Clinton), including on such issues as concerns about the war in Iraq (and the search for weapons of mass destruction), the shift in military emphasis away from Afghanistan, and the government's reaction to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Scholarship has investigated President Bush's rhetoric on Hurricane Katrina (e.g., Benoit & Henson, 2009; Liu, 2007) and on terrorism and the war in Iraq (e.g., Bostdorff, 2003; Ivie, 2007; Spielvogel, 2005). Previous research has analyzed other image repair efforts from President George W. Bush during his presidency. For example, President Bush appeared on *Meet the Press* in February 2004 discussing such topics as Iraq and the economy (Benoit, 2006b). The president tended to rely on transcendence, denial, and defeasibility. He also held a press conference in April 2004 addressing the war against terrorism (Benoit, 2006a), using bolstering, denial, and transcendence. However, near the end of his second term as president, his secretary of state, his wife, and Bush himself developed image repair messages that can be seen as addressing his legacy. This essay will apply the theory of image repair discourse to critically analyze these three image repair discourses: one message of self-defense and two third party defenses.

As noted earlier, near the end of President Bush's second term in office, three image repair efforts appeared: one by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on CBS, one by First Lady Laura Bush on FOX (both on December 28, 2008), and one by President Bush about two weeks later in his January 12, 2009, press conference. Bush's approval rating had dropped to 29% (67% disapproval) in mid-December 2008, according to the Gallup poll (PollingReport.com, 2009). This was quite a drop from his high point after the tragedy of 9/11: 90% approval (6% disapproval). This case study will compare the third party image repair presented by Rice and Laura Bush with the president's image repair discourse. These messages will be analyzed in the order in which they appeared (Secretary of State Rice's interview, First Lady Bush's interview, and President Bush's press conference). These three messages did not cover exactly the same territory, in part because the questions asked of the three rhetors varied considerably. To help understand the context, an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* (2008) poll in the first week of December 2008 asked which event would be "remembered as being George W. Bush's biggest failure as president." Respondents identified the top five failings as the war in Iraq (35%), not preventing the recession (21%), creating the largest federal deficit (21%), inadequate response to Hurricane Katrina (9%), and helping the wealthy more than the middle class (8%). It is also worth

mentioning that other topics arose that are not discussed here (e.g., Condoleezza Rice talked about how she played piano for the Queen of England; Laura Bush talked about cooking).

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's Discourse

The secretary of state appeared on CBS's *Sunday Morning* on December 28, 2008, interviewed by senior correspondent Rita Braver (all quotations from Braver and Rice can be found in Rice, 2008). Four accusations were raised during the program; each one will be discussed separately here.

United States Disliked Abroad

Braver asked about America's reputation abroad: "Why do former diplomats say things to me like . . . we are just hated in so many places now, we're not liked, we're not respected, and we're not even feared. We're just disliked." Rice replied first with a straightforward denial: "Oh, it's just not true." She then went on to bolster America's image:

> I know that the United States is respected for the quadrupling of development assistance in Africa, for the doubling in Latin America, for the tripling worldwide after assistance that was flat. I know that the fact that the United States has spoken out for Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma or for the people of Zimbabwe or for the people of Sudan, or ended the conflict in Liberia and put Charles Taylor in jail, or ended the conflict between Southern Sudan and Northern Sudan that killed millions of people over decades.

Citing accomplishments (such as developmental assistance) is an indirect way of countering the accusation that the United States is not liked, suggesting that if we have done these things they must like us. Rice argues that the way to answer the question of whether we have respect is to "look at the record."

Bush Was Unpopular at Home

Braver segues from attitudes toward the United States to attitudes toward Bush in the United States. In the 2008 elections, Democrat Barack Obama was elected president, the Democrats held the House

of Representatives, and several Senate seats changed from Republican to Democrat (CNN, 2008). In this context, Braver asked, "Do you think . . . that this last presidential election was kind of a referendum on this President's foreign policies?" The Secretary of State used transcendence here, shifting the point of view from election results to the fact that "this President had two terms. That's all he gets. That's all he gets is two terms. And he had two terms. He was reelected." Braver alluded to public opinion polls that showed that President Bush's popularity was low. Rice stuck to her use of transcendence, saying "I'm not going to talk about popularity polls. The President was reelected in 2004. That's all he got to do." The secretary of state used transcendence to respond to concerns about President Bush's low levels of popularity.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Next, Braver turned to the justification for the war in Iraq: "The whole premise, of course, for invading Iraq was that there were weapons of mass destruction, and it turned out, of course, that there weren't." Rice used simple denial when she noted that Saddam Hussein had "used them [WMDs] before." She also used transcendence to justify Bush's decision to invade Iraq:

> Go back and you look at what the President said in Cincinnati and what he said again at a speech in February shortly before we liberated Iraq, he talked about the broad problem of Iraq . . . it's not just weapons of mass destruction. It was Saddam Hussein's ambitions, his aggression in the region, and the fact that he was a threat to us and to his neighbors.

The argument is, regardless of whether Iraq had WMDs (or in addition to that fact), Hussein was a threat to the United States and other countries. This danger justified the military action.

The final accusation raised in the program was that some "people say he's one of the worst presidents in recent memory." The secretary declared that "it's ridiculous," using simple denial. This strategy was reinforced with bolstering. She noted that President Bush was the one

> who secured this country after the worst attack on its soil ever, who showed a way to deal with those threats in ways that really forced us and challenged us to think completely

> differently about how we organize domestically, how we organize abroad, and how we made a union between the two. When you look at what this President took on in terms of AIDS relief and foreign assistance to the world, when you look at the number of countries that this President and the number of people that this President has actually liberated.

Rice stated that future "generations pretty soon are going to start to thank this President for what he's done. This generation will." Then she listed additional accomplishments of the president, continuing to bolster his reputation:

> We have really made foreign assistance not just an issue of giving humanitarian aid or giving money to poor people, but really insisting on good governance and fighting corruption; and that there are African states now where that really is the mantra, where we've made big investments in countries like Ghana and Tanzania, and they are going about with good governance. I think the fact that this President has laid the groundwork for a Palestinian state, being the first President, as a matter of policy, to say that there should be one, and now, I think, laying the foundation that's going to lead to that Palestinian state—I can go on and on.

Providing a list of accomplishments, from responding to terrorist attacks and liberating countries to AIDS relief and working toward a Palestinian state, is a way to enhance the president's image.

First Lady Laura Bush's Discourse

First Lady Laura Bush responded to five accusations during the course of her interview. Each of these accusations will be discussed in turn in this section.

Failed Presidency

Chris Wallace, the host of *FOX News Sunday*, conducted the interview with the First Lady. It also aired the morning of December 28, 2008 (all quotations from Wallace and Laura Bush are taken from Bush, 2008). Wallace asked Bush, "How do you respond to some people . . . who are going to view this as a failed presidency?" The First Lady

replied, "I know it's not," directly denying this accusation. Then Bush bolstered her husband's reputation:

> But my husband responded in a way that kept our country safe after September 11th, and I think that's very, very important. He's liberated, because of our policies, the policies of the United States and our military, 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq from—from oppressive governments and tyranny. He's saved, because of our policies, the United States policies and taxpayers'—over 2 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are on antiretrovirals because of his policy of trying to save people from disease as well as from tyranny. And I think that the—his inner core and his belief in freedom—and that means not just freedom from tyranny, but freedom from disease and freedom from illiteracy—is what really is the basic of American values, and that's what I think he's shown the whole time he's been president.

She not only listed accomplishments (keeping our country safe, liberating people, saving people from disease) but also lauded his character, values, and beliefs.

Focus on Iraq Rather Than Afghanistan

Wallace noted that "some critics say that we gave the Taliban a second chance, and one of the reasons they are on the march in Afghanistan is because we switched our focus to Iraq." The First Lady begins with denial: "I don't think that's true at all." However, she then says that although we've stayed "very, very invested in Afghanistan," we may not have been "as invested militarily." She then bolsters with discussion of how people have helped "women there be educated" and how "women entrepreneurs in Afghanistan" have been mentored.

Iraq Surge

Wallace also asked about the troop surge in Iraq. "Everybody says, 'get the troops out.'" The president "stands up to everybody in Washington and says, 'No, we're going to send more troops in. Where did that come from?'" Notice that he is not actually asking her to justify the surge but to explain where this idea originated. Bush explained that "that came from his really tough inner core," an example of bolstering. She also

employed transcendence, arguing, "He didn't want to think that the people who had died, the Americans who had died, our troops who had died, would just die in vain because we left. And he's right." This justifies the surge on the basis of past casualties in Iraq.

Fallen/Injured Soldiers and Families

The interview next turned to the question, "What do you say to a soldier who's lost a leg or to a family who's lost a son or a husband?" The First Lady bolstered by stressing our soldiers' sacrifices: "These are people who volunteered to put their life on the line for the United States." She also praised their families: "They're so strong and they're so terrific, and they know that their loved one in most cases was doing what they wanted to do." So she bolstered here by showing compassion.

Hurricane Katrina

Wallace also brought up criticism about the government's response to Hurricane Katrina: "A lot of people blame your husband, not for the hurricane but for the response." Bush responded to this charge with bolstering: "The rescue of so many people by the U.S. Coast Guard off their roofs or in boats is unprecedented, and I don't think the Coast Guard gets the credit that they should for that." She also offered another defense, attacking her husband's accusers, in particular some reporting on the tragedy:

> It was really not true reporting. There was a—the reporting was—ended up being not really factual, but many, many people heard the first reporting, and that's what they think happened, that 10,000 people died or, you know, whatever the things were that were not true.

Her discourse bolstered the government's response and attempted to undermine the criticism.

President George W. Bush's Discourse

President George W. Bush held a press conference on January 12, 2009, at the end of his second term in the Oval Office (Barack Obama took office just a week later, on January 20, 2009). His discourse

responded to six concerns that will be addressed in this section (he also briefly mentioned other topics, such as the Abu Ghraib prison and Social Security).

United States Disliked Abroad

When asked about "restoring America's moral standing in the world," President Bush used denial: "I strongly disagree with the assessment that our moral standing has been damaged . . . Most people around the world, they respect America." Clearly the president rejects this criticism as unfounded. Bush also employed transcendence to deal with this accusation. He acknowledged that there were some people "in certain quarters in Europe" where American was not popular. He observed that "you can try to be popular," but "in terms of the decisions that I had to make to protect the homeland, I wouldn't worry about popularity." Homeland security is more important than popularity. So he argued that most people around the world respect the United States and that it was worth alienating a few in order to protect America.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Bush addressed the question of WMDs in Iraq. However, he does not use a clear image repair strategy here: "Not having weapons of mass destruction was a significant disappointment . . . Things didn't go according to plan." This utterance might sound like mortification, but he resisted the possibility of admitting to a mistake here: "I don't know if you want to call those mistakes or not but they were—things didn't go according to plan." He tries to walk a fine line here, conceding that things went awry but not offering any excuses nor mortification.

Legacy

The president was invited to "look back over the long arc of your presidency" and then he was asked, "Do you think, in retrospect, that you have made any mistakes?" Bush bolstered by mentioning accomplishments (the surge, the economy starting to turn around) and used denial: "I thank you for giving me a chance to defend a record that I am going to continue to defend, because it's a good, strong record." Bush also employed the strategy of defeasibility to defend his legacy. He argued that "hard things don't happen overnight" and

suggests that initial assessments of his legacy are premature: "I don't think you can possibility get the full breadth of an administration until time has passed." So he bolstered, used denial, and cited defeasibility (difficult challenges take time and we need to wait for time to pass to assess his legacy).

Iraq Surge

Bush addressed the troop surge in Iraq, employing transcendence: "Because of the violence in Iraq, I decided to do something about it—and sent 30,000 troops in." This utterance attempts to justify the surge on the basis of violence occurring at the time in Iraq.

Hurricane Katrina

Two criticisms that had been raised about the governmental response to Hurricane Katrina were addressed in this press conference. One concern was that the governmental response to this disaster was unreasonably slow. Although admitting that the reconstruction was not perfect, Bush was asked whether things "happened fairly quickly" and his answer was, "Absolutely." He also said, "Don't tell me the federal response was slow when there was [sic] 30,000 people pulled off roofs right after the storm passed." These utterances work to deny that the governmental response was slow. He also employed bolstering to respond to this criticism, declaring that "the systems are in place to continue the reconstruction of New Orleans." Another criticism that had been raised about this disaster was that President Bush had flown over the devastation from Hurricane Katrina in Air Force One as he traveled from Crawford, Texas, to Washington, D.C.—without landing to see the problem firsthand. He reflected on the aftermath of the hurricane, saying he had thought about those events: "Could I have done something differently, like land Air Force One either in New Orleans or Baton Rouge? The problem with that . . . is that law enforcement would have been pulled away from the mission." This statement employs defeasibility, arguing that factors beyond his control preventing him from landing.

Economy

The president employed two strategies when addressing the economy. First, he shifted the blame: first to the previous administration—"This

problem stated before my presidency"—and then to the business sector—"Wall Street got drunk and we got the hangover." Bush also employed bolstering on this topic: "Credit spreads are beginning to shrink; lending is just beginning to pick up. The actions we have taken, I believe, have helped thaw the credit markets, which is the first step toward recovery." So he argued that others had caused the problem but that he had started to solve it.

"Mission Accomplished"

On May 1, 2003, the president flew as a passenger in an S-3 Viking reconnaissance jet, landing on an aircraft carrier (the USS *Abraham Lincoln*). A banner with "Mission Accomplished" was prominently displayed in the background. Although this event may have signaled the end of conventional warfare in Iraq, it soon became clear that our mission had not been accomplished. This became a point of contention for some critics. In his press conference, Bush employed mortification, explaining that "putting a 'Mission Accomplished' sign on an aircraft carrier was a mistake." However, he then immediately shifted to differentiation, saying that "we were trying to say something differently, but nevertheless it conveyed a different message." His use of mortification in this image repair discourse was minimal.

Evaluation

Of course, one's predispositions will influence how one reacts to any persuasive message. People with different beliefs and values about these topics would react differently to these messages. For example, an ABC/*Washington Post* (2008) poll in the first part of December 2008 found that 34% said that the war in Iraq was "worth fighting," while 64% said it was not. Similarly, in September 2008, 33% thought the federal government had "already done enough" to help the recovery from Hurricane Katrina, whereas 57% thought the federal government "should do more" (Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, 2008). Image repair efforts on controversial topics such as these will face audiences that vary in receptiveness to defensive arguments.

Surely these three rhetors thought about what they might say about these issues (and probably not for the first time) before these interviews; their responses should not be considered spontaneous replies to questions. The defenses had some overlap (see Table 7.1

for an overview of these image repair efforts), but each defense had unique features. This is surely in part because these rhetors are different; however, the discourse they produced was also influenced by the questions they were asked. It appeared as if Wallace in particular was "throwing softballs" to the First Lady, asking questions designed to be easily answered so as to help defend the president's image. Each interview will be evaluated separately in this section.

Table 7.1. Image Repair from Secretary of State Rice, First Lady Bush, and President Bush

Accusation	*Condoleezza Rice*	*Laura Bush*	*George Bush*
U.S. disliked around the world	Simple denial		Simple denial
	Bolstering		Transcendence
Bush unpopular in U.S.	Transcendence		
Iraq: no WMDs	Simple denial		(disappointment)
	Transcendence		
Worst/failed president/legacy	Simple denial	Simple denial	Simple denial
	Bolstering	Bolstering	Bolstering
			Defeasibility
Afghanistan to Iraq		Simple denial	
		Bolstering	
Iraq surge		Bolstering	Transcendence
		Transcendence	
Soldiers/families		Bolstering	
Katrina		Bolstering	Simple denial
		Attack accuser	Bolstering
			Defeasibility
"Mission Accomplished"			Mortification
			Differentiation
Economy			Shift blame
			Bolstering

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

The response to the accusation that other countries do not respect the United States denied that the United States was disliked and listed several instances of American foreign aid. This is an indirect response at best; it assumes that sending aid will cause other countries to like the United States (alternatively, they could resent us). Furthermore, the countries discussed in the examples of foreign aid (Burma, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Sudan) are not major U.S. allies. These cannot be considered a powerful argument that the United States is liked and respected around the world.

In response to the accusation that President Bush was unpopular at home, Rice employed transcendence (explicitly refusing to discuss public opinion polls), arguing that he won two terms as president. There can be no doubt that doing so is quite difficult and thus a praiseworthy accomplishment. However, saying that he won elections in 2000 and 2004 was not a very strong response to the charge that the president was unpopular in 2008. It was impossible to deny that the president was doing very poorly in public opinion polls.

On the question of WMDs, Rice used denial. It was well established that Saddam Hussein did have WMDs; apparently he secretly destroyed them. So we knew he had them at one point and we had reason to suspect that he still possessed WMDs at the time of the invasion. This is a generally effective response. She also used transcendence, arguing that Hussein was a threat to us (and others). It is not as obvious that Iraq threatened the United States; some in Rice's audience would accept this, but others probably would not.

Rice denies the accusation that Bush was the worst president, characterizing this charge as "ridiculous." A direct answer to this criticism would require a comparison with other presidents, but that could appear to be no more than a series of gratuitous attacks. Listing the accomplishments of the president is a reasonable approach. However, some of the examples provided here are not very persuasive (Ghana, Tanzania). Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011. Furthermore, given the context (many people did not agree that we should have invaded Iraq; others thought the president had led us into a recession), it would be difficult for such a list of accomplishments to overcome such attitudes.

First Lady Laura Bush

As with the secretary of state, the First Lady reacted to the accusation that Bush was the worst president with denial and a listing of

accomplishments. She elaborates an idea mentioned by Rice, arguing that the president has "liberated . . . 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq." However, she also talks of topics that are not likely to be impressive to many in the audience (in this case, antiretrovirals). Bolstering his character, talking about "his inner core and his belief in freedom," was a good addition to the defense.

The First Lady discussed the accusation that the United States shifted its focus from Afghanistan to Iraq. Although she initially denies this accusation, her use of bolstering essentially concedes that focus has shifted to from military to economic aid.

This message also considered the troop surge in Iraq. Bolstering was a good idea; who knows better about the president's "tough inner core" than his spouse? Some would find the justification that our troops should not die in vain persuasive. However, others would say it is like (but worse than) "throwing good money after bad." If there is no real solution to Iraq, the surge could mean that more would "die in vain."

Laura Bush also was asked about the tragedy of fallen and injured soldiers and their families. Of course, there is no easy way to comfort those who have suffered such losses. Her use of bolstering was clearly appropriate on this point.

The First Lady also responded to a question about the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina. She bolstered by noting that the Coast Guard rescued many victims and deserves praise for doing so. However, serious objections were raised to other aspects of the government's response, and the argument that some aspects of the government's response (Coast Guard rescue missions) were effective is not a persuasive response to other criticism. Attacking her husband's accusers in the media might have been justified, but it was unlikely to dispel other accusations.

President George W. Bush

The president used denial to respond to the criticism that America was disliked around the world. Simply denying this concern was not likely to be persuasive to many in his audience. His attempt at transcendence (better to make America secure than popular abroad) assumed his audience would agree that the United States was more secure from terrorism. In fact, Americans were split on the question of whether they approved of how President Bush had handled the war on terrorism: 47% approved, 48% disapproved (CBS/*New York Times*, 2009). So this argument would probably appeal to some, but not all, of his audience.

President Bush's response to the criticisms about our failure to find WMDs in Iraq was particularly weak. He cannot deny this justification for war was incorrect, but he was unwilling to admit any mistakes. He could have argued that based on what we knew at the time, the decision to go into Iraq was appropriate (not a mistake) at the time. Only in hindsight do we know there were no WMDs, so the decision to go after WMDs was the right choice at the time. The argument advanced by his secretary of state on this criticism was noticeably stronger.

When the president was invited to reflect on his presidency (to think about whether he made any mistakes), he bolstered with examples (the surge, the economy). The surge was a success on some fronts (but defending the surge ignores the question of whether we should have been there in the first place). Reactions to Bush's attempt to bolster his image based on the economy were likely to be less favorable (the U.S. economy is huge and cannot be turned around overnight, but it is not clear how much his policies helped). When the president does admit a mistake ("Mission Accomplished"), he immediately uses differentiation (we were trying to say something different). The president's response to questions about his legacy was mixed at best.

Bush also discussed the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. As suggested in the evaluation of First Lady Laura Bush's response about the Coast Guard, the fact that one part of the response (rescuing people from rooftops) happened quickly simply does not establish that the response in general was fast. It is not clear that most people thought he should have ordered Air Force One down so he could see the effects of the disaster firsthand. This question (landing Air Force One) may have been more salient to the president than to most in his audience.

President Bush also discussed the economy. He attempted to shift blame both to the Clinton administration and to the business sector. Many people would rather hear how a problem will be fixed instead of who should be blamed. It is not clear that most of his audience would be persuaded by his claims that the economy was starting to recover. Even 2 months later, in March 2009, about two-thirds of Americans thought the "worst is yet to come" in the economy (27% said the worst was over, 66% said the worst is yet to come; *Fox News*, 2009).

Implications

Given the context (in particular, public attitudes toward President Bush), these three image repair efforts faced a very difficult challenge. The evaluation indicates that a few strategies should have been helpful but most

of the defense was weak and cannot be expected to have much impact on public opinion. The severity of the accusations simply was not matched by the persuasiveness of the response. Nor should these three messages be considered equally persuasive (Laura Bush's messages was probably the most effective). Consistent with this overall evaluation, a CNN poll conducted January 12–15 (the third message, from President Bush, was from January 12) found that the president's approval rating was 31% (68% disapproval), virtually unchanged from mid-December (29%/67%; PollingReport.com, 2009). It is possible that attitudes toward President Bush improved later, but no comparable data are available (pollsters stop asking about presidential approval after the president leaves office).

Third party image repair has some advantages that more traditional image repair does not possess—and note that in this case, both the accused (Bush) and two third parties provided defenses. First, messages from others could appear more independent (less self-serving) than image repair messages from the accused. In this case, the president's spouse and handpicked secretary of state could not be considered entirely objective. Still, there is the possibility that some audience members might be more amenable to persuasive messages from these other defenders.

Second, in this case we have three messages from three different sources. Social science research has established that persuasive messages from multiple sources can be more persuasive than one message from one source (e.g., Harkins & Petty, 1981). In the image repair literature, Nelson (1984) discussed how the media and other tennis stars helped to defend Billie Jean King. Together, George Bush, Laura Bush, and Condoleezza Rice provided multiple defenses for the president in these interviews.

Third, some arguments can be more appropriate or persuasive coming for a source other than the accused. Wen, Yu, and Benoit (2009) argue that Taiwanese newspapers could blame teammates when Taiwanese pitcher Chien-ming Wang lost a major league baseball game, a defense Wang should not employ himself. Here, Laura Bush could talk about the kind of person her husband is ("his inner core and his belief in freedom") more readily than either the president or his secretary of state. On the other hand, it is possible that some image repair strategies might be less appropriate from a third party source. For instance, as noted in the evaluation, President Bush made two responses to the criticism that the United States is disliked abroad: simple denial and transcendence. However, transcendence implicitly concedes some wrongdoing (there is no need to justify an action by appealing to higher values if the accusation is untrue). In essence,

President Bush's argument went, "I don't think the United States is disliked, but, if so, it was worth it to keep America safe." It would arguably be inappropriate for either the First Lady or the secretary of state to make that kind of concession. That is, they did not say, and probably shouldn't have said, something like "Even if President Bush has caused people in other countries to dislike the United States, it was worth it to protect our national security." As a general rule, one who supports another who is accused of wrongdoing should probably not concede wrongdoing by the accused.

Fourth, it is possible that some members of the audience would be prone to watch one of these messages (or one source) rather than others. People had already had the chance to hear President Bush's defenses over the years; there might be particular interest in a defense from a different source (i.e., First Lady Bush or Secretary of State Rice). This could mean that some people were exposed to Bush's "side" of the story even if they didn't watch his press conference.

Conclusion

Third party image repair has the same basic options as traditional image repair. However, persuasive messages in this context are distinctive. Apologies from the perpetrator are surely more satisfying from apologies from others. However, a third party may have more credibility than the offender, particularly if the third party is a victim. Some defenses available to third parties may not be advisable for the offender. Multiple sources can be more persuasive than single sources.

Third party image repair can occur in two different forms: historic and contemporary. This chapter offers new case studies in both of these contexts: Prime Minister Cameron's apology for "Bloody Sunday" and contemporary image repair from President George Bush, First Lady Laura Bush, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. More work needs to be conducted in this area of image repair.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Several points made thus far about image repair deserve particular emphasis. Threats to image are common and our reputation is very important to us; these factors combine to ensure that image repair messages will continue to be commonplace. Perceptions—those of the accused and the intended audience(s)—are essential in image repair. First, perceptions *held by the accused* about the audience's unfavorable attitudes give rise to image repair efforts, and the audience's attitudes, or beliefs and values, should be used by the accused to help design image repair messages. Just as market research investigates target audiences to help design effective sales messages, persuaders who wish to repair their images should analyze their target audiences and use that information to develop messages that are more likely to be persuasive for the audience. Second, perceptions *held by the audience about the accused and the offensive act* determine how the audience reacts to the image repair effort. As Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) explain, persuasion occurs when the audience's beliefs or values change (new ones added or existing ones altered). If the accused's audience analysis is successful, the audience's *actual* attitudes will be the same as the accused's *perceptions* of the audience's attitudes. When there is a disconnect between the audience's attitudes and the accused's perceptions of those attitudes, image repair attempts are more likely to go awry.

It is important to keep in mind that a person or organization accused of wrongdoing may want to persuade more than one audience; we must also realize that the individuals in one specific audience can have varied attitudes. These situations can make image repair more challenging, but it is a mistake to ignore these realities when they arise. The accused may need to prioritize audiences and develop image repair messages that are most likely to persuade the most important audience and less likely to repair image with other audiences. One

might decide to avoid a strategy that could help with one audience but might alienate other audiences.

Attacks or suspicions have two elements: identification of an offensive act and attribution of blame for that act; these ideas correspond to Fishbein and Ajzen's concepts of beliefs and values (beliefs of blame; values of offensiveness). Image repair theory offers 14 potential responses to image threats: These image repair strategies respond to blame or offensiveness, apologize, or promise to correct the problem (see Table 2.1). The theory of reasoned action offers several possibilities for repairing a damaged image (strengthening favorable attitudes, weakening unfavorable attitudes, creating new favorable attitudes; see Table 2.2). This book offers several case studies of image repair taken from scandals and image repair reported in the media; this theory and these strategies can also be used in face-to-face interactions about alleged wrongdoing. It is also possible for attackers to attempt to prolong the situation by attacking again, after a defense (Stein's [2008] concept of *antapologia*). In fact, rival persuaders can exchange a series of messages attacking and defending (see the chapter on Coke versus Pepsi in Benoit, 1995a). Third party image repair, when another person or organization attempts to defend the accused, is also possible (see chapter 7).

In my opinion, an accused should not lie about the accusations. Of course, sometimes the truth is not obvious, and I agree that "social reality" is constructed through exchange of persuasive messages; what I mean here is the accused should not say things that he or she believes are untrue. First, it is simply wrong to lie; I cannot recommend use of unethical messages. Second, if the truth emerges and the original accusations are shown to be true, the accused now has an additional problem: having lied about it. Chapter 5 discusses a clear example of this situation: Lance Armstrong cheated in sports by doping and he consistently and forcefully lied about it for years. Eventually the truth came out and he was reviled not only for doping but for lying about it. He was also stripped of the cycling titles he won by cheating, banned from recognized competition for life, and sued to recover money that had been paid to him by sponsors. Similarly, the truth emerged about President Richard Nixon and Watergate; he was forced to resign his office (Benoit, 1982). I am realistic enough that I do not argue that guilty parties must confess, but they should use image repair strategies that do not require lies (whether the guilty *ought* to confess is a question beyond this book).

Finally, keep in mind that maintaining a positive image is an important goal, but not the only goal that matters to people and organizations. Corporations, for example, often need to avoid providing ammunition that could be used against them in legal action.

This book has investigated image repair in a variety of contexts, such as politics, the corporate world, entertainment, and international affairs. Other research published elsewhere has investigated image repair in areas such as radio and cable talk shows (e.g., Bentley, 2012; Browning, 2011; Furgerson & Benoit, 2013), health care (Johnson, 2006), and religion (e.g., Blaney & Benoit, 1997; Miller, 2002). The fact that image repair occurs repeatedly and in such diverse contexts testifies to the importance of this area of theory and research.

Dealing With Threats to Image

Regularly monitor for threats to image (check the news; perhaps even do Internet searches about yourself or your organization periodically), and be aware when others appear hostile or unfriendly to you. It may be obvious when your image is at risk—for example, critical headlines, protests at a place of business, hostile messages—but you should not ignore an image threat because you were simply not paying attention.

Discover negative attitudes toward you; this information can motivate image repair. However, knowing that a person or organization has an unfavorable attitude is not enough information. For example, consider a person who dislikes Lance Armstrong. You must know which beliefs and values created this negative attitude. For example, some people have negative attitudes toward Armstrong because he cheated, because he lied about doping, or because he sued accusers to silence their true accusations. If a person has an unfavorable attitude toward Armstrong because he doped, a defense that said "He never lied about doping" would offer little help. It is even possible that a supporter may be unhappy with him because he did not win the 2006 Tour de France or refused to sign an autograph. Telling that person that Armstrong had not doped (denial) cannot be expected to help repair his image. So people and organizations must realize that an unfavorable attitude about them exists before there is any reason to contemplate image repair. Furthermore, one who wants to repair a damaged image must understand the nature of that unfavorable attitude: the beliefs and values that constitute it. Analysis of the

audience's attitudes could help by identifying possible image repair strategies (e.g., opportunities for bolstering).

Next I sketch what a person or organization can do when accusations or suspicions of wrongdoing emerge. First, determine the nature of the attacks or suspicions. Identify the audience's attitudes: the beliefs and values that constitute the negative attitude toward the accused. If there are multiple accusations, decide which are most important for you to defend against. You may decide an accusation is not important enough to respond to; what you do not want to do is to inadvertently ignore an important accusation because you were not aware of all the negative attitudes toward you. Keep in mind that if you wish to persuade multiple audiences, then the beliefs, values, and attitudes that you must identify in order to develop a defense can vary by audience; as noted earlier, it is also possible that the members of a particular audience could have different beliefs, values, and attitudes. To do this audience analysis, you must identify the audience or audiences in play in the situation you face, focusing on the audience or audiences most important to you. If you want to persuade multiple audiences, you should prioritize audiences so that as you develop your image repair effort you try to persuade the most important audience first and then try to address other audiences to the extent possible.

In audience analysis, it is not necessary to identify every belief and each value held by the audience; some of their attitudes do not concern your reputation. Other things the audience has learned about you may not be currently salient to that audience. Remember from chapter 1 that Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) argue that typically only about five to nine belief/value pairs—ones salient at the moment—shape an attitude. If the image repair concerns a public scandal, it may be possible to get a good start on identifying what the audience believes about you and the accusations against you by looking at the headlines of newspapers, news programs, or webpages used by your target audience. I would not recommend a superficial audience analysis, but the task of identifying the audience's most important attitudes, beliefs, and values is not as daunting as it might first appear.

Second, if your audience analysis reveals that you face multiple accusations, you should decide whether some criticisms are less important and can be ignored with little risk. If you feel the need to respond to every accusation, prioritize them so the defense you develop is most likely to deal with the most important accusation and to deal with other accusations to the extent that is possible. You should focus

your attention and your message(s) on the most important accusation or accusations.

Third, consider whether you have other important goals in this situation in addition to repairing your image. As with audiences and accusations, you should prioritize your goals so that your messages are most likely to accomplish the most important goal. Image repair is a very important goal, but it may not be the most important end you seek in every situation; it could be more important, for example, to avoid providing evidence that could be used against you in court. In chapter 6, Secretary of State Clinton wanted to repair America's relationship with Pakistan (and avoid increased fees for supply trucks) as well as to repair the country's image. In Prime Minister Cameron's speech on "Bloody Sunday," he wanted to offer a historic apology but avoid offending supporters of the U.K. military (chapter 7). Persuasion involving multiple goals tries to achieve the most important goal first and then attempts to achieve secondary goals to the extent possible. This book is about achieving one goal, image repair, but it is important to realize that real persuaders often have other goals that can be very important.

At this point, the accused is ready to start developing an image repair effort. Begin by deciding on an overall approach. For example, if you are innocent, denying the accusations is usually the best option. Of course, some people continue to think they are innocent even though their audience is convinced that guilt is clear; such persuaders will trumpet their innocence without regard to audience reactions and with no success. However, if you believe you are innocent of accusations you will probably want to use denial and/or shift the blame. In rare situations, an accused who is innocent might eschew denial if the audience is completely closed-minded and would never believe a denial. In such cases the persuader may need to move on to other possible strategies, such as minimization.

If, however, you realize you are guilty, I cannot recommend denial (as I argued before, lying is wrong and the consequences for you can be very bad if you lie and then the truth is revealed). A person who is guilty or a guilty organization should consider mortification and/or corrective action. Of course, persuaders must keep in mind other important goals (confession is risky, for example, when one faces criminal or civil legal action). One who is guilty but who does not want to confess that guilt can try other strategies, such as minimization or attacking accusers (and, again, I would not recommend making accusations about the attacker that you believe

are false; that is wrong and, again, it could backfire if the truth comes out).

Once you have decided on a general defensive approach, reflect on what resources you have for your message. It is possible that simply declaring "I am innocent" (denial) would work, but supporting an image repair strategy with evidence and argument makes it more likely to succeed (remember in a criminal trial an alibi witness reinforces the defendant's denial). Chapter 3 (BP and the Gulf Oil Spill) and chapter 7 (Prime Minister Cameron on "Bloody Sunday") illustrate the use of evidence in image repair. Do you have evidence, arguments, or other sources that can reinforce your persuasive messages? If you attempt minimization, for example, do you have believable statistics showing the problem is exaggerated? If you attack the accuser, do you have proof for your accusations? Are there other sources who can support your image repair? (Keep in mind that some alibi witnesses are not credible.) If you decide to use bolstering, for example, reflect on the qualities you have and desirable things you have done recently. Keep in mind that bolstering can appear self-serving if not downright boastful; evidence is helpful, and having someone else sing your praises might work even better than bolstering from you. Keep in mind the audience's values: For bolstering to work, the qualities or actions you tout must appear desirable to the audience. A corporate official who boasts about cutting costs by firing workers might appear in a favorable light to some (investors, perhaps) but not to others (workers, and especially workers who have been fired or laid off).

It is important to be sincere and to appear sincere in image repair efforts. A persuader's apparent sincerity (it is difficult for an audience to judge actual sincerity) tends to increase the source's credibility and effectiveness. For example, Senator David Vitter (chapter 4) appeared genuinely remorseful when he confessed to his transgression with his wife Wendy Vitter at his side.

Make sure the image repair strategies you select are not contradictory: "I didn't hit her, and she provoked me into slapping her anyway," is unlikely to help. In President Nixon's speech on a U.S. military offensive in Cambodia, he attempted to use differentiation and transcendence. He displayed a map of Vietnam and Cambodia, with Viet Cong (VC) strongholds identified in red in both countries. He argued that attacks on VC in Cambodia were *not* an invasion of another country but simply more of the current policy (differentiating "invasion" from "continuation of current policies"). Nixon also used transcendence, arguing that this military offensive against the VC in

Cambodia was an entirely new action, one that will win the war (the goal of winning the war justifies a new offensive). It was important to frame this as a new offensive because the war had not been ended by the policies followed for the past 5 years. These strategies may have been plausible singly, but they did not work well together:

> In operationalizing the strategy of differentiation, Nixon characterizes his military offensive as a *continuation of current policy* of attacking enemy strongholds. This description clashes sharply with the one created by his attempt at transcendence, where we are told that this military offensive is something *new and never attempted* by us or our allies in the past five years. This does not sound as if this offensive simply continues existing policy. (Benoit, 1995a, p. 152)

Consistency in selection of image repair strategies is vital to successful image repair.

Persuaders are often reluctant to apologize; even when using mortification sometimes they cannot resist adding an excuse. For example, in chapter 5, analysis of Lance Armstrong's image repair shows that he employed mortification, saying he made mistakes, felt remorse, and was sorry for what he'd done. However, he could not leave his statement there: He had to make an excuse (defeasibility), protesting that he did not create the culture in which doping was necessary for winning. Such backpedalling tended to undermine his apology, because blaming the culture meant he was not accepting full responsibility for his offensive act. Make sure the strategies used in your defense are consistent; do not undermine your own image repair effort.

Think about what media are available to you: How can you make sure your image repair effort actually reaches the intended audience? If you have the resources, you can use multiple messages to make it more likely the intended audience sees or hears your message (recall in chapter 3 that BP used both newspaper and television advertisements). You may be able to address your intended audience face to face, but that is not always possible, especially for organizations or corporations. If you decide to address multiple audiences, you might want to tailor different messages for different audiences. However, it is risky to use inconsistent approaches in different messages, because someone might see both messages and accuse you of an inconsistent defense.

It is also important to realize that using more image repair strategies is not necessarily better than using fewer ones. One strategy, if selected carefully and appropriate for the audience's beliefs and values, might be enough. For example, if you are innocent and deny the accusations, it would not help to try to minimize the problem. If fact, adding minimization to denial could make the audience suspicious: "Why would he or she work to try to show the offense is exaggerated if he or she didn't do it?" Similarly, "I didn't do it and she provoked me anyway" is not likely to hit a home run in image repair. On the other hand, some strategies work well together, such as mortification and corrective action. Analyze the audience (identifying the relevant beliefs and values), prioritize your goals (and your target audiences), think about your persuasive resources (e.g., evidence), and select the image repair strategy or strategies that are most likely to achieve your goals.

When the accused faces multiple accusations, the defensive effort need not use the same strategy as long as your message is clear. For example, when President Bill Clinton finally confessed to having had an inappropriate relationship with intern Monica Lewinsky, he admitted one accusation and engaged in mortification (his relationship with Lewinsky), but he denied a different accusation (that he had suborned perjury or encouraged others to lie about it; Blaney & Benoit, 2001).

It is also possible to try to anticipate accusations and attempt to preempt them. Two examples are given in this book: a brief illustration of a sign in a Post Office that might help fend off complaints (chapter 2), and Cameron's third party image repair in chapter 7. It is risky to admit wrongdoing before accusations are made, but it might be worthwhile. Arpana and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2005) conducted a study of "stealing thunder," or revealing potentially damaging information before critics or the news media can release it. The authors found that stealing thunder can enhance an organization's credibility. It is clear that one area where more research is needed is preemptive image repair, one variant of which is "stealing thunder." We do not know enough about when and how to try to preempt accusations.

Preparing Crisis Response Plans

One can wait until a crisis occurs before developing a response. However, it is advisable to prepare a crisis response plan before it is needed. A crisis response plan, as conceptualized here, is a contingency plan:

The purpose of this plan is to prepare image repair responses before the crisis erupts, so they can be developed without the stress and time pressure that exist in a crisis. Of course, such contingency plans must be adapted to the specific situation and implemented thoughtfully, not followed blindly. Response plans should be reviewed periodically and updated as needed. Some will need to develop multiple contingency plans for different potential crises.

A person or organization may not know *when* accusations of wrongdoing will emerge or every image threat they will face. Crises almost always erupt unexpectedly. Some offensive acts occur through carelessness and are not predictable. Others, such as sexual harassment or types of discrimination, are meant to be secret. Still, many potential threats to image can be anticipated. For example, a restaurant can prepare for accusations of food poisoning; hopefully the restaurant will work to prevent such illnesses, but it can prepare a defense if food poisoning does happen. Passenger airline companies should strive for safety, but they can also prepare responses in case a plane crashes. Reflection on the activities an organization (or a person) pursues allows some contingency plans to be developed. When multiple potential problems are identified, they should be prioritized by likelihood and severity to develop responses.

A contingency plan should answer a number of questions:

1. What actions, if any, should be taken (e.g., shut down production, ground planes)?
2. Who in the organization needs to be informed, and what information will they need?
3. Who outside the organization needs to be informed, and what should they be told?
4. Who will be the organization's spokesperson?
5. Who designs (and who approves) image repair messages?
6. How will the message be disseminated? If there are multiple messages, when and to whom will they be distributed?
7. Under what conditions, if any, should the image repair message(s) be changed?
8. When should image repair efforts cease?

Use of the phrase *contingency plans* is meant to emphasize that these plans should consider different kinds of threats or threats of different levels of severity. Plan for choices in plans to increase the likelihood that the response implemented is suitable for the specific threat

encountered. As suggested, contingency plans should be reviewed regularly and improved if possible. Once a crisis does occur, the actual response and the plans used to develop the response should be reviewed as soon as possible after the crisis is over.

Image repair is a recurrent feature of society at all levels. This book works to understand this important form of persuasive communication. Human beings and communication are so complex that we will never be able to stop thinking about and studying image repair. We do have a solid beginning in theory and research.

Future Research on Image Repair

We have come a long way in trying to understand how to respond persuasively to threats to our reputation. However, more work can further enhance our understanding. I want to sketch a few areas that deserve attention; surely readers can imagine other possibilities. Preemptive image repair is intriguing: Surely it would be better to prevent damage to reputation than to try to repair an image after the damage has been done. As we adopt new media (e.g., the Internet, Facebook, Twitter) we need to investigate image repair in those media (see Moody, 2011; Muralidharan, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011). Image repair that occurs in an exchange (such as Stein's [2008] concept of *antapologia*) or attacks and defenses that alternate in conversations would reward our attention. Image repair in other countries besides the United States, and particularly image repair between countries with the possibility of cultural clashes, ought to be on our research agenda. Image repair discourse is a vital part of individual and organizational culture and we need to work toward a thorough understanding of this process.

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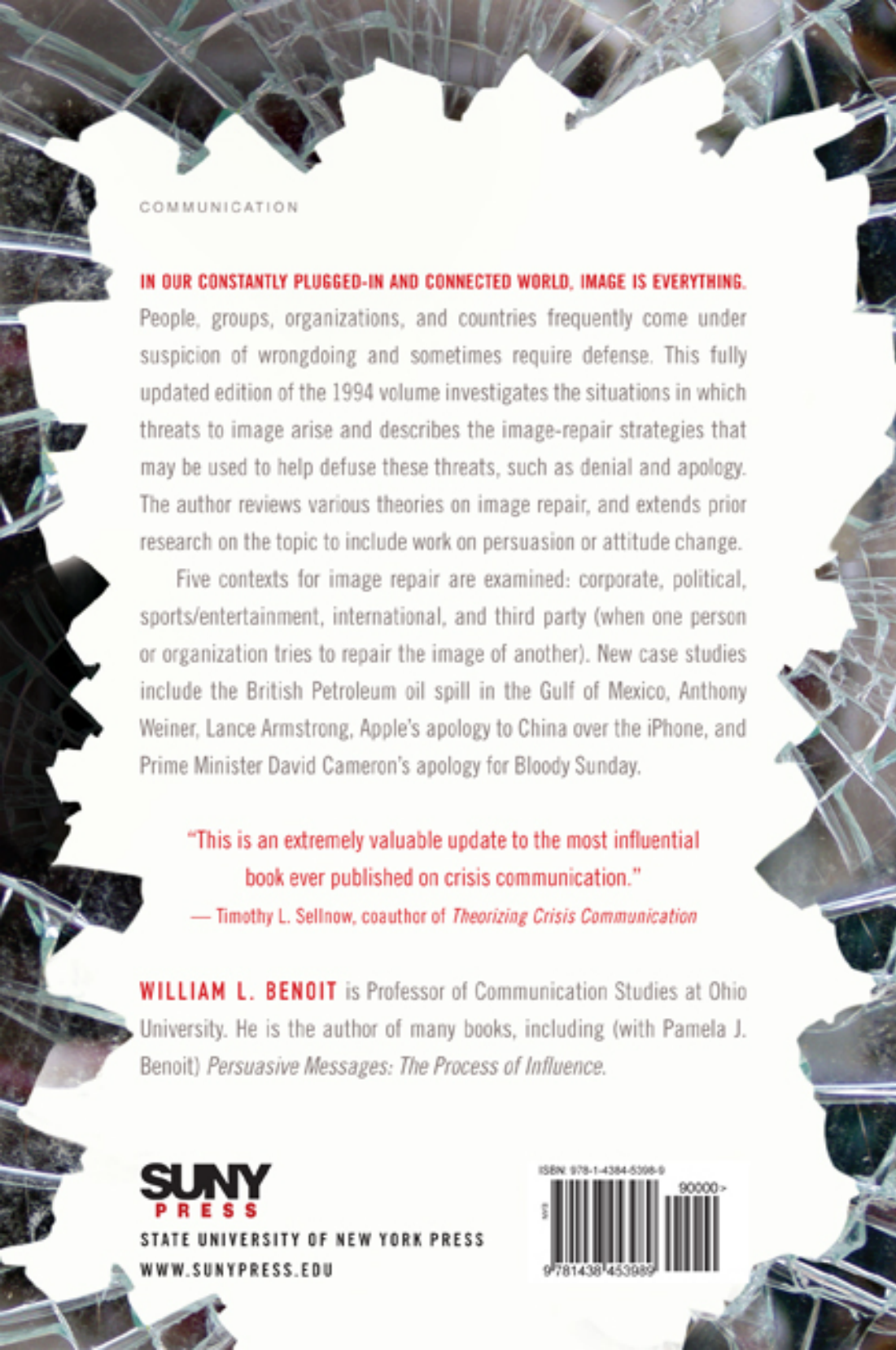

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IN OUR CONSTANTLY PLUGGED-IN AND CONNECTED WORLD, IMAGE IS EVERYTHING. People, groups, organizations, and countries frequently come under suspicion of wrongdoing and sometimes require defense. This fully updated edition of the 1994 volume investigates the situations in which threats to image arise and describes the image-repair strategies that may be used to help defuse these threats, such as denial and apology. The author reviews various theories on image repair, and extends prior research on the topic to include work on persuasion or attitude change.

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