

University Sports Apologia

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Approval Page

We certify that we have read and viewed this project and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze image repair strategies used within college athletics, specifically football. Apologia is utilized in the public realm by a person or organization that needs to apologize to their public or fans for an undesirable action. This research focuses on apologies with athletes, coaches and universities as a whole. Using Benoit's image repair framework, a content analysis was conducted to examine two football programs. Ohio State, who's athletes were involved in selling memorabilia for services, and the University of North Carolina, who had some academic fraud where athletes were given unfair treatment to keep them eligible to play. Their public apologies were transcribed and coded to identify which image repair strategies were most often utilized, and in which contexts they were used. This research found that mortification was the most commonly used strategy within the study.

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Introduction

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) assists over 460,000 student-athletes each year as they compete in their respective sports. There are 1,121 colleges and universities that make up the NCAA along with 99 voting athletics conferences and 39 affiliated organizations who create the members of the NCAA (What is the NCAA?, 2016). “Member representatives serve on committees that propose rules and policies surrounding college sports. Members ultimately decide which rules to adopt – everything from recruiting and compliance to academics and championships – and implement them on campus” (What is the NCAA?, 2016). Having this committee in place allows for a more democratic hierarchy within the NCAA.

Over the 111 years that the NCAA has been in existence, there have been quite a few misconduct incidents in the NCAA, and many apologies that followed. A couple of the most memorable are Penn State and the child sex abuse scandal, and Ohio State’s athletes trading their game jerseys and championship rings for payment. Another more current scandal was the Baylor University sexual assault trial. Many of these incidents lead to an athletics program having to forfeit or vacate their wins. Although the actions of forfeiting and vacating seem similar, there is a difference in the consequences that they cause. In an interview on vacating vs. forfeiting, NCAA Committee on Infractions Committee Chair, Paul Dee states, “In vacation, only the team involved, only in wins, do they vacate the wins. In forfeiture, you would not only vacate the win, but the opponent would improve their record” (Rapoport, 2009).

The 2010 Ohio State football team’s actions lead to thirteen vacated wins that the team had acquired throughout the season.

The 2010 Ohio State football team got caught in a scandal involving student-athletes getting paid a total of 14,000 dollars, and receiving tattoos as payment for their memorabilia along with conference rings, and game jerseys. The NCAA punished the University with a bowl ban in head coach, Urban Meyer's, first year in 2012. A bowl ban would be the equivalent to not being able to play in the playoffs of any other sport. This punishment further reduced the number of scholarships and tacked on a year of probation (Carbone, 2011).

After the memorabilia scandal was exposed, former Ohio State head coach, Jim Tressel was found to be connected with it. Tressel was informed about the student-athletes being involved in trading their memorabilia, however, he did nothing about it. Tressel then went on to sign the annual NCAA certificate of compliance form, indicating that he knew of no violations that were taking place at the time (As cited in Chronology of Ohio State scandal, 2011).

The scandal did not stop there as three players were suspended just before the start of the 2011 season for accepting \$200 from booster Bobby DiGeronimo. Halfway through the Buckeyes' 6-6 season it was found that several players had been paid too much for too little work at their summer jobs, which had been supplied by the same booster. Tressel has since been disassociated from the football program at Ohio State.

Another scandal involving the University of North Carolina's 2008 and 2009 football teams lead to the Tar Heels vacating a total of sixteen games over the two seasons for receiving academic help.

The 2008 and 2009 University of North Carolina teams received academic help to assist the athletes in keeping their eligibility. This particular scandal has become one of the most widely publicized academic fraud cases in United States history.

The student-athletes received help from not only professors, but tutors as well, who assisted the student-athletes in their assignments and tests. The NCAA interviewed several North Carolina football players over alleged gifts, and extra benefits, and found that there had indeed been some extra help for the student-athletes in the way of classes being created to keep them eligible.

Within this academic scandal, there was a particular department on campus which helped the athletes in an terrible way; including unauthorized grade changes and faculty signatures, classes with very little teaching taking place, and a disproportionate proportion of the student-athletes enrolled in affected classes. Former U.S. Justice Department official, Kenneth Wainstein, states that it seems hard to reasonably claim that athletics was not the main impetus. Wainstein reported that, from 1993 through 2011, more than 3,100 UNC students took classes in the African and Afro-American Studies department that did not require attendance (Story, 2017). Along with this, a specific tutor was being assigned to the athletes to assist in test taking and submission of assignments on the athlete's behalf. All of this was done in hopes to help the student-athletes keep their eligibility. Several of these instances and scandals have led to research in the area of image repair.

In order to understand the scale to which this affects the public, there must be an understand of who the NCAA is. The NCAA is the largest athlete association in America, serving 19,000 teams, and as stated above, more than 460,000 student-athletes. To illustrate how large the NCAA is, the next largest association is the NAIA who serves 65,000 student-athletes per year (About the NAIA, 2016). By looking into the scandals involving such prominent universities within college football such as Ohio State and the University of North Carolina,

researchers are able to see how different organizations use *apologia*, compare their strategies, and allow further research to be completed on the topic of *apologia*. Both of these universities used *apologia* in a current day setting. Although there are hundreds of scandals similar to these, the University of North Carolina and Ohio State's stand out because their stature in the NCAA, the combination of different *apologia* styles, and using press releases and the media to do so.

Apologia and image repair can be used in many ways, and can be used as a solution to multiple problems. It is important to understand the benefits of *apologia*, as one can use it in their personal lives to better their relationships as well as the media exposure in the sports today.

“As the media continue to become further rooted in professional sports, the more personal lives of athletes become exposed. As a result, sports fans become more knowledgeable to the personal lives of athletes and develop opinions on these athletes, whether good or bad. It is inevitable that athletes are exposed to the public when they commit an offensive act, which is why the study of image repair for modern athletes is critical” (Winter, 2015).

The two schools mentioned above found themselves in situations where they needed to use image repair. These two universities provide current apologies that can be analyzed with Benoit's image repair strategies. This paper assesses the image repair strategies used by Ohio State, and the University of North Carolina in their public statements using a variety of image repair strategies in their public apologies.

A content analysis will be done on these two teams which allows the researcher to understand the textual material by evaluating text and context of each situation.

Literature Review

To analyze the strategies used by the universities to apologize for their misdeeds, this paper relies on the theory of apologia, along with the image repair framework. Both of which have had extensive research completed on them, allowing many to study the theories deeper.

Apologia

In Kevin Stein's (2008) work on *apologia*, he expresses how *apologia* is used, and more importantly why it is used. "When individuals and organizations are forced to explain their behavior, they will typically account for the undesirable action by lessening responsibility for the act or by lessening the significance of the harm caused by the act" (Stein, 2008, p.19). Apologia is a gateway for people to use image repair. The strategies go hand in hand and allow people to acknowledge they have done wrong.

Apologia can be seen as a form of self-defense, there are many ways one can use *apologia* to try and keep a positive image of themselves. In a study completed on former President Nixon, the author, Allison Prash, states how Nixon was a master of self-defense. Prash goes on to say, "some of his most rhetorically successful addresses were those that defended some aspect of his character or political position" (2015). This type of *apologia* is also shown in Ware and Linkugel's (1973) work, describing the genre of *apologia* as a "public speech of self-defense" (p. 274) that is issued in response to an attack on one's character or worth. Apologetic discourse in the beginning was argued to be, "a distinct form of public address, a family of speeches with sufficient elements in common so as to warrant legitimately generic status" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 273).

Apologia can be used in many different ways. This is supported by using the ideas of Ware and Linkugel (1973) where they outlined some principles of the rhetorical form of apology. Ware and Linkugel draw on Robert Abelson's theory of belief-dilemma resolution to describe four factors that apologists use when caught in a wrong: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (Towner, 2007). Since then, many scholars have used the generic criticism of apology to analyze occasions such as President Nixon's resignation speech.

Ware and Linkugel (1973) state, "They argue the speaker will attempt to identify him/herself with something valued by the audience" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p.275) . This is in an effort to show the audience that they are similar and just because they slipped up does not mean they are not someone who still has their life together, or someone to be looked up to. On the opposite side, apology gives the accused an outlet. Having the ability to clear their mind and start with a clean slate gives the apologizer a clear conscious to get back out there and do the things at which they are best.

An outside look at apology comes from Noreen Kruse. Kruse (2009) defined apology as a defense of one's character in response to public criticism. Public criticism should of course, lead to a public apology, in which researchers can dig deeper into why people are motivated to both criticize and apologize in the public eye. Kruse also expanded the definition to include a wide variety of mediums or methods of delivery in addition to public speeches—including materials such as novels, press releases, plays, and poems. Having multiple mediums for a public apology gives the person apologizing the option to reach many audiences, in hopes that their apology will be accepted.

The predecessor to apologia, image repair theory, was potentially misinterpreted in some instances. Burns and Bruner (2000) found several areas that could potentially cause confusion within Benoit's (1995) image restoration theory: specifically image and restoration. Viewers of the apology could misinterpret images in two ways. The first indicates an oversimplification of the agent's image. Secondly, "a reader might assume that image restoration must be approached from the point of view of the corporation" (Burns & Bruner, 2000, p. 29).

Image Repair in Sports

After the foundation was set based on apologia theory, William Benoit rendered up what are the image restoration strategies in 1995, using a similar framework to the apologia theory. Image repair theory states, "Because our image is important to us, when we believe that our image is threatened by some attack, we are motivated to take necessary steps to protect it. An attempt to repair one's reputation when faced with allegations is inevitable" (Brown, 2012, p. 16).

Benoit's image repair theory is based on the theory of apologia but expands on the topic to create five image repair strategies with subcategories. The first image repair strategy, denial, comes from apologia theory. Benoit states that there are two different types of denial, simple denial or evasion of responsibility.

Reducing offensiveness is another image repair strategy, which can be used in multiple ways. One can reduce offensiveness through bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, or compensating the victim. Bolstering refocuses the attention onto positive acts to reduce the negative image portrayed by the negative action.

Minimization attempts to show that the “act is not as serious as presented”. Differentiation tries to prove the act is not as offensive as other similar acts (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009, p. 168).

Transcendence paints the act in a more positive circumstance to reduce negative perception.

Additionally, the accused can attack the accuser’s credibility or compensate the victims of the offensive act (Brown, 2012, p. 19).

The last two image repair strategies are corrective action and mortification. These strategies are often used in unison. The corrective action strategy involves the accused showing commitment to preventing another offensive act from occurring. With mortification strategy the accused admits their responsibility and asks for forgiveness (Brown, 2012, p. 19). All of these image repair strategies are often not used alone but rather in multiple variations.

Many times, *apologia* theory has influenced the responses given from not only the athletic organizations, but the teams and athletes as well. When a University fails to obtain the vision of the NCAA, they are held responsible to apologize for what they did so that it does not reflect poorly on the NCAA. These organizations have more than just their own image to uphold, and they have many approaches available for them that could fix their threatened image.

In an instance involving Duke University’s lacrosse team, the team was found not guilty for their actions, but the image of the university was still tarnished due to their wrongdoing. “As long as there was a public perception that the allegations were true and that the University was partly responsible by association, Duke needed to respond” (Len-Rios, 2010). Being under the microscope for too long could result in an instance such as this, where although they were not guilty, it still reflected poorly, and that is why image repair is used at such a level.

Bolstering appears to be the most common in sports *apologia*. This is shown again in Alex Rodriguez's apology on his drug abuse when he states, "Like everyone else, I've made a lot of mistakes in my life" and, "...there's certain things I can't control and there are certain things I could control. I'm going to focus on what I can do and move forward" (Rodriguez, 2009). These are both great examples of how bolstering works as he tries to connect with the audience by stating what he did was wrong, but the only thing he can do is move on, he is only human like the rest of us.

In an article done by Jordan Compton at Ohio University on some very unsportsmanlike conduct done by a female soccer player at the University of New Mexico, her apology is analyzed in this article, and she uses bolstering when she states, "I look at it [the video] and I'm like, 'That is not me.' I have so much regret. I can't believe I did that" (As cited in Repairing the athlete's image, 2013). She is almost apologizing as if she is not the human who preformed the actions that so many saw on the soccer field that day.

In a very recent international scandal involving three American college basketball players, one particular players apology stood out with the use of bolstering. Cody Riley, one of the accused athletes from the UCLA basketball team states, "I know that this goes beyond me, letting my school down, but I let the entire country down" (UCLA players arrested in China apologize, 2017). Riley brings the focus off the situation by showing his sorrow for what he did, and the trials it put the entire country through. He once again thanks not only the government where he was held, but the United State government for getting them out, and home safely to America. This is again a use of bolstering as he is showing what a good reputation our nation has, taking the focus off of him, and his actions.

The media plays a key role in the *apologia* process for public figures. The media provides a channel for statements to be made on public record and provide public figures with a means for transparent communication with their publics (Winter, 2015).

Media coverage has shot through the roof in the past five to ten years when it comes to sports. With the rise in media awareness, image repair has become more and more necessary and well known within the realm of athletics. With the idea that media presence is growing in athletics, it is important for athletes to know how to defend their image, and try and keep it in a positive light, not only in the media's eyes, but the fan's as well.

Many athletes, and organizations use a similar framework to apologize for their actions, but some things set others apart. Using the right image repair strategy could make all of the difference. There are factors such as the audience being apologized to, and what it was exactly that the accused is apologizing for. By analyzing what strategies were used, and how it was received one could understand the idea of image repair better.

Research Questions

RQ: What are the dominant image repair strategies used by the Universities to restore their image in the public's eye?

Methods

Benoit's Image Repair Theory Framework is used to analyze the University of North Carolina, and Ohio State's statements to see how they utilize the image repair process. Benoit's image repair discourse, the most recent of image repair theory, has been used to analyze many other prominent image repair situations.

Samples

The two artifacts that were chosen were done so because of what they offered along the lines of image repair and their prominence within the NCAA community. Both universities apologized for the actions of their athletes, but in very different styles. The University of North Carolina took an entire university approach because their faculty was involved in the transgression while Ohio State's apology came from the coach and was only connected to the football team.

The texts that have been analyzed are press release transcripts of the individual apologies. This study uses a content analysis to analyze the text, allowing patterns to arise and help get a better understanding of image repair and why it is used in university athletics. Bryman (2004) states that qualitative content analysis is "probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents" and that it "comprises a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analyzed" (p.392).

The statements made by the universities using the different *apologia* styles will be the focus of this study. Ohio State's apology was done by Terrell Pryor and coach Tessel's apology during a press conference put on by the university. The University of North Carolina's apology came from their chancellor, again in a press release with other university administration members.

Theoretical Framework

These five models of *apologia* can be used in many instances, such as bringing light to a problem, and attempting to fix it. *Apologia* is mostly used for the purpose of reconciliation rather than self-interest (Borden, 2012). By having a clear idea of what an apology should be, and why

one should be conducted, the perpetrator has the best chance at that apology being accepted by everyone.

Image repair, although very close to *apologia* theory, brings different aspects to the table. *Apologia* suggests a variety of reasons for apologizing, but Benoit argues that the primary purpose of image repair is to fix image. Ware and Linkugel (1973) laid the grounds for what would become a more recent and relevant development brought to academia by William Benoit. Benoit (1997) created the image repair theory to expand the *apologia* theory, and show the many ways possible to apologize.

Benoit's discourse is made up of five strategies; denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Along with these five strategies come 14 subcategories. These are simple denial, blame shift, provocation, defeasibility, accidental, good intentions, bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking accuser, compensation, corrective action and forgiveness (Benoit, 1997).

Denial. The first image repair strategy, denial, comes from the *apologia* theory like much of the image repair strategies. There are two types of denial, as explained by Benoit (1997). Those are simple denial and shifting blame. In simple denial, the accused states that they did not commit the act of which they are being accused. The main shifting blame is to take the spotlight off of oneself, The denial strategy involves the accused person, or organization denying that the misconduct ever took place, or shifting blame on to someone or something else. The denial strategy is used when the accusations of the scandal or incident are not true, or deceptive (Utsler & Epp, 2013).

A famous example of denial used in sports apologia is Roger Clemens when he was accused of using performance enhancing drugs while playing baseball. "I realize that many people want me to simply confess and apologize for the conduct that I have been accused of, but I cannot confess to, nor apologize for, things I did not do," Clemens said (Thompson & Vinton, 2008).

Evading responsibility. The second strategy is evading responsibility, there are four subcategories that come along with it. Evading responsibility itself occurs when someone cannot deny their actions, but they can use any of the four components that come along with it. The first subcategory of evading responsibility is provocation. This is where the accused may claim that the act was committed in response to another wrongful act.

Next is defeasibility. Defeasibility is when the accused pleads a lack of knowledge or control about important factors related to the offensive act. A good example of defeasibility is when Alex Rodriguez got caught using drugs that were not permitted in Major League Baseball. He shows this when he stated, "I didn't think they were steroids at the time. Again, that's part of being young and stupid" (Rodriguez, 2009). Although he is apologizing, he is taking what he did and claiming he did not know they were illegal and going to somewhat ruin his career.

Accident and good intention are the final two categories under evading responsibility. The accident style is where the actor may make an excuse for factors beyond their control, and good intentions is performed when the actor asks not to be held fully responsible based on his/her good, rather than evil motives in committing the act. The action of using evading responsibility is shown when Holtzhausen & Roberts state, "the communicative entity can argue it was provoked and responded to the act of another, argue defeasibility due to a lack of

information or ability, or claim the event was an accident or that it has good intentions” (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). This shows just how many different tactics there are within evading responsibility.

Reducing offensiveness. Another strategy that can be used in image repair is reducing offensiveness. This strategy has many subcategories that can be used to repair an image. These are bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, or compensating the victim. These are all ways to take the offense and make it seem as less offensive, and somewhat try to brush it under the rug to smooth things over.

Reducing offensiveness is used to reduce the level of negative feelings towards the accused. These strategies all take what happened and tries to make it seem smaller than it is, or bring to light all of the positive things that the person has done in hopes to make the audience forget about what they have done that got them into this situation.

Differentiation strategy uses equivocation to make the public look at the incident, and not connect it to the accused party’s character. The accused tries to illustrate the accusation in a different context, giving it a new meaning (Utsler & Epp, 2013). In an article by Jordan Compton on some very unsportsmanlike conduct by a female soccer player at the University of New Mexico illustrates this perfectly. Her apology states, “I look at it [the video] and I’m like, ‘That is not me.’ I have so much regret. I can’t believe I did that” (As cited in Repairing the athlete's image, 2013). She is almost apologizing as if she is not the human who preformed the actions that so many saw on the soccer field that day.

The bolstering strategy tries to identify with the audience through something they may have in common in a positive light. The individual or organization being accused of misconduct

attempts to remind the audience of positive parts of their past, stating all the good they have done within their organization, or for the community. This is shown again in Alex Rodriguez's apology on his drug abuse when he states, "Like everyone else, I've made a lot of mistakes in my life" and, "...there's certain things I can't control and there are certain things I could control. I'm going to focus on what I can do and move forward" (Rodriguez, 2009). Through this technique, the accused is not denying guilt but rather trying to push the blame that they are receiving off. This is a great example of how bolstering works as he tries to connect with the audience by stating what he did was wrong, but the only thing he can do is move on, he is only human like the rest of us. Boltering is not always seen as the most effective *apologia* strategy because of the idea that there is an expectation of guilt by not addressing the problem directly, and taking responsibility (Brown, Dickhaus & Long, 2012).

Minimization is somewhat self explanatory, as this method is used to claim that something was not as bad as it had originally seemed. An example of minimization could be, "grafitti is art, it is not a crime".

Transcendence is taking the action and turning it into something positive, by changing the aspect in which people see the action the accused can change the way people perceive their action. With attacking accuser, the person who is accused gets back at their accuser. Utsler and Epp (2013) define transcendence as trying to portray the transgression as a smaller part of an overall positive situation that is not readily apparent to the public. This is done in hopes that the accusers will try to understand the bigger picture and view the offensive act in a more positive way.

Compensation is simply when the accused tries to payoff the person who accused them. This does not change what the accused did, or does it correct what they did.

Corrective action. The corrective action strategy seems to be the most effective, and one of the most popular. It comes across as sincere, and very apologetic and that is what people want when it comes down to apologies. In corrective action, the accused claims that they will fix the problem. This can involve restoring the situation to its prior state, or promising to make changes to prevent its reoccurrence. In Michael Vick's apology for dogfighting, he uses corrective action when he calls on himself to be more selective with the people he helps and this will alleviate his association with the negative allegations at his home (As cited in *Repairing the athlete's image*, 2013). Corrective action shows that there is room for change, and knowledge of the events that happened.

Mortification. The last strategy that is used in Benoit's image repair is mortification. Mortification is admitting what they did, and asking for forgiveness for their actions. Mortification is also very popular because it is raw and honest, it can be taken as a very sincere "sorry". A few examples of this come from Josh Hamilton and his apology on drug and alcohol abuse. "To everybody I hurt, everybody, fans, kids, people who have addictions who look up to me, I apologize" (Sullivan, 2012). In his statement, he again puts all of the blame on himself saying "I feel terrible about this..." and "There is nobody that feels worse than I do" (Sullivan, 2012).

By using this strategy, he shows that he is truly sorry for his actions, and he feels regret for those actions. Again, in Elizabeth Lambert's apology she uses mortification to show her feelings towards her actions, which included punching several opponents during a soccer game,

along with pulling an opponent's hair causing her to fall to the floor. "I am deeply and wholeheartedly regretful for my action" (As cited in *Repairing the athlete's image*, 2013).

Mortification is used often, and for good reason.

The corrective action and mortification strategies which are important to image repair, are often used together to create an apology. Combining apology strategies could be beneficial when used correctly, "By confessing and discussing the atrocities committed, both parties, the injurer and the injured, can take stock of what has been done" (Edwards, 2010). The following example shows how two parties work together to bring cohesion of the apology to a different level. In this particular example, it shows how the United States, Australia and Canada apologized for actions they took by using mortification and corrective action. As a collective apology, the three authorities who were apologizing came together to say their apologies.

A poor example of how collective apology works would be Dan Rather and CBS. Dan Rather apologized for his actions, and CBS apologized on his behalf, but the apologies did not match up. They used multiple different methods, and that is the main reason why their apology failed. They used methods of *apologia* such as denial, mortification, corrective action, transcendence and good intentions. All of which take the apology in different directions, which ultimately leads back to the apology being ineffective (Kaylor, 2010).

Coding

A content analysis, using the image repair strategies to analyze the data, is used to understand the apology strategies that came from the universities. Benoit's (1997) image repair theory works best to analyze the text, and help with understanding the effect that an apology has on someone or something's image, whether that be the media, family, or fans. However, no

attempt was made in this study to measure the effectiveness of the apology, only to focus on the strategies used by the schools. Statements made by the school official or athlete were evaluated and placed into the image repair strategy for which they were used.

The apologies of two universities were analyzed for the scandals in which they were involved. A transcript of University of North Carolina's vice chancellor's, James Dean's, apology on Bloomberg News was used to see what strategies were used. Dean's apology took place January 25, 2014 in New York City.

For Ohio State's apology; athlete, Terrelle Pryor and Coach Tressel's press release apologies were used to analyze their image repair methods. Both Pryor and Tressel's apologies took place June 14, 2011 on Ohio State's campus. Ultimately there were five athletes involved who sold a list of things, including Big Ten championship rings, a Fiesta Bowl sportsmanship award, jerseys, pants and shoes, along with other items (Dirlam, 2016), however only one apologized, that being Pryor. By using Benoit's image repair framework an analysis was conducted to see what strategies were used, and if they the strategies were similar with the scandal that each organization was facing.

Results

The results show that the strategies most used were mortification, defeasibility, corrective action, and differentiation. These styles seemed to be the most effective for the organization as they publicly apologized, by still showing they understood they had done wrong.

Mortification

There are multiple examples of mortification in the apologies given by the universities, and it was also the most used by both universities. By using mortification in an apology, it shows

the organization understands what they did wrong, and they see the necessity to sincerely apologize for their actions. By looking at Terrelle Pryor of Ohio State, one can understand that he illustrates the use of mortification. He states, in a press release, “In terms of Ohio State, I’d like to say sorry to the coaching staff, say sorry to my teammates, say sorry to all Buckeye nation and to all the Buckeye fans” (AP Archive, 2015). Mortification is also found in the University of North Carolina’s apology about having fake classes: We made mistakes. Horrible things happened that I’m ashamed of” (Barrett, 2014). This is a prime example of someone accepting what their organization did was wrong, but now there is nothing left to do other than move forward, and try to rebuild the tradition that has become.

Another example of mortification comes from the North Carolina scandal, as the people apologizing for the academic fraud that was happening were not even a part of the administration when it was taking place. James Dean, the executive vice chancellor and provost of North Carolina stated, “that was wrong and ... undermined our integrity and our reputation. We actually feel accountable and... we’re going to learn from that painful history” (Barrett, 2014). Although the people in charge were not there when the fraud was committed, they still took it on as if it was their responsibility, and showed use of mortification.

Defeasibility

Defeasibility is defined by Benoit as lack of information or ability (Benoit, 2006). Although this technique is used often, it does not show a lot of responsibility for the actions done. In the University of North Carolina’s apology, they used a lot of defeasibility. Those who apologized made sure it was clear that they were not around when the scandal took place, this came across very clear in their apology. By using defeasibility, they did not necessarily plead for

a lack of knowledge, rather they were not there so they had no part in the action. The dean stated that the story is more complicated, than just those involving the department where fake classes were made, and it does have something to do with the athletics department as well. The group of administration from North Carolina used the statement, “To fix things, we have to understand what actually happened in the past” (Barrett, 2014). By using defeasibility, they did not necessarily plead for a lack of knowledge, rather they were not there so they had no part in the action.

Corrective Action

Corrective action was another strategy used often through Ohio State and the University of North Carolina’s *apologia*. Benoit (2006) states that corrective action is used when the accused claims that he will correct the problem. This can involve restoring the situation to its prior state, or promising to make changes to prevent its reoccurrence. Both Ohio State and North Carolina used this strategy to apologize for what they had done. Tressel used corrective action on behalf of Pryor, stating, “he’s not going to make any excuses. He’s going to tell the team he made some mistakes... out of maturity, but he has a good heart” (AP Archives, 2015). He uses these terms to show that they both know what went wrong, and they know it has to be fixed to repair their image. He goes on to say, “I believe in this young man” (AP Archives, 2015).

Differentiation

Although differentiation is used far less than the others, but it is still prevalent in Ohio State’s apology to the media. Pryor apologized by stating, “I’d like to graduate, come back and graduate sometime and finish my degree and graduate as a Buckeye” (AP Archives, 2015). By standing by the university, and stating that he wants to come back and finish as a Buckeye, Pryor

takes the light off of the negative and focuses on the positive of wanting to continue his education at Ohio State University. He is making a connection with the Buckeye fan base, and showing that he still wants to be a part of the university.

Each strategy serves its own purpose when it comes to *apologia* and image repair, and the four strategies that were used to analyze the universities apologies seemed to be the best fit for the situation, as they showed sorrow for their actions. Benoit's expansion on the *apologia* theory has given a new face to image repair and *apologia*, and has helped out with this process immensely. Benoit's image repair strategy creates a way to study *apologia* by creating different categories which can be broken down even further to understand the whole process.

Discussion

The strategies mentioned above in the results were the most prevalent for the topic of study. The four strategies mentioned, illustrate the most effective way to apologize, as they were most commonly found in the analyzed text. The mortification, corrective action, defeasibility and differentiation strategies can show that the accused wants to improve the situation through apologizing. A few of the less common strategies that were used were denial and provocation. These two forms of *apologia* were not used in the analyzed text, as the universities had been found out, there was proof of what they had done, so using denial would have hurt the program and university more than it would have helped.

The research question associated with this study looked into the dominant image repair strategies used by the Universities to restore their image in the public's eye. This research question was answered through coding of press releases.

Although previous research has been done on very similar circumstances, these stand out to as being different and their own individual situations because of who apologized and how they apologized to the public. In the University of North Carolina's case, they had someone who is very established in the school system apologize, however, that individual was not there when the events took place, and was not a part of the scandal in anyway. But because this was a school infraction, a representative of the school was chosen to give the apology. This gives the apology a different feel than Ohio State's simply because of where the apology was coming from. Since Ohio State's infraction was centered on athletes and coach, it made sense that they were the individuals to issue the apology. In much of the literature done on this topic it is clear that the apology is coming from the source of the issue.

Much research has been done on topics such as this one, or very similar to it. For future research, a personal interview could be an aspect to add to the research to give it a more personal touch. Analyzing a smaller scale school would give the researcher the ability to have that personal level, and allow maybe a different type of apology if it be one on one. Having to apologize on a large scale such as a press conference might be a factor in how young college athletes think they have to apologize compared to how they actually feel about their actions, and the question of if they thought they were wrong for doing so.

Conclusion

The findings that were present in these apologies are important because they show the strategies in which organizations use to apologize. These particular apologies are unique, as they show a modern take on apologia. The University of North Carolina is still dealing with the repercussions of their action of almost ten years ago. Being able to deal with a crisis for almost

ten years, and not have much media coverage may show that the university is handling it well. Understanding what strategies are successful for the accused in a group or organizational setting, will make it easier in the future to identify how to apologize for similar actions.

Future research on this topic should analyze apologies universities have made concerning other types of scandals beyond athletics to determine if similar *apologia* strategies are used. It would also be important to note how effective those strategies work together. Future research should also determine whether or not the apology was accepted by the media and the public.

Limitations of this paper include the lack of content and the analysis of only two university scandals. First, it was very difficult to find information that was ready to be analyzed. Many of the press releases found, needed to be transcribed, so that the coding process was more organized. On top of this issue, just finding press conferences of apologies was a challenge in itself. The small number of people who actually apologized also created a limitation of the information available. Secondly, a number of universities have face scandals within their athletic departments and should be studied as well.

By analyzing the text above, it brought to light the importance of organizational apologies, and the impact they have on not just a singular image, but a whole web of images that could be hindered by a scandal. Image repair has become much more important in the sports world as the media has increased their presence within athletics. By using image repair within sports, it gives the athletes the ability to apologize for their action, and to attempt to repair, or keep their positive image.

Image repair is important in any aspect of life, but it is more important when the media gets a hold of the scanda. Many scandals start small and continue to grow. For example, Ohio

State, not only got in trouble for their actions of selling memorabilia, but their coach took it to a new level of lying to the NCAA. Once this was exposed by the media it grew into something about which that everyone knew. Having a public apology in a situation like the ones of Ohio State and the University of North Carolina is crucial to the the university, the NCAA and one's self, as they strive to keep a positive image in the public and media eye.

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