OFF THE FIELD: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF ATHLETE TRANSGRESSIONS AND RESPONSE STRATEGY ON THE IMAGE REPAIR AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION PROCESS

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation was designed to investigate to what extent that an athlete’s transgression can damage not only the athlete’s image, but the image of the team that depends on that athlete’s image to maintain its positive image. Using Benoit’s Image Repair Theory, this study explored to what extent the type of transgression faced by an athlete and his/her response to the transgression affect the image of that athlete. This study also examined to what extent the type of transgression faced by an athlete, the response of the team that athlete represents to the transgression, and the team’s history of dealing with athlete transgression affects a team’s image using Coombs’ Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Using two experiments, the researcher empirically examined the effects of transgression type, crisis history and response strategy on athlete and team image, team responsibility, and the behavioral intentions impacted by image, while controlling for participant’s prior knowledge of the cases used in the experiment, and the participant’s degree of moral judgment. Specifically, the first experiment examined the effects of the type of transgression (criminal vs. non-criminal) and the athlete’s response to the transgression (mortification vs. attacking the accuser vs. bolstering) on the athlete’s image and the amount of negative word-of-mouth generated about the athlete. The second experiment examined the effects of the type of transgression (internal vs. external), the team’s history of athlete transgressions (positive vs. negative) and the team’s response to the transgression (apology vs. scapegoating vs. justification) on the amount of responsibility placed on the team for the athlete’s transgression, the team’s reputation, the amount of negative word-of-mouth and supportive behavior generated towards the team.
For Experiment I, results showed that regardless of the type of transgression, an athlete will repair his/her image better if they use the mortification strategy rather than the attacking the accuser or bolstering strategy. However, there is evidence that the preferred strategy used to improve an athlete’s image can depend on the type of transgression the athlete faces. Results also showed that the more negative the athlete’s image is perceived, the more negative WOM generated about that athlete. For Experiment II, results were similar to previous studies using Coombs’ SCCT theory. More responsibility was attributed to a team when the athlete in question is facing a transgression that occurred during play or team activities rather than facing a transgression external to the team. Also, more responsibility was attributed to a team when it has a history of athletes facing transgressions, and the more responsibility attributed to the team, the more negatively the team is perceived by stakeholders. Results did not support the recommendations provided by Coombs for choosing SCCT strategies, but they did support the links between reputation and behavior: the more positive the team’s reputation, the less negative WOM generated about the team, and the more positive the team’s reputation, the more stakeholders are willing to support the team.
DEDICATION

To my late great-grandmother Hattie Mae Wiley and my late aunt Paulette Joyner—you always saw the potential in me to do great things. I wish you were here to see our dreams finally come true.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ANOVA Analysis of Variance statistical test
ANCOVA Analysis of Covariance statistical test
EFA Exploratory Factor Analysis
F Fisher’s F ratio
IRB Institutional Review Board
IRT Image Repair Theory
LSD Fisher’s Least Significant Difference test
M Arithmetic mean
NBA National Basketball Association
NFL National Football League
p Probability value
PGA Professional Golfers’ Association
r Pearson product-moment correlation
R² Coefficient of determination
SCCT Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SD Standard deviation
t Student’s t ratio
WOM Word of Mouth
α Cronbach’s alpha
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To Amanda Tubbs, you have been such a huge support during this entire process since I’ve met you, and I can honestly say I could not have gotten through the last year of trials and tribulations without you. I cannot wait to start this next chapter of my life with you. To Dr. Jennings Bryant and Diane Shaddix, you saw potential in me enough to admit me into the program, nominate me for a fellowship among other honors, and help me each and every step of the way. To Dr. Candace White, thank you for steering me to a path of academia. I would not have made it this far without your encouragement during my masters program. I also want to thank the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Alabama. You embraced me as one of your own my first year here, and you are giving me a wonderful opportunity. I am proud to be a member of this prestigious faculty.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. II

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................................... IV

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS .............................................................................. V

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................. VI

LIST OF TABLES ...................................................................................................................... XIII

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................. 1

*The Importance of Athlete Image* ............................................................................................. 2

Purpose of the Dissertation ........................................................................................................ 5

Significance of the Dissertation ................................................................................................ 7

Overview of the Dissertation ..................................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................... 10

The Need for Audience-Oriented Image Repair and Crisis Communication Research .......... 10

Part I – Athlete Transgressions and the Impact on the Athlete ................................................ 12

Image ......................................................................................................................................... 12

Benoit’s Image Repair .............................................................................................................. 15
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image Repair Strategies</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image Repair in Sports</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Link between Image and Behavior</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II – Athlete Transgressions and the Impact on the Team</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Crisis and Crisis Communication Management</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Development of the Crisis Communication Management Process</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Response</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roots of SCCT: Attribution Theory</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational Crisis Communication Theory</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Response Strategies</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique and Evaluation of SCCT</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Communication and Sports: Using SCCT to Examine Athlete Transgressions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 – METHOD</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Design</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Response Analysis</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment Case Selection</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment I – Athlete Image</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent Variables</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION ........................................................................................................... 90

Summary of Results ..................................................................................................................... 90

Summary of Research Questions and Hypotheses ................................................................. 91

Theoretical and Practical Implications ...................................................................................... 94

Implications for Image Repair in Sports .................................................................................. 94

Implications for Empirical Research in Crisis Communication ............................................. 97

Implications for Public Relations Practitioners ................................................................. 100

Limitations and Future Research ............................................................................................ 102

Theoretical Limitations ............................................................................................................ 102

Methodological Limitations .................................................................................................... 104

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 105

REFERENCE LIST ..................................................................................................................... 106

APPENDIX A – MANIPULATION NEWS ARTICLES FOR EXPERIMENT I ....................... 117

APPENDIX B – MANIPULATION NEWS ARTICLES FOR EXPERIMENT II ..................... 121

APPENDIX C – INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT ......................................................... 125

APPENDIX D – DEBRIEFING AND THANK-YOU STATEMENT ........................................ 126

APPENDIX E – SCENARIOS FOR MORAL JUDGMENT SCALE ....................................... 127

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ........................................................................................................... 128
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>SCCT Crisis Typology, by Level of Responsibility (Coombs, 2007b)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>SCCT Crisis Response Typology, by Posture (Coombs, 2007b)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>List of Transgressions used in Environmental Scan Pretest</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>NFL Athletes used for Preliminary Screening</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Items Measuring Athlete Image (Choi &amp; Rifon, 2007)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Items Measuring Negative Word-of-Mouth (Coombs &amp; Holladay, 2007)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Items Measuring Crisis Responsibility (Brown &amp; Ki, 2011)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Items Measuring Organization Reputation (Coombs &amp; Holladay, 1996; McCroskey, 1966)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Items Measuring Potential Supportive Behavior</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Hypotheses and Research Questions, Variables and Statistical Procedures</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Manipulation and Participants in Experiment I</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Manipulation and Participants in Experiment 2</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Demographic Profile</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Factor Loadings for Athlete Image Scale</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Factor Loadings for Negative WOM Scale</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Factor Loadings for Crisis Responsibility Scale</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Factor Loadings for Organizational Reputation Scale</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Factor Loadings for Supportive Behavioral Intentions Scale</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Manipulation Check Scores: Experiment I Response Strategies</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Manipulation Check Scores: Experiment I Response Strategies</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Change in Perceived Image</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Generated Negative Word-of-Mouth</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Change in Generated Negative Word-of-Mouth</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Perceived Team Crisis Responsibility</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Perceived Team Organizational Reputation</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Sport has achieved popularity across the United States and has become an important social, cultural and economical feature of the country. Fan affiliation with a specific athlete or team has helped strengthen the bonds between groups of people regardless of their backgrounds, ethnicities, religions or economic status. (Prettyman & Lampman, 2011). This popularity is evident, with more than 200 million estimated sports fans in the United States (Trail & James, 2008). The popularity of sport has led to its economic growth. Milano and Chelladurai (2011) have estimated that the sport industry in the United States is worth between $168 and $208 billion. The SportsBusiness Journal estimates the industry to be worth $213 billion, twice as large as the auto industry and seven times larger than the movie industry (“The Sports Industry,” 2007, as cited in Pedersen, Miloch & Laucella, 2007).

Another indicator of the national impact of sport is the extensive amount of media coverage dedicated to sport. In fact, the sport industry has grown significantly due to the influence and growth of sports media. The growth of ESPN is an indicator of the nation’s current demand for sport media coverage and the media’s commitment to provide that coverage. What began as a local cable television station in 1979 has expanded into a media conglomerate, operating multiple television stations, radio stations, a website and a magazine among other ventures. Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella (2007) addressed the impact of media coverage on sport, stating that although sports are not dependent on the media for survival, aspects of specific sports that do not receive much attention from media can struggle to gain awareness, which can lead to the inability to attract fans and achieve financial success.
Although the sports industry is enjoying great financial success and extensive media coverage, both can be hampered when athletes that represent teams or leagues become involved with scandals, criminal activity and other transgressions. These transgressions can impact the interest and consumption of sports among fans. For example, after the infamous brawl between the Indiana Pacers and the Detroit Pistons on November 19, 2004, the Pacers have annually suffered low attendance figures, an issue they still face into the 2011-2012 NBA season (Reed, 2012). After the Tiger Woods infidelity scandal, the PGA Tour suffered declining attendance figures and TV ratings in 2010 (McCarthy, 2010).

This dissertation will examine the role of image repair in professional sports. Specifically, this dissertation empirically investigates to what extent an athlete’s transgression can damage not only the athlete’s image, but the image of the athlete’s team. Using a theoretical approach based on Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory and Coombs’ (2007b) Situational Crisis Communication Theory, this dissertation explores the impact of an athlete’s image on the team he/she represent, and how negative information can damage that association.

The Importance of Athlete Image

It is important to investigate the repair process of an athlete’s image because the influence of the media in sport has given athletes increased visibility. The rise of treating athletes like celebrities began in the 1920s, when reporters began creating “larger-than-life” images of feats and achievements of sports figures (Smart, 2005). This coverage of the achievements of star athletes has grown with the growth of mass media, and particularly, the invention of the television and its central role in the growth of sport media coverage. Today, the Internet has further increased the visibility of athletes with the creation of websites and blogs solely dedicated
to sports coverage and athletes’ use of social media to create a personal connection with their fans. Because of this increased visibility, there is a need for athletes to protect their image.

This dissertation’s focus stems from the importance of managing an athlete’s image during issues for the athlete as well as his/her perspective team. From an athlete’s perspective, poor image repair can cost him/her financially. For example, an athlete’s image is important because he/she are usually the face of a sports franchise. This is important in professional team sports, where an athlete’s words and actions are directly linked to the franchise for which he/she plays (Doyle, 2011). If an athlete is involved in damaging activity, it usually results in the player being released from the team he/she represents. Though never convicted, Adam “Pacman” Jones was traded from the Tennessee Titans because of multiple alleged criminal incidents (Wyatt, 2008). Terrell Owens was deactivated for a season and eventually released from his contract with the Philadelphia Eagles because of his comments toward Eagles management and quarterback Donovan McNabb during a heated contract negotiation period (Associated Press, 2005; Associated Press, 2006). Both men had to settle for significantly smaller contracts with other teams as a result of their transgressions.

Poor image management also can cost an athlete financially through lost endorsement deals. Athletes use their image to endorse a wide variety of products, and are sometimes paid more for endorsements than for play on the field (Smart, 2005). The connection between an athlete endorser and a product can be long lasting. A perfect example of this is Michael Jordan’s long-standing relationship with Nike, an endorsement relationship that has been in existence since 1985. Many consumers equate celebrity endorsers with the products they endorse; therefore, attacks to that celebrity’s image can subsequently hurt the company’s image he/she represents (Jones & Schumann, 2004). Brazeal (2008) suggested that ultimately an athlete’s
endorsement power is dependent on his or her image. Doling (2003) found that negative news coverage of an athlete endorser can negatively impact the purchase intentions and attitudes of consumers toward the product they endorse, which is why companies tend to drop athletes from endorsements when they are faced with transgressions to avoid damage to their brand image. Numerous athletes over the last few years have seen companies drop them from endorsement deals because of transgressions. For example, Michael Vick’s relationship with Nike was terminated after his involvement in a dogfighting ring (Associated Press, 2007). It was not until his successful comeback with the Philadelphia Eagles that Nike decided to resign him to an endorsement deal in 2011 (Associated Press, 2011a). Tiger Woods’ relationship with Gatorade was terminated after evidence of his infidelity came to surface (McCarthy, 2010).

From a team perspective, because an athlete’s words and actions are directly linked to his/her representative franchises, the image of the organization is in danger when an athlete is faced with threats to his/her image. Professional athletes are employees of their respective organizations; therefore, an attack on an athlete’s image will be seen in most cases as an attack on an organization’s image, especially if there are multiple instances involving members of a team. The regular occurrence of issues with athletes can point to something within the organization that needs to be addressed (Kelley & Michela, 1980). When an organization has faced several crises, it indicates a pattern of issues that the organization needs to correct before facing further negative press coverage and permanent reputational damage (Coombs, 2004).

For example, between 2000 and 2010, players from the Cincinnati Bengals were arrested 31 times (Schrotenboer, 2010). Because of their arrest record, the Bengals’ organization has been frequently criticized for having a poor management structure, lacking the willingness to discipline its players, and an overall lack of accountability for the players to behave (Watson,
The actions of the Bengals’ players have caused the organization’s image to suffer, and this can lead to financial losses. In fact, due in part to the negative image of the team, as well as the impact of suspensions of key players that led to subpar performances in 2006 and 2007, attendance at Bengals home games has decreased 8.5 percent since 2006 (Kirkendall, 2011) even though NFL attendance records were set in 2006 and 2007, and attendance remained steady for other teams with similar records during that time frame (National Football League, 2008).

Because of the need for athletes to manage their images in the public eye, there is a growing need for public relations practitioners that specialize in managing, and when needed, repairing an athlete’s image. Athlete image management has grown into an important part of sports public relations because the “image value” of athletes has become significantly important to their financial success (Brazeal, 2008; Smart, 2005). The visibility of an athlete in the media usually increases when that athlete is involved in issues on and off the field. For example, Brown (2011) conducted a study of the news coverage of Vick during the dogfighting scandal in four prominent media outlets (The New York Times, The Washington Post, and CNN and ESPN websites) and found a dramatic increase of news coverage of Vick following the first appearance of the story. Huang (2006) found that media coverage during crises and scandals can be influential on the public’s perceptions of issues, events and the parties involved, which not only includes the athlete, but the team they represent as well.

**Purpose of the Dissertation**

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine to what extent the response that a professional athlete gives to the public about attacks on his/her image impacts the athlete’s image repair process and the image of the team he/she represent. There are several factors that will be explored to further understand the image repair process. First, using Benoit’s (1995) image repair
theory, this study will explore how the nature of the transgression, and the athlete’s choice of response to that transgression, affects an athlete’s image. Transgressions are attacks on a person’s (or organization’s) image in which stakeholders perceive that the person (or organization) has deliberately engaged in some wrong doing, violating important stakeholder values (Fediuk et al., 2010). Wilson et al. (2010) suggested that future research should explore how to respond to specific types of transgressions in sports through strategic management of the crisis, which would include the response given to the public about the situation. Owens (contract dispute), Vick (dogfighting ring) and Tiger Woods (infidelity) suffered significant reputational and financial losses for very different situations. Coombs (2004) stated that by understanding the amount of crisis responsibility a specific type of crisis can create initially, practitioners can predict the threat of damage to an entity’s reputation the crisis can bring. This study will examine whether the type of transgression by the athlete impacts the repair of his or her image.

Despite the influence that media coverage can have on shaping the public’s perception of an issue, an athlete and his or her representative have the opportunity to address these allegations and mitigate the effects of transgressions by practicing effective crisis communication management. If the response is accepted by the public, the image of the athlete can be minimally damaged, and financial and personal losses can be kept to a minimum. If the athlete’s response is ineffective, it could possibly lead to major damage for his or her image (Seeger, 2006). This study will examine if the athlete’s choice of response to an image attack impacts the repair of his or her image.

Second, this study will explore how the organization’s history with athlete transgressions and response to an athlete’s transgressions can impact the team’s image. As stated previously, because athletes are employees of the organization, their transgressions also affect the image of
the organization. If a team’s athletes are regularly involved in situations that can damage their image, it can ultimately damage the image of the team as well. Also, choosing the right response to an athlete’s transgressions can mitigate reputational and financial damage to an organization. Using Coombs’ Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this dissertation will examine the impact of a team’s history with athlete transgressions and how its response to attacks toward an athlete’s image can affect the team’s image.

In summary, this dissertation will explore how the type of transgression an athlete faces, as well as the athlete’s choice of response while dealing with the transgression, impact the image repair process for the athlete. This study also will explore how these factors, as well as the team’s history with athlete transgressions, can impact the image of the athlete’s team. The researcher will use two quasi-experimental designs to explore to what extent transgression type, team history with athlete transgressions, and choice of response impacts the image of the athlete involved and the image of the athlete’s team by exposing participants to a fictitious crisis scenario involving a professional athlete.

**Significance of the Dissertation**

This study has three theoretical and practical implications for the public relations profession. First, this study will add empirical evidence to the investigation of image repair in the sports arena. The rhetorical study of image repair in sports has focused on how athletes communicate to the general public through the media during times of scandal and legal issues. The previous body of research examined the responses used by athletes (e.g., Brazeal, 2008; Fortunato, 2008; Glantz, 2010; Kennedy, 2010; Pfahl & Bates, 2008), but little research has been done to examine how these responses affect the public’s perception of the athletes. Brown, Dickhaus and Long (2012) examined how certain response strategies affected the public’s
perception of LeBron James’ image after the ESPN “The Decision” special where James announced his intentions to join the Miami Heat. The previous study only examined one particular situation, and did not consider whether the type of transgression had an impact on the public’s perception of athletes. This study will expand the empirical evidence dedicated to the investigation of image repair in sports, and will not only explore its impact on athletes, but on the athletes’ teams.

Second, this study will add to the growing body of empirical evidence in crisis communication management. Coombs (2010) argued that there is an abundance of case studies that have been performed in crisis communication research that look at the responses used during crisis situations; however, there is a lack of information about how stakeholders react to these crisis response strategies. There is a need for more empirical investigation of the impact of response strategies on the perception of organizations, an area of crisis communication research Coombs (2010) called “audience effects crisis communication research” (p. 721). Instead of taking a rhetorical or case study approach to the use of response strategies during times of crisis, this study will provide empirical evidence of the effects of certain response strategies on the public’s perception of the athletes involved in the crisis situation, as well as the organizations those athletes represent.

Third, this study will provide some practical recommendations specifically for sports information directors and other public relations practitioners in the sports arena. Research in crisis communication has mostly focused on the corporate sector, and few studies have focused on nonprofit and governmental organizations (Fussell-Sisco et al., 2010). Several scholars (Curtin & Gaither, 2005; L’Etang, 2006) also stated that there is little research on sport public relations from a practical and academic perspective. Stoldt (1998) found that most of the
research in sports public relations has been case studies, and stressed that there was a need for empirical research in this area. The findings from this dissertation can be beneficial for public relations practitioners working in the sports arena who have to deal with any attack on an athlete’s image, whether that practitioner works for the athlete directly or the team that athlete represents.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

The first chapter of this dissertation introduced the purpose of the dissertation by giving an overview of the importance of athlete image and stating the purpose and significance of this study. Chapter 2 will provide a review of literature relevant to this study, and is divided into two parts. Part I addresses athlete image repair. This chapter will examine Benoit’s (1995) image repair theory and its use in the sports arena. Part II will address organizational crisis communication in the sports arena. This chapter will examine crisis communication management (specifically crisis response) and Coombs’ SCCT theory. Chapter 3 will provide a summary of the research questions and hypotheses, the operationalization of the key variables in the study, and the method used for the study. This section will provide a general description of the quantitative research process and experimental design before explaining the design of the experiments for this study. Chapter 4 will present the results from the experiment, and Chapter 5 will give a summary of the results, theoretical and practical implications for the study, limitations of the study and future research suggestions.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature is divided into two parts. Part I explores the image repair process from the point of view of the athlete using Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory (IRT). IRT was chosen because it is the theory predominately used in rhetorical image repair studies from an individual standpoint. IRT was not initially designed for sports image repair, but grew more out of Benoit’s background in political communication, but has been used to examine several case studies involving athletes that will be discussed later (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). Part II explores the image repair process from the point of view of the team that the athlete represents using Coombs’ (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). SCCT has provided a framework for organizational crises to be investigated from an empirical standpoint, but has been primarily used for corporate crises.

The Need for Audience-Oriented Image Repair and Crisis Communication Research

The majority of studies of Benoit’s (1995) image repair strategy have been conducted from the point of the view of the source of the communication – the accused party. These types of studies (e.g. Brazeal, 2008; Fortunato, 2008; Kennedy, 2010) are typically rhetorical in nature and presented as case studies of specific offensive acts (Brown, Dickhaus and Long, 2012). These studies involve critiques of the strategies used by the accused parties. Sheldon (2006) argued that a limitation of the previous research that used image repair theory suffered from a lack of guidelines for determining if the strategies used by an accused party were successful in repairing that party’s image. Approaching image repair research from an audience-oriented point of view rather than a source-oriented point of view can help create and refine these guidelines.
Burns and Bruner (2000) argued that by investigating the effects of image repair strategies on audiences through the use of empirical research, the predictive power of this theory can be improved. Benoit (2000) agreed with this call for research, and specifically requested more experimental research to be conducted using his theory.

Coombs (2010) has stressed the need for more empirical research that investigates to what extent responses to transgressions affect audiences’ perceptions of those accused, an area he calls “audience effects crisis communication research” (p. 721). The development of his Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has impacted this evolution of image and reputation research. However, this theoretical framework was designed to, and has been mostly used to examine the impact of crisis situations on stakeholders’ attitudes towards organizations, namely corporations (Coombs, 2010; Fussell-Sisco et al., 2010). Benoit’s (1995) image repair theory, however, has been used to investigate corporate image repair, but has mostly been used to examine political and celebrity image repair (Person, 2010). Avery et al. (2010) conducted a content analysis of studies that used both image repair theory and SCCT, and found that out of 11 articles that focused on individual transgressions, 10 of those used image repair theory, and the other used a combination of the two theories.

Benoit’s (1995) image repair strategy typology and Coombs (2007b) SCCT crisis response typology have several similarities because the SCCT typology was created by Coombs from a synthesis of several response typologies, including Benoit’s typology. A major difference between image repair and SCCT, however, is that SCCT uses attribution theory to create recommendations for the use of response strategies by “matching” response strategies to types of crises, while image repair theory, because of the theory’s primarily source-oriented perspective, did not attempt to match responses with types of attacks (Sheldon, 2006). Therefore, this
researcher argues that image repair theory would be more appropriate for examining the impact of responses to attacks toward a professional athlete on that athlete’s image (Part I) while SCCT can be used to examine the impact of responses to those same attacks on the athlete’s team affiliation (Part II). This dissertation seeks to expand both theories by testing them in a sports context, as well as testing image repair theory against different types of transgressions.

**Part I – Athlete Transgressions and the Impact on the Athlete**

This section will address the theoretical role of image repair for public relations professionals who represent athletes. Managing the image of athletes is important for their financial success, and using the right strategies to respond to an attack on an athlete’s image can help protect their assets. This chapter will begin by defining image and differentiating the terms *image* and *reputation*, followed by a discussion of IRT and its strategies. Then, this section will look at the use of IRT in sports, and finally will look at the impact of image on one of the outcomes of effective image repair and crisis communication management – behavioral intentions.

*Image*

Benoit and Hanczor (1994) defined *image* as “the perception(s) of a person, group or organization held by the audience, shaped by the words and actions of that person, as well as by the discourse and behavior of other relevant actors” (p. 40). The image of an entity is a representation of an entity that is more lasting than an impression, but is still subject to change when audiences are faced with new information (Scott & Jhen, 2003). Public relations and marketing have expressed separate views of the term *image* with the term having a mostly negative connotation in public relations and a more neutral one in marketing.
From a public relations perspective, Botan (1993) and Grunig (1993) defined image as the manipulated, and often times fabricated, representation of an entity, which expressed the creation of image as more of a publicity tactic rather than an integral function of public relations. An entity’s image was seen more as a cover-up of its true identity. This opinion was supplemented by the use of public relation firms by organizations with subpar images to cover up their transgressions by generating positive news coverage (Manheim & Albritton, 1984). These attempts of concealing the organization’s negative actions by generating a positive image caused trouble once stakeholders discovered the truth, which damaged the relationships between the organization and its stakeholders. Because of this connotation, public relations researchers and practitioners have used the term reputation to describe this perception of an entity (Coombs, 2005).

From a marketing perspective, image has a more neutral connotation. Marketing researchers discuss image, and the maintenance of a positive image, as an important aspect of brand marketing. The marketing literature predominately uses the term corporate image, and defines it as the overall perception the public has about a firm (Barich & Kotler, 1991; Dichter, 1985; Kennedy, 1977). Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) argued that an entity does not have a single image, but rather differing images based on the perceptions of a specific stakeholder group based on their experiences with the entity – for example, employees may have a different image of a firm than customers. There are two components to corporate image: a functional component and an emotional component (Kennedy, 1977). The functional component addresses the impact a stakeholder group’s perception of a firm can have on tangible outcomes, such as willingness to purchase goods and services (for a for-profit) or donate money and volunteer (for a nonprofit).
The emotional component addresses the impact a stakeholder group’s perception can have on the attitudes and feelings toward the organization.

The public relations literature approaches reputation as a more positive connotation of the term image, which assumes that the two terms are synonymous (Coombs, 2005; Grunig, 1993). Until the early 1990s, scholars in marketing also treated image and reputation as synonymous terms (e.g., Abratt, 1989; Dichter, 1985; Dowling, 1993; Dutton et al., 1994; Kennedy, 1977). Kennedy (1977) argued that when conducting studies, the interchanging of the two terms was acceptable as long as respondents understood the terms. This interchangeability evolved from the frequent use of the term corporate image and the infrequent use of the term corporate reputation in literature during the 1960s and 1970s (Gotzi & Wilson, 2001). Most scholars who believed the two terms are interchangeable argued that image is the comprehensive perception of an entity that has been created over time (Alvesson, 1998; Kennedy, 1977). Gotzi and Wilson (2001) discovered that the interchangeability of the terms stemmed from the revelation that most scholars who treated the terms as synonyms were in fact from a public relations background.

Recently, however, there has been a push in marketing literature for the differentiation of the terms image and reputation. These scholars define reputation as the aggregate perception of an entity and approach reputation as a collection of images over a period of time (e.g., Chun, 2005; Gotzi & Wilson, 2001; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001). Although an entity’s reputation is largely dependent on the everyday images formed by its stakeholders, an entity’s image in the eyes of stakeholders can be influenced by its reputation (Gotzi & Wilson, 2001). Gray and Balmer (1998) argued that reputation is historically constructed through consistent performances, while image is usually constructed more quickly through strategic
communication messages. While communication materials, such as press releases and advertisements, can be instrumental in forming and changing an image, reputation requires more time and effort to create and maintain. However, Chun (2005) argued that a crisis or transgression, if detrimental enough, can severely damage an entity’s image and reputation. Based on this comparison of image and reputation, this dissertation argues that it is more theoretically accurate to measure an entity’s image in an empirical study rather than their reputation because of the ability to change the image in the public eye more quickly. Measuring reputation would require a longitudinal study.

Benoit’s Image Repair

Image Repair Theory (IRT) evolved from the research of several scholars, including Rosenfield’s (1968) work on self-defense and Burke’s (1973) work on responding to guilt for wrongdoing, but the theory mostly evolves from Ware and Linkugel’s (1973) theory of apologia. The premise of apologia theory, drawn from the work of social psychologist Abelson (1959), is that it is natural for an attack on a person’s character to create a response from that person because when the public witnesses an attack on a person’s morality, motives or reputation, they expect a response from the accused. Ware and Linkugel (1973) gave four rhetorical strategies used by the accused to respond to attacks in self-defense:

1) Denial – disassociating from the attack by claiming that they were not involved in whatever offends the public

2) Bolstering – disassociating from the attack by identifying themselves with something favorable to the audience

3) Differentiation – separating from the negative context to show that it was the act, not the accused, that is offensive

4) Transcendence – associating the negative act with something in a larger, more positive context that the audience does not presently view the act
In addition to these four strategies, Ware and Linkugel (1973) gave four approaches for combining these strategies, arguing that speeches that respond to accusations do not use just one strategy, but usually combine either denial or bolstering with either differentiation or transcendence. These rhetorical approaches are: absolutive (denial and differentiation), vindicative (denial and transcendence), explanatory (bolstering and differentiation) and justificative (bolstering and transcendence).

IRT posits that because our image is important to us, when we believe that our image is threatened by some attack, we are motivated to take the necessary steps to protect it. An attempt to repair one’s reputation when faced with allegations is inevitable for four reasons (Benoit, 1995). First, we live in a world of limited resources, and the allocation of those resources provokes anger from those that desire a different distribution. Second, circumstances beyond our control can prevent us from meeting our obligations. Third, it is human nature to make mistakes, either honestly or guided by our own self-interests. Finally, humans rarely have identical personal goals, which can cause conflict among those with competing goals.

An attack on a person’s image has two components. First, some action occurred that was considered offensive or undesirable. In order for someone’s image to be threatened, some offensive act must have occurred that the public views as negative. Second, someone is held responsible for the action. If the public believes that he or she was responsible, even if the person accused did not commit the offensive act, then it must be treated as an attack on the person’s image (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007a). There is no need to respond to allegations if the person is not perceived as responsible for the action in question. Originally called image restoration theory, Benoit (2006) later preferred the term “image repair” over “image restoration” for two reasons. First, the latter assumes that one’s image can always be restored to its previous state,
and sometimes the accused must settle for repairs of their image. Second, the latter also assumes that every image is “good” before it is attacked, and therefore can be restored to its previous positive state (Benoit, 2006).

The foundation of Benoit’s (1995) theory has two key assumptions. First, communication is a goal-directed activity. Communication is motivated by a certain set of intents, beliefs and goals for each person, and it is designed to achieve these goals for the speaker. Clark and Delia (1979) gave three universal goals of communication: (1) to respond to a particular obstacle or problem that the parties involved are facing, (2) to establish and maintain relationships between the parties involved, and (3) to create and maintain a desired self-image that the speaker wants the receiver of the communication to perceive. This leads to the second assumption of IRT: maintaining a favorable image is one of the key goals of communication.

From a public relations perspective, responding to an attack on the image of a person or organization a practitioner represents is important because the public relations profession exists to create, and then maintain a positive reputation for individuals and organizations through the management of the entity’s image, especially during times of crisis and scandal (Fearn-Banks, 2007). Benoit (1995) gave two reasons why maintaining a favorable image is important. First, a favorable public image contributes to a healthy self-image. A negative public image can cause anxiety, stress and guilt, which can be detrimental to one’s health. Negative sanctions from audience members (for example, prison sentences for crimes) also can contribute to the decline of a healthy self-image. Second, a positive public image can be helpful when attempting to persuade audiences effectively because audiences frequently call a speaker’s credibility into question when they are presented persuasive material.
Image Repair Strategies

A primary goal of Benoit’s (1995) theory was to provide a more comprehensive list of strategies for image repair than provided by the previous rhetorical literature. After a review and syntheses of the previous literature on apologia, response to guilt and self-defense, Benoit (1995) created a typology of five strategies that accused parties use to repair their images after an attack. Three of these strategies have variations. Table 2-1 provides a complete list of image repair strategies.

The first strategy that an accused person can use to protect his or her image is denial. The person can choose to deny the fact that he/she performed the act in question. The denial strategy has two variants. A simple denial just states that the person in question did not perform the offensive act. The accused party can also shift the blame. This is a form of denial because if someone else performed the act, then obviously the person accused cannot be held responsible.

If the person under question cannot deny the attack, he/she can attempt to evade responsibility to reduce the responsibility for his or her actions. There are four variations of this strategy. A provocation approach, also known as scapegoating, proclaims that the person accused of the offense performed the act in response to someone else’s wrongdoing. The accused can claim he/she performed the negative behavior because of a lack of control, lack of information, or misinformation, known as defeasibility. The person accused also can claim the act was caused by an accident or that the person had good intentions when performing the act in question.

The third strategy is to reduce the offensiveness caused by the party’s actions. This strategy has six variations. Bolstering involves referring to positive acts performed in the past by the accused that will help mitigate the negative perception. Minimization involves making the audience believe that the offensive act is not as serious as he/she perceive. Differentiation
Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Strategies and Explanations</th>
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| Denial                    | • Simple Denial  
|                           | Stating that the organization or individual did not perform the act in question           |
|                           | • Shifting the Blame                                                                        |
| Evading Responsibility    | • Provocation  
|                           | Scapegoating, Claiming the actions were provoked by the actions of another person or organization |
|                           | • Defeasibility  
|                           | Claiming the action was provoked by lack of information or misinformation                  |
|                           | • Accident  
|                           | • Good Intentions                                                                           |
| Reducing Offensiveness    | • Bolstering  
|                           | Stressing the positive traits of the organization or individual                           |
|                           | • Minimization  
|                           | Claiming the crisis is not as serious as the public or media perceives                      |
|                           | • Differentiation  
|                           | Making the act seem less offensive than the public perceives                               |
|                           | • Transendence  
|                           | Places the crisis in a more favorable context                                               |
|                           | • Attack the Accuser                                                                        |
|                           | • Compensation                                                                             |
| Corrective Action         | • Corrective Action  
|                           | Promising to correct the problem                                                           |
| Mortification             | • Mortification  
|                           | Admitting the crisis was the organization’s or individual’s fault and asking for forgiveness |

involves comparing the act in question to other, more offensive acts to make the current accusations seem less offensive. Transcendence involves placing the act in a more favorable context to mitigate the negative perception. The accused also can attack his/her accusers to
reduce credibility of the opposing party or provide *compensation* for the victims of the offensive act.

The final two strategies have no variations. The accused can perform *corrective action* in order to show commitment to preventing the problem from occurring again. This can occur in two forms: the accused can restore the situation to its state before the incident or promise to prevent the reoccurrence of the incident. Finally, the accused can admit that they are responsible for the action and ask for forgiveness, called *mortification*, or apology. These two strategies are often used in combination: the accused can apologize for their offensive behavior and take steps to prevent the behavior from happening again. Benoit and Lindsey (1987) also found that an accused party can take corrective action without apologizing or admitting guilt for the offensive act.

*Image Repair in Sports*

Several scholars (e.g., Brazeal, 2008; Fortunato, 2008; Glantz, 2010; Kennedy, 2010; Pfahl & Bates, 2008) have begun to investigate the use of image repair strategies by sports personalities because these athletes increasingly find themselves making public statements for past incidents (Meyer, 2008). Kruse’s (1981) initial study concluded that sports image repair was not important because fans were more interested in the success or failure of the team rather than character issues of their athletes. However, sports image repair has taken on greater importance because of the globalization of sports, increased news coverage of troubled athletes, and also increased activism of sports fans (Meyer, 2008). These reasons stress a need for an athlete’s image to be created, nurtured and defended to sustain a positive reputation with his/her stakeholders and fans (Brazeal, 2008).
Several studies have rhetorically examined the use of image repair strategies to respond to an athlete’s criminal transgression. A criminal transgression is described by Fuller (2006) as an action that violates the laws of a society and that could lead to judicial prosecution. Benedict and Blumstein (1999) found that the arrest rates for players in the National Football League (21 percent) and the general population of males residing in U.S. cities with a population of 250,000 or greater (23 percent) are similar. However, Kudlac (2010) argued that media attention devoted to covering the criminal transgressions of athletes has increased because the public believes that athletes, due to their financial success and celebrity status, should adopt appropriate behaviors. This media coverage makes criminal transgressions more visible to the public, and usually requires athletes to defend their actions.

The initial rhetorical analysis of image repair by a sports personality for a criminal transgression was Benoit and Hanczor’s (1994) analysis of Tonya Harding’s defense of her image after people close to her attacked her teammate and rival, Nancy Kerrigan. During an interview, Harding used several bolstering strategies (including stressing her family values and her intent to contribute to the Special Olympics), denial of her participation, and attacking her primary accuser, ex-husband Jeff Gillooly. The researchers argued that these attempts were ineffective to repair her image with the public, however, primarily because Harding lied about her knowledge of the attack initially and the overwhelming amount of evidence against her.

Fortunato (2008) examined internal communication used during the Duke Lacrosse scandal in an attempt to frame the story. Initially, the university used corrective action and mortification in an attempt to restore Duke’s reputation after the arrests of lacrosse players on charges of sexual assault. The university then switched to a strategy of attacking the accuser once
the certainty of evidence and victim’s accounts, as well as the credibility of Durham District Attorney Mike Nifong was called into question.

Meyer (2008) examined response strategies used by Michael Vick during a speech given right after his conviction for involvement in a dogfighting and gambling ring. Vick used a combination of bolstering, differentiation and transcendence strategies to reduce the offensiveness of his actions during the dogfighting scandal. However, the long-term effects of his strategy were not discussed. Although both Kobe Bryant (during his sexual assault case) and Barry Bonds (during the BALCO investigation and trial) used denial strategies in an attempt to repair their images, Bryant was more successful in repairing his image because he also used mortification strategies (Kennedy, 2010). Bryant used mortification strategies to apologize for committing adultery, but denied committing sexual assault. This coupled with the poor credibility of the accuser helped Bryant repair his image. In contrast, Bonds denying his involvement in the BALCO scandal, although circumstantial evidence was overwhelmingly against him, played a role in the damage to Bonds’ reputation.

Although he was not arrested, Michael Phelps had to defend his image after a British tabloid featured a picture of the swimmer smoking marijuana (Walsh & McAlister-Spooner, 2011). Phelps used a combination of mortification (apologized for the incident), corrective action (stating that it would never happen again) and defeasibility (reminding the public that he is young) to repair his image. The researchers argue that this strategy was successful because his sponsors supported him during the incident, and media coverage during this time period was mostly positive despite his behavior.

Although most rhetorical research examines the use of image repair strategies after athletes are engaged in criminal activity, a few studies examine the process during non-criminal
transgressions. A primary example of this approach is Brazeal’s (2008) study of the strategies used by Terrell Owens during his contract negotiations with and eventual suspension from the Philadelphia Eagles. Owens used mortification and bolstering strategies successfully during the negotiations. Once he was suspended, Owens unsuccessfully used shifting the blame strategies by attempting to make him look like a victim during the negotiations, which contradicted his earlier apology. This made Owens look like a hypocrite in the public eye, which damaged his image. This study provided an example of how choosing the wrong strategy can further damage an athlete’s image.

Roger Clemens responded to allegations in the Mitchell Report that he used steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs earlier in his playing career (Sanderson, 2008). During a press conference, Clemens used denial and attacking the accuser (in this instance, former trainer Brian McNamee) strategies to downplay the accusations. However, Clemens and his agent provided contradictory information several times during the press conference, which hurt his credibility and further damaged his image.

Despite the abundance of rhetorical research using IRT, only a handful of empirical studies have been conducted: one content analysis (Len-Rios, 2010) and two experiments (Brown, Dickhaus & Long, 2012; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). This is primarily because rhetorical studies using IRT have evaluated cases more from a source-oriented point of view—the focus for these studies has been on the accused party’s approach to repairing his or her image. This approach has given us vast insight into how accused parties use certain strategies to repair his or her image. Burns and Bruner (2000) have argued that now that we understand the source-oriented point of view, IRT should be approached in future studies from more of an audience-oriented point of view, meaning that the focus shifts to how the audience responds and
reacts to image repair attempts from the accused party. This evolution requires the use of more empirical methods, rather than rhetorical case study methods, to examine audience effects.

Len Rios (2010) conducted a content analysis of news articles and internal documents from Duke University during the lacrosse scandal to determine which response strategies were used most frequently. Results were consistent with Fortunato’s (2008) findings: the university initially relied on simple denial and mortification strategies, then engaged in bolstering, corrective action and attacking-the-accuser strategies to defend the university’s image once credibility issues were discovered for the suspect and Nifong. The content analysis also showed that the attacking the accuser strategy resulted in the most positive media coverage. Content analyses can be used to understand which response strategies are used by accused parties after a transgression, and can, to some extent, be used to examine the effects of those strategies on situations that can be easily operationalized through coding schemes, such as the tone of media coverage (Huang, 2006). However, they are ineffective when examining how audiences react to the use of certain response strategies, and how audiences perceived accused parties after the use of certain response strategies (Coombs, 2010).

Coombs and Schmidt (2000) conducted the initial experiment using Benoit’s (1995) image repair strategy, using Texaco’s racism crisis as the context for the study. In 1996, recordings leaked to the press during a racial discrimination lawsuit that revealed three Texaco executives using racist language and planning to destroy evidence. Coombs and Schmidt (2000) tested the effects of image repair strategies used by Texaco officials during the crisis that were previously discussed and analyzed rhetorically by Brinson and Benoit (1999) using experimental methods. Results showed none of the five strategies used by the organization (mortification, bolstering, corrective action, shifting the blame and separation—a combination of the bolstering,
shifting the blame and corrective action strategies) were more effective in protecting the organization’s image than the others, and that respondents viewed all five strategies as positive steps towards repairing their image.

Because Brinson and Benoit (1999) claimed that only mortification and separation strategies would be successful in repairing the company’s image, this study sparked the argument that more empirical analysis was needed in crisis communication and image repair research. However, Coombs (2010) and Coombs and Schmidt (2000) argued that IRT was not specifically designed for organizational crisis communication and is more geared toward the repair of an individual’s image, which led to the development of SCCT as an organizational crisis communication theoretical framework (which will be discussed in part II).

Brown et al. (2012) conducted an experiment to determine which strategy would be most effective in repairing LeBron James’ image after he announced his future team during an hour-long ESPN special titled “The Decision.” The image repair of LeBron James was studied not because of a legal issue or scandal, but because of a hit to his credibility due to his actions during his free agency and the negative public outcry that resulted. Results showed that mortification was the only strategy that improved James’ image after the announcement, while the use of shifting the blame and bolstering strategies hurt his image. These strategies were chosen based on strategies used by Terrell Owens during his contract negotiations because it was a similar situation (Brazeal, 2008).

This dissertation seeks to replicate these studies using three strategies—mortification, attacking the accuser and bolstering—however, they will be tested using a criminal and a non-criminal transgression to explore if the image repair process is different between the two types of transgressions. Although this approach does exclude the other repair strategies, based on the
review of previous cases involving athlete transgressions (explained in Chapter 3), these are three of the most common approaches for both criminal and non-criminal transgressions that athletes use to repair their image: mortification (apologizing for their involvement), attacking the accuser (calling out the person making the allegations) and bolstering (reminding the public of their athletic success and/or good character).

Smudde and Courtright (2008) conducted a content analysis of studies using IRT and found that these were three of the five most used response strategies in articles using image repair as the theoretical framework. Kim et al. (2010) conducted a similar content analysis of studies using IRT and found that these were three of the four most used strategies in public relations literature. Based on previous research, the mortification strategy should improve the athlete’s image better than the other two strategies for both scenarios. Brazeal (2008) suggested that using the mortification strategy worked better to repair Owens’ image than when other strategies were employed, and Brown et al. (2012) found empirical evidence to support the claim that the mortification strategy was the most effective image repair strategy during the LeBron James controversy. Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses will test this assumption:

*H1: An athlete’s image will be better repaired by the mortification strategy than the attacking the accuser and bolstering strategies, regardless of the type of transgression.*

Rhetorical analysis using image repair has been produced for both criminal (e.g. Fortunato, 2008; Meyer, 2008) and non-criminal (e.g. Brazeal, 2008; Sanderson, 2008) transgressions. These case studies have shown that athletes have used similar image repair strategies when faced with either type of transgression. However, previous research has not explored whether or not it is easier to repair an athlete’s image based on the type of transgression he or she faces.
One of the weaknesses of IRT is that it has not been developed to examine the differences in approaches to repair a party’s image based on the type of transgression that party faces (Sheldon, 2006). Benson (1988) argued that there was a need for future research in image repair and crisis communication research to examine the linkage between specific transgressions and certain response types. Although SCCT provides a linkage between crisis type and crisis response strategies, the differences in approach depending on the type of transgression a person faces has not been explored using IRT. The following research question will address this inquiry:

**RQ1: Are there differences in the repair of an athlete’s image for criminal transgressions and non-criminal transgressions?**

**The Link between Image and Behavior**

Empirical research in crisis communication has found evidence of the relationship between the image of an organization (or reputation in the public relations literature – these terms are used interchangeably) and behavioral intentions. Perloff (2010) defined behavioral intention as “the intention to perform a particular behavior; a plan to put behavior into effect” (p. 92). Scholars have used measures of behavioral intentions rather than measuring behavior because of the difficulty to measure true behavior during the time of data collection (Ki & Hon, 2007), and the two concepts have a tendency to be identical because they are both under the person’s control (Perloff, 2010). Also, Ajzen (1991) found evidence that behavioral intentions are a direct link between attitude and behavior.

Two behavioral intention measures are present in crisis communication literature: potential supportive behavior and negative word-of-mouth (WOM) (Coombs, 1999, 2004a, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2001, 2007). The negative image of an organization can cause stakeholders to have less intention to behave in a supportive manner toward the organization (Coombs, 1999, 2007b). Richins (1983) defined negative WOM as communication among
consumers about an organization that is detrimental to its success. Negative WOM is produced when stakeholders are angry with a person or organization after a crisis situation or attack on the entity’s image, and the increased access and use of the Internet has made it easier to produce and spread negative WOM (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Schlosser, 2005). It is important to understand how to mitigate negative WOM because WOM is influential when shaping consumers’ and stakeholders’ opinions about an entity, and negative WOM is more effective than positive WOM (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Previous studies found that the more negative the perceived image of an organization, the more likely the public is to produce negative word-of-mouth (Coombs, 2004a, 2007b). Therefore, it would be logical to assume that the more negative the public perceives an athlete, the more likely the public is to speak negatively about that athlete. The following hypothesis tests that assumption:

H2: There will be a negative correlation between perceived image and generated negative WOM.

Previous research has not tested whether or not certain image repair strategies will help reduce negative word-of-mouth. Given the linkage between image repair strategies and image (Brown et al., 2012; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000) and the linkage between image and negative word-of-mouth (Coombs, 2004a; Coombs, 2007b), if would be logical to explore the effects of response strategies on the mitigation of negative word-of-mouth. The following research question will address this inquiry:

RQ2: Which image repair strategies used following an athlete’s transgression are the most effective at reducing the negative word-of-mouth generated about that athlete?

Because this study attempts to explore the differences in the image repair process for athletes who face criminal and non-criminal transgressions, the following research question will
address whether or not the amount of negative word-of-mouth generated about an athlete differs based on the type of transgression the athlete faces:

**RQ3**: Does the amount of negative word-of-mouth generated about an athlete differ for athletes who face criminal transgressions versus athletes who face non-criminal transgressions?

### Part II – Athlete Transgressions and the Impact on the Team

This section will address the theoretical role of image repair for public relations professionals who represent teams to whom an athlete is a member. As mentioned in the introduction, it is important that teams respond to their athletes’ transgressions because athletes are employees of their respective franchises, and an athlete’s words and actions are directly linked to the franchises they represent. Therefore, it is important that the team responds to these transgressions in order to reduce potential damage to the organization.

Approaching these attacks as crises in the organization is important to the understanding of how to manage them effectively. In a survey conducted by Hessert (1998), public relations practitioners for professional sports teams reported that athlete behavior, on and off the field, is the most common crisis experienced, and the most common crisis practitioners anticipate facing in the future. This section will begin by defining the terms *crisis* and *crisis communication*, and explaining the importance and historical development of the crisis communication process. Then, this chapter will look at the role of crisis response in the crisis communication process, which will lead into a discussion of the development and refinement of SCCT and its application to managing responses to athlete transgressions.

**Definition of Crisis and Crisis Communication Management**

Several definitions of the word *crisis* have been published; however, there are distinct similarities with each definition. Coombs (2007a) gave a synthesized definition of the word “crisis” based on several perspectives on the term, defining it as “the perception of an
unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes” (pp. 2-3). There are several characteristics of a crisis presented in this definition. First, a crisis is a perception. Even if an organization does not believe that a crisis exists, ultimately the public’s perception represents the reality of the situation. In other words, if an organization’s stakeholders believe a crisis exists, then it does in fact exist (Seeger, 2006). Penrose (2000) studied the role of perception in crisis situations and concluded that the perception of the crisis can ultimately decide crisis planning and response.

Second, a crisis is unpredictable, but not unexpected. Cloudman and Hallahan (2006) stated that preparedness is a key element of anticipating a crisis, and preparation helps calm the unpredictable nature of crises by providing a system or procedure that will help produce appropriate, sufficient, and timely responses. Crises often put organizations in a situation that requires making complex decisions in a hurry (Stanton, 2002). Although crises are generally associated with negative outcomes, positive consequences can result from crises when dealt with successfully (Augustine, 2000; Heath, 2006). If a crisis is not handled quickly and systematically, it has the potential to spread throughout the organization and eventually implicate the entire framework of the organization (Burnett, 1998).

Crisis communication management, though sometimes associated with risk communication and issues management, is a distinct field with different approaches. *Crisis communication management* is usually associated with public relations as the approach an organization takes to repair a damaged image after a crisis or disaster (Seeger, 2006). Crises are chaotic and demanding, and the ability to communicate to stakeholders effectively during a crisis will determine the reputation and damage of an organization and impact the lives of those
involved (Reynolds, 2006). Reynolds and Seeger (2005) presented crisis communication as a small, although significant, concept in the larger risk and emergency management function.

Fearn-Banks (2007), however, distinctly defined crisis communication and crisis management as two separate terms. She defined crisis management as the organization’s planning process for a crisis, and crisis communications as the dialogue between the organization and its stakeholders.

Importance of Crisis Communication Management

It is important for public relations practitioners to learn how to manage crisis situations that can damage an organization’s reputation because, as mentioned earlier, the profession exists to create, and once created, maintain a positive reputation for organizations. The biggest problem with that outlook is that too often organizations do not consider utilizing crisis communication management, or public relations in general, until their reputation is on the verge of becoming tarnished (Fearn-Banks, 2007). Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2006) argued that crisis communication management is important because of the rapidly growing existence of a global environment. The general public is exposed to crises that would not have been a factor 20 years ago because of the rapid growth of technological advancement (Perrow, 2007). Technological advancement has made society dependent on more organizations globally, which increases the exposure to potential crises. Coombs (2007a) gave five reasons that contribute to the need for effective crisis communications management. He included the arguments of the importance of reputation and the rapid growth of technology, and more specifically, communication technology, but also identified three other factors that show the importance of crisis communication management. First, customers, investors, employees and community members, among other stakeholders, are becoming increasingly more vocal when organizations are not living up to their expectations. This increased activism among stakeholders can create crises for
organizations. Second, there is a broader view of crises among stakeholders and organizations. Crises that affect an organization do not have to just happen internally. The events of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina showed that attacks and events external to an organization can also cause damage. Finally, organizations can now be held legally responsible for not taking reasonable action to reduce or eliminate known or foreseeable risks caused by crises that could cause harm. This negligent failure to plan can be alleviated with successful crisis prevention and preparation.

Palenchar (2009) enhanced Perrow’s (2007) and Coombs’ (2007) argument by stating that the advances in communication and technology not only have increased people’s awareness of crises, but have given the general public the power to respond to crises, and stakeholders the power to reach decisions about organizations quicker. A crisis that happened 20 years ago would have unfolded in months. Now, a crisis can unfold in mere hours thanks to these advances, making the need to respond quickly and sufficiently more important.

**Historical Development of the Crisis Communication Management Process**

One of the earliest books developed on crisis communication management was written by Littlejohn (1983). He gave a six-step model for crisis management. First, the crisis organizational structure should be developed. Once the structure is developed, a crisis team should be selected and developed into an effective unit. After the team is developed, a crisis audit should be designed and conducted, followed by the development of the contingency plan. Finally, guidelines should be developed to actually manage the crisis. This early model was one of the first to stress the need for a crisis management team, and the need for preparation for a crisis, components of crisis communication management that is evident in later models.

Fink (1986) gave an outline of crisis management that is widely considered one of the first influential models (Coombs, 2007a; Palenchar, 2009). Fink (1986) gave four stages to a
crisis, comparing the crisis to a disease. The prodromal crisis stage is the warning stage, where the signs of a crisis appear, and preparation should be inevitable. The acute crisis stage is the triggering event that starts the damage. The chronic crisis stage begins the healing and clean-up process of the damage caused by the crisis. The crisis resolution stage begins to show signs that the crisis is over, and reflection and revision can begin. Coombs (2007a) argued that Fink’s (1986) approach is the first to treat a crisis as a process, not as a single event. Fink (1986) is also credited for expanding on the idea of crisis audits, suggesting a comprehensive situation audit with action plans for each situation drawn from the audit (Penrose, 2000).

Mitroff and Pearson (1993) gave a five-phase approach to crisis management. Signal detection occurs when the crisis begins to give warning signals, and the crisis manager must begin sorting the true warning signals from the daily organizational noise (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). Preparation/Prevention occurs when the organization begins preparing for the crisis and finding ways to prevent further evolution of the crisis. Once the crisis has fully evolved, damage containment must be executed to keep the crisis from affecting uncontaminated parts of the organization and its environment. Once the damage is contained, recovery and learning must be executed to restore the organization’s reputation and daily business activity and to learn how to improve the crisis communication plan. Mitroff and Pearson’s (1993) model was the first to suggest that crises should be actively identified for possible prevention (Coombs, 2007).

According to Coombs (2007), the three-stage model has no identifiable creator, but has been studied and recommended by several crisis management experts. The three-stage model is used regularly because other models of crisis communication management can be constricted to this model. The three-stage model starts with the pre-crisis stage, which involves signal detection, prevention and preparation. The crisis stage involves recognizing the crisis and
containment, including responding to the crisis, which will be discussed in more detail. The post-crisis stage includes making sure the crisis is over, evaluating the crisis plan and correcting and refining where needed, and ensuring the recovery of the organization’s reputation.

Crisis Response

A critical component of the crisis stage described in the three-stage model used by Coombs (2007a) is the crisis response—what an organization says and does during a crisis. Once a crisis hits, the crisis manager and his or her team must work to prevent the crisis from further affecting internal and external stakeholders, as well as mitigating the crisis as soon as possible to prevent further damage (Mitroff, 1994). The way an organization responds to the crisis is very important to the management of the crisis. If the organization’s response to a crisis is inexcusable, it can cause major problems for the company’s financial success, image, reputation and survival (Fearn-Banks, 2007). There are two trends of crisis response research: form and content (Coombs, 2007a).

Crisis response form. According to Coombs (2006), the form of crisis response is mostly grounded in case study and anecdotal research, and has not yet been subject to a guided theory or empirical methods. Coombs (2006) gave three lessons that are consistent with the literature devoted to crisis response form: be quick, be consistent, and be open. There is a critical need for organizations facing a crisis to provide information quickly because a crisis creates a demand for information from stakeholders (Augustine, 2000; Coombs, 2007a; Fearn-Banks, 2007). The evolution of technology has accelerated the spread of information, which reduces the time organizations have to respond (Barton, 2001). A delayed response to a crisis can give entities outside the organization the opportunity to shape stakeholders’ opinions (Brummett, 1980).
Crisis teams also must be quick to respond because a crisis causes stakeholders to perceive that the organization lost some control (Coombs, 2006). A quick response gives stakeholders the perception that the organization has the crisis under control (Lukaszewski, 1997). Perceptions of control can be helpful in restoring confidence among stakeholders and repairing organizational reputation (Egelhoff & Sen, 1992).

“Consistency” is another important factor when responding to crises. Researchers state that having one consistent message travel through the media will help control the situation and ease tension among stakeholders, especially if there is more than one spokesperson (Coombs, 2007a; Fearn-Banks, 2007; Fink, 1986). Whereas some scholars believe that crisis teams must have one clear spokesperson (e.g. Carney & Jorden, 1993), Coombs (2007a) suggests that as long as the message is consistent, crisis teams can coordinate the efforts of multiple official spokespersons, while discouraging other members of the organization from becoming unofficial spokespersons. Coordination with credible sources before a crisis hits also can help keep the messages consistent (Seeger, 2006).

“Openness” is the third factor in discussing the form of crisis response, but it is also one of the most multifaceted recommendations (Coombs, 2006). There are two interpretations of the recommendation. First, openness means being available to the media and other stakeholders to provide information during a crisis. The availability of a crisis team to stakeholders fosters credibility between the organization, the media, and its stakeholders (Seeger, 2006). If an organization seems unavailable during a crisis, stakeholders may believe that the organization is not in control, or that they are hiding information (Barton, 2001). Second, openness means that the organization must provide full disclosure—official spokespersons must provide all information that they know about the crisis to stakeholders (Coombs, 2006). Although full
disclosure can contradict the recommendations from the legal department of an organization, the more an organization tries to withhold any mistakes or negative information, the more explosive the information will be if anyone finds out, and can ultimately result in legal troubles (Fink, 1986; Fitzpatrick, 1995; Heath, 2006). Even though being honest usually means disclosing negative information, the organization’s willingness to share that information with the public can help maintain or crystallize its reputation (Pratt, 2004).

Crisis response content. Coombs (2006) stated that the recent development of research devoted to the content of crisis response has been investigated using empirical methods, particularly experimental methods. The content of crisis response has been divided into a sequential order of three categories: (1) instructing information, (2) adjusting information and (3) reputation management (Coombs, 2007a; Sturges, 1994). Instructing information tells people affected by the crisis how to protect themselves physically and financially from the crisis (Barton, 2001). This also includes business continuity information—information that informs stakeholders about how the crisis could affect business operations (Coombs, 2007a). Although some scholars have examined the response to (Heath & Palenchar, 2000) and the need for (Gibson, 1997) instructing information during crises, there is a lack of empirical information on the use of instructing information (Coombs, 2010).

Adjusting information is information that helps the people affected by a crisis cope psychologically (Coombs, 2007a). This information can assure the affected publics that the organization is managing the crisis and that it is sympathetic and concerned for them (Egelhoff & Sen, 1992). Coombs (2010) argued that adjustment information, particularly expressions of sympathy and corrective action, are a part of reputation repair. Specifically, Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2006) have looked at renewal—focusing on rebuilding confidence among stakeholders.
and restoring the organization, rather than placing or assigning blame—as corrective action, but it is viewed more as reputation repair rather than adjusting information for stakeholders and victims.

Reputation management is the final stage of content for crisis response. Although reputation management is the most investigated component of crisis response content, instructing and adjusting information must be provided before the organization can provide responses designed to repair its reputation (Coombs, 2007a). While response typologies have been formed and applied to crisis situations through informal methods, including IRT and Allen and Caillouet’s (1994) impression management strategies, Coombs’ (2007b) SCCT has led to the investigation of reputation management through empirical methods, particularly experimental methods.

The origins of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) grew out of a call for research made by Benson (1988) that three issues need to be addressed for crisis communication research to advance: (1) the creation of a typology of crisis types; (2) the creation of a typology of crisis responses; and (3) a theoretical approach to linking the two lists. The call was addressed by Coombs, first in 1995 as the symbolic approach to crisis communication, before becoming the SCCT model 15 years later.

*Roots of SCCT: Attribution Theory*

The framework of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory is grounded in attribution theory. Heider (1958) is credited as being the father of attribution theory. He suggested that people are often “naïve” psychologists, seeking out explanations for human behavior. He then continued to suggest that studying the process that the “naïve” psychologist uses to seek explanations was worthy of scientific study. Although the theory has its roots in
social psychology, more than 50 years after its founding, the theory has contributed more than 10,000 scholarly articles and books applying the theory to various fields in social science (Fösterling, 2001).

Heider (1958) suggested that people often seek common sense explanations for the world’s phenomena. People usually looked at two types of factors when forming these explanations: factors within the person and factors within the environment. Although the person’s explanations are “naïve” because they lack the scientific reasoning and deduction that formal investigators would use to seek explanation, Heider (1958) believed that the process that people use to form explanations is not much different from the way scientists arrive at conclusions. The person uses the internal and external factors to make their explanation with the same, although simple, scientific fashion that scientists use to explain the world’s phenomenon. This method of deduction does not come without bias, as people tend to overestimate the internal causes of behavior and underestimate the external causes of behavior, which scholars have dubbed the “fundamental attribution error” (Ross, 1977).

Two schools of thought developed out of Heider’s (1958) seminal work on attribution theory. Kelley (1967) believed that attribution theory made the person a “scientist.” Growing largely from Heider’s (1958) initial theory, this approach theorized that antecedents of attributions occur simultaneously across situations at varying levels, which he called the covariation principle. Weiner (1984) believed that attribution made the person a “judge,” arguing that when events occur, people often want to seek an agent to blame and punish. These attributions will eventually influence future motivation, emotion, and ultimately, behavior towards the agent involved. Although some aspects of Kelley’s (1967) covariation principle are
present in SCCT, it is mostly based on the second school of thought derived from attribution theory (Weiner, 1984).

“The Person as a Judge”: Weiner’s Attribution Theory of Motivation. Kelley’s (1967) covariation model of attribution explained how people used information to make attributions. This model did not help to explain how those attributions can help guide motivation and behavior. Weiner (1979) applied the attribution conceptualization made by Heider (1958) and Kelley (1967) to explain how the attributions made by people influence their actions. The basis of the attribution theory of motivation is that when a specific event is a success or failure, people tend to investigate why the event produced the given outcome. Once the “judge” attributes responsibility to someone or something, praise or blame is placed on that agent, and either the situation is repeated in future circumstances to produce similar success, or the situation is changed to avoid repeated failure.

Weiner (1985) originally conceptualized three dimensions that people use to make attributions: locus, stability, and controllability. Locus refers to whether the event in question was a result of the person (internally) or the environment (externally). This factor relied heavily on the work of Heider (1958) and Kelley (1967). Weiner’s (1979) argument was that besides whether the event was a result of the person or the environment, there are other factors that contribute to the attribution of events to agents to make reliable judgments. Stability refers to whether the causes of the event have changed over time (unstable), or if the causes of the events are always present (stable). Controllability refers to whether or not the cause of the event was one that the person could control or one over which that the person had no control.

Weiner (1985) believed that once an attribution is made to one of the causes of success or failure, then certain emotions are triggered by those causes, and ultimately, those emotions will
influence future behavior. For example, a student passes a difficult exam. The student believed that he passed because he studied extensively (internal locus). The person always studies for his tests extensively (high stability), but the person rarely does well on exams (uncontrollable). According to Weiner (1985), the person passed the exam because of his ability. The person will feel confident about his ability, and, as a result, he will continue to study, maybe even more extensively, in order to get the same results. If the student failed the exam, however, and the student believed he failed because he did not study enough (internal locus), the person never studied for his exams (high stability), and the person usually did well on exams (uncontrollable), then the person failed because of his ability, and, as a result, the person will have a feeling of incompetence, and the person will study harder next time in order to avoid failing another test.

Attribution theory can be used as a lens for sports because similar to the example provided, fans expect athletes to act responsibly and cherish their abilities, and are shocked and left looking for answers when an athlete is deviant.

McAuley, Duncan and Russel (1992) used Weiner’s (1985) approach to attribution to create a causal dimension scale. Four causal dimensions were found that determine if the event in question should be attributed more to the agent (strong individual responsibility) or to outside sources (weak individual responsibility): stability, external control, personal control and locus of causality. Conceptual definitions of stability and locus for McAuley, Duncan & Russel’s (1992) scale are similar to those used by Weiner (1985). The researchers divided controllability into two concepts. External control refers to how much control an outside source other than the agent involved has on the event. The more control an outside source has on the event, the more external control present. Personal control refers to how much control the agent had over the event. The more control the agent had, the more personal control attributed. Although measures
were developed for all four dimensions, research has indicated that personal control and locus of causality overlap (Coombs, 2000). High personal control and internal locus create perceptions of an intentional act, while low personal control and external locus create perceptions of an unintentional act. Therefore, most research uses three dimensions: stability, external control, and locus/personal control (or locus).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

The basic premise of SCCT is that a crisis is an ideal event to trigger an attribution search (Coombs, 2000). A crisis threatens key stakeholders’ expectations about an organization and can affect an organization’s performance and reputation (Coombs, 2009). It is important to note that SCCT is a post-crisis communication theory, intended for use after the organization has given all instructing and adjusting information that is important to stakeholders and victims for them to survive the effects of the crisis (Coombs, 1999, 2006, 2007a). SCCT focuses more on mitigating the reputational threat involved with crises. The theory suggests that a crisis manager must understand the crisis situation in order to evaluate the level of reputational threat presented by a crisis (Coombs, 2007b). Once the reputational threat is identified, the crisis manager can determine the crisis response strategy that bests protects the organization’s reputation.

Factors that Influence Reputational Threat. Coombs (2007b) identified two factors that can influence and shape the reputational threat that a crisis causes for an organization: initial crisis responsibility, which is assessed by identifying the crisis type, and performance history, which consists of crisis history and relationship history.

The first step to assessing the reputational threat of the crisis is identifying the initial crisis responsibility attached to the crisis, which is determined by the crisis type (Coombs, 2009).

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1 The researcher is using the term reputation when describing SCCT because this is the terminology used by the framework’s creator, Dr. Timothy Coombs, because of the negative perception of the term image in public relations literature. SCCT has empirically examined a single event in the life cycle of the organization. Therefore, based on the argument provided in Part I of the dissertation, SCCT is theoretically examining image rather than reputation.
The definition and classification of crisis type is essential for crisis managers to reduce the initial uncertainty a crisis brings (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). SCCT posits that the crisis type determines the amount of responsibility stakeholders will initially attribute to organizations when a crisis hits (Coombs, 2007b). Initially, Coombs (1995) linked attribution theory to selecting crisis types by identifying four types of crises based on two dimensions: internal-external and intentional-unintentional. The internal-external dimension addresses the locus dimension in attribution theory (Weiner, 1985). The intentional-unintentional dimension addresses the controllability dimension in attribution theory. Future testing would place the original crisis types on a continuum rather than a grid, based on the level of personal control present for each crisis type (Coombs, 1998; McAuley, Duncan, & Russel, 1992).

Coombs and Holladay (2002) later synthesized a list of crisis types from several other typologies found in other crisis literature (e.g., Egelhoff & Sen, 1992; Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). The list was clustered into three groups based on the level of initial crisis responsibility, which factored in the level of personal control the crisis type presented (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; McAuley, Duncan, & Russel, 1992). Three clusters were identified based on the study. The victim cluster provokes minimal levels of attribution because stakeholders see the organization as the victim of the crisis. These include natural disasters, workplace violence, malevolence, and rumors. The accidental cluster provokes moderate levels of attribution because these crises are usually seen as uncontrollable and unintentional. These include technical-error product harm, technical-error accidents, and challenges. The preventable cluster provokes strong levels of attribution because the organization willingly engaged in the acts that led to the crisis. These include human-error accidents, human-error product harm, and organizational misdeeds. Table 2-2 shows the crisis typology for SCCT.
Table 2-2
SCCT Crisis Typology, by Level of Responsibility (Coombs, 2007b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim Cluster: Very Little Attribution of Crisis Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural Disasters:</strong> When an organization is damaged as a result of the weather or “acts of God” such as earthquakes, tornados, floods, hurricanes, and bad storms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workplace Violence:</strong> When an employee or former employee commits violence against other employees on organizational grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rumors:</strong> When false or misleading information is purposefully circulated about an organization or its products in order to harm the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Malevolence:</strong> When some outside actor or opponent employs extreme tactics to attack the organization, such as product tampering, kidnapping, terrorism, or computer hacking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accidental Cluster: Low Attribution of Crisis Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenge:</strong> When the organization is confronted by discontented stakeholders with claims that it is operating in an inappropriate manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical-Error Accidents:</strong> When the technology utilized or supplied by the organization fails and causes an industrial accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical-Error Product Harm:</strong> When the technology utilized or supplied by the organization fails and results in a defect or potentially harmful product</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preventable Cluster: Strong Attribution of Crisis Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human-Error Accidents:</strong> When human error causes an accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human-Error Product Harm:</strong> When human error results in a defect or potentially harmful product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Misdeeds:</strong> When management takes actions it knows may place stakeholders at risk or knowingly violates the law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance history. Once the initial assessment is determined, the next step to assessing reputational threat is evaluating the performance history of the organization (Coombs, 2009).

The performance history of an organization consists of crisis history and relationship history. Both are related to Weiner’s (1985) dimension of stability. Both factors can intensify the level of crisis responsibility, and therefore, can hurt or harm the organization’s reputational threat (Coombs, 2004a, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Crisis history is defined as whether or not an organization has had similar crises in the past. When an organization has a history of unfortunate events, it points to a problem that should be addressed (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

When an organization has faced several crises, it indicates pattern of issues that the organization needs to address before facing permanent reputational damage (Coombs, 2000).
organization’s crisis history also can be used by mass media outlets as a frame for the current crisis (Coombs, 2004a).

**Relationship history** is defined as how well or poorly an organization has treated, or has been perceived to have treated, its stakeholders prior to a crisis. When an organization has a history of treating its stakeholders poorly, their stakeholders will attribute more crisis responsibility to the organization for the present crisis (Coombs, 2007a). Coombs and Holladay (2001) described two effects that performance history can have on reputational threat. The “halo effect” states that an organization’s prior reputation can affect the comprehension and interpretation of new information, such that a positive prior reputation can lead to the dismissal of negative information, and a negative prior reputation can lead to stakeholders ignoring or downplaying positive information. The “Velcro effect” states that an organization’s negative crisis or relationship history can intensify crisis responsibility more than a positive crisis or relationship history can extenuate crisis responsibility.

**Crisis Response Strategies**

Once the level of reputational threat is determined, then the crisis manager must use the SCCT-recommended crisis response strategy taken from a synthesized list of response strategies. Coombs (2007a) based his crisis response typology on the response strategies developed by Benoit’s (1995) work based on IRT and Allen and Caillouet (1994)’s work based on impression management and legitimacy. Initial tests of the matching of crisis types to crisis responses placed crisis response strategies on a continuum similar to the crisis typology continuum (Coombs, 1998). Crises that exhibited strong levels of personal control were recommended to be approached by using more accommodative responses, whereas crises that exhibited weak levels of personal control were suggested to be approached by more defensive strategies.
Coombs (2006, 2007a) later took his synthesized list of response strategies and clustered the list into four groups of similar strategies, which he later called postures. The denial posture strives to remove any connections an organization has with a crisis. These include attacking the accuser, simple denial and scapegoating. The diminishment posture attempts to reduce attributions of organizational control and reduce negative effects of the crisis. These include excusing and justification. The rebuilding posture attempts to improve the organization’s reputation. These include compensation and apology. The bolstering posture seeks to build a positive connection between an organization and its publics. These include reminding, ingratiolation and victimage. It is recommended that the bolstering strategies are used only in conjunction with other strategies to avoid a superficial perception placed on the organization because of the strategies’ focus on the organization (Coombs, 2007a). Table 2-3 shows the crisis response typology for SCCT.

Table 2-3
SCCT Crisis Response Typology, by Posture (Coombs, 2007b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Response Postures and Explanations</th>
<th>Crisis Response Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial Posture:</td>
<td>• Attacking the Accuser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Strives to remove any connections an</td>
<td>• Simple Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organization had with a crisis*</td>
<td>• Scapegoating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminishment Posture:</td>
<td>• Excusing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Attempts to reduce attributions of</td>
<td>• Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational control and reduce negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effects of the crisis*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuilding Posture:</td>
<td>• Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Attempts to improve the organization’s</td>
<td>• Apology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reputation*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering Posture:</td>
<td>• Reminding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Seeks to build a positive connection</td>
<td>• Ingratiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between an organization and its publics</td>
<td>• Victimage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Critique and Evaluation of SCCT

Overall, SCCT has answered Benson’s (1988) call for a theoretical framework for selecting the right “response” to a crisis. The major contribution that SCCT gives to crisis communications research is in its empirical nature. SCCT uses experimental design and research rather than the classic case study approach that crisis communication literature has used for many years (An & Cheng, 2007; Coombs, 2008). Applying empirical research to crisis communication has helped the field develop knowledge based on statistical findings, not just expert evaluations and critique of crisis case studies. Rather than assuming the connection between crisis typology and crisis response typology, SCCT has provided a framework for conducting studies that can test if certain responses will work in certain situations. The empirical nature of SCCT has given the theory very high testability, as well has very high falsifiability, two very important criteria for good theory (Shoemaker, Tankard & Lasorsa, 2004).

SCCT has used attribution theory to successfully provide a framework to explain how people can use information about an organization’s previous history of crises and information about an organization’s previous relationships with stakeholders to predict the degree of attribution of responsibility for their actions during a crisis. The theory has grown from a simple framework using the amount of personal control to link certain crisis responses to a crisis typology (Coombs, 1995) to a full-blown model that explains the relationships of several determinant factors that affect organizational reputation, and eventually, behavioral intentions toward an organization (Coombs, 2007b). According to Shoemaker, Tankard and Lasorsa (2004), excellent theories must be simple, while holding great explanatory power. SCCT, while not very simple in nature in its present form, has provided excellent explanatory power because it
has the ability to show the effects of crisis history and reputations on the image of an organization, especially when the crisis history and reputation is negative (Coombs & Holladay, 2001).

Although SCCT has provided a framework for researchers to use empirical methods to create guidelines, there are some concerns regarding the practical nature of the theory. Crises are dynamic and usually call for split-second decisions by the crisis team working under pressure from the media and stakeholders. SCCT, while providing a useful framework, does not always lend itself to practical use in time-pressing situations because of the systematic nature of the theory. Another weakness of the theory is its limitation to corporate crises. The theory is designed to accommodate the characteristics of corporate crises, and only takes into account organizations that would face the 10 crisis types suggested (Coombs, 2004). The theory is not designed for use in the political or entertainment arena because it is not designed for application to individuals, which is why IRT has been used in this dissertation to address the athlete’s image repair strategy, while SCCT has been used to address the team’s crisis communication strategy when having to respond to athlete transgressions.

_Crisis Communication and Sports: Using SCCT to Examine Athlete Transgressions_

As mentioned above, a survey of public relations practitioners for professional sports teams reported that athlete transgressions, both on-field and off-field, were the crises most dealt with, as well as the crises most anticipated (Hessert, 1998). Although this survey was conducted 13 years ago, detrimental behavior still needs to be addressed by an athlete’s team. Player transgressions can strain the relationship between a sports organization and its stakeholders, which could ultimately cost teams financially through a decline in fan support and loss of corporate sponsorships (Pfahl & Bates, 2008; Wilson et al., 2008).
Literature devoted to organizational response to crises in the sports arena have been primarily rhetorical studies that have used IRT as the theoretical framework, such as Fortunato’s (2008) study about the Duke Lacrosse scandal mentioned in Part I of the literature review. Pfahl and Bates (2008) studied the image repair strategies of Formula One Racing after a series of crashes due to tire failure caused controversy at the United States Grand Prix in 2005. The researchers found that Formula One Racing and Michelin attacked each other during statements to the public, which led to contradictory statements and confusion over the cause of the crashes. However, the rhetorical analysis did not allow for the investigation of audience reaction to the statements, which would be possible through the use of SCCT.

The only study found that used Coombs’ early theoretical development of the symbolic approach, which is the predecessor to SCCT (Coombs, 1995), was a study conducted by Williams and Olaniran (2002). The researchers used rhetorical analysis to examine the crisis response strategies used by Texas Tech University and the city of Lubbock, TX, after three members of the Hampton University women’s basketball team were arrested and falsely accused of attempting a parking lot scam the day before a game between Hampton and Texas Tech. The study used Coombs’ research on organizational crises to analyze the strategy used by Texas Tech to separate the university from the racially-charged scandal plaguing the city of Lubbock after the false accusations, but looked at the case rhetorically rather than empirically, and therefore did not take into account audience reaction to the use of response strategies.

This study will empirically examine the use of certain response strategies to repair a team’s image after being faced with athlete transgressions by using SCCT as the framework. According to Coombs’ (2007b) crisis typology, athlete transgressions can be considered a challenge, which causes moderate levels of attribution of crisis responsibility. Athlete
transgression can be considered an organizational challenge because the misdeed of the athlete (considered an employee of the team) can cause stakeholders to consider that the organization is operating in an inappropriate manner based on moral or ethical grounds, based on the team’s association with that athlete. However, the nature of the transgression can be considered to determine the amount of initial responsibility placed on the organization.

According to Coombs (1995), an organization would be considered more responsible for a crisis if the crisis is internal to the organization. Based on this assumption, stakeholders may consider the organization more responsible for athlete transgressions that occur during play or team activities (internal) rather than away from the team (external). The following hypothesis addresses this assumption:

\[ H_3: \text{A team will be perceived to be more responsible for an athlete’s transgression if the transgression is an internal transgression rather than an external transgression.} \]

Coombs (2007b) defines crisis history as whether or not an organization has had similar crises in the past. When an organization has a history of unfortunate events, it points to a problem that should be addressed. In the context of this dissertation, a history of athlete transgressions could point to a problem within the organization that needs to be addressed. Coombs’ (2004) found that when an organization has a history of similar crises, the public attributes more responsibility to the organization for the current crisis. The following hypothesis places this assumption into the study’s context:

\[ H_4: \text{If a team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, it will be perceived as more responsible for the current transgression.} \]

Previous studies have tested the relationship between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation, which is the key relationship in SCCT theory (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Coombs, 2004). The key advantage of SCCT over IRT for organizational
crises is that it provides a theoretical connection between crisis situations and crisis response strategies: crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007b). Previous studies found that there was a negative relationship between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation—the more crisis responsibility that is attributed to an organization, the more negative the organization’s reputation is perceived. This study will also test the correlation between the two variables:

\[ H5: \text{There will be a negative correlation between perceived crisis responsibility and perceived organizational reputation.} \]

Once the initial crisis responsibility is determined and the performance history is evaluated, SCCT provides a list of recommendations for crisis managers to guide response (Coombs, 2007b). Crisis responses are designed to repair the organization’s image and mitigate its responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 1995). When faced with a crisis from the accidental cluster, such as a challenge, SCCT recommendations suggest that if the organization has a positive crisis history (no history of similar crises), the practitioner should use a diminishing response strategy. According to SCCT recommendations, when faced with a crisis from the accidental cluster, if the organization has a negative crisis history (a history of facing similar crises), the practitioner should use a rebuild response strategy. SCCT recommendations suggest that the use of denial strategies is not appropriate when responding to a crisis from the accidental cluster, regardless of crisis history (Coombs, 2007a). Also, SCCT recommendations suggest that the recommended response is the most ideal response to address the crisis situation. According to some scholars (e.g. Frandsen & Winn, 2007), assuming that there is an ideal response to a crisis does not take into account the dynamic nature of crises.

Unlike previous studies using SCCT (e.g. Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2001), this study will determine if the strategies mitigated the organization’s responsibility for the transgression and repaired the organization’s reputation successfully based on these
recommendations. Because an athlete transgression is a challenge according to SCCT crisis definitions, the following hypotheses will address these recommendations:

**H6a:** When a team has a positive history with athlete transgressions, a team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression will be mitigated by the use of a diminish response strategy better than other strategies.

**H6b:** When the team has a positive history with athlete transgressions, a team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression will be improved by the use of a diminish response strategy better than other strategies.

**H7a:** When the team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, a team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression will be mitigated by the use of a rebuild response strategy better than other strategies.

**H7b:** When the team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, a team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression will be improved by the use of a rebuild response strategy better than other strategies.

As mentioned in Part I, two behavior intention measures are present in crisis communication literature: potential supportive behavior and negative word-of-mouth (Coombs, 1999, 2004a, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2001, 2007). The empirical study of SCCT provides evidence that there is a relationship between organizational reputation and behavior intentions, similar to the link between image and behavior theorized in Part I (Coombs, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2001). The more negative the organization’s reputation, the more likely stakeholders would be willing to spread negative word-of-mouth (Coombs & Holladay, 2007) and the less likely stakeholders would be to engage in behavior that supports the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). The following hypotheses address these assumptions in the context of the dissertation:

**H8:** There will be a negative correlation between perceived organizational reputation and generated negative WOM.

**H9:** There will be a positive correlation between perceived organizational reputation and supported behavioral intentions.
CHAPTER 3 – METHOD

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how an athlete’s response to transgressions affects the image of that athlete and the team he/she represents. This dissertation will investigate two overarching questions:

1) To what extent does the type of transgression an athlete faces and his/her response to that transgression affect the image of the athlete?

2) To what extent does the type of transgression an athlete faces, his/her response to that transgression, and his/her team’s history with athlete transgressions affect the image of the team that athlete represents?

Based on the preceding review of literature, the following hypothesis and research questions were proposed:

H1: An athlete’s image will be better repaired by the mortification strategy than the attacking the accuser and bolstering strategies, regardless of the type of transgression.

RQ1: Are there differences in the repair of an athlete’s image for criminal transgressions and non-criminal transgressions?

H2: There will be a negative correlation between perceived image and generated negative WOM.

RQ2: Which image repair strategies used following an athlete’s transgression are the most effective at reducing the negative word-of-mouth generated about that athlete?

RQ3: Does the amount of negative word-of-mouth generated about an athlete differ for athletes that face criminal transgressions versus athletes that face non-criminal transgressions?

H3: A team will be perceived to be more responsible for an athlete’s transgression if the transgression is an internal transgression rather than an external transgression.

H4: If a team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, it will be perceived as more responsible for the current transgression.
H5: There will be a negative correlation between perceived crisis responsibility and perceived organizational reputation.

H6a: When a team has a positive history with athlete transgressions, a team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression will be mitigated by the use of a diminish response strategy better than other strategies.

H6b: When a team has a positive history with athlete transgressions, a team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression will be improved by the use of a diminish response strategy better than other strategies.

H7a: When a team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, a team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression will be mitigated by the use of a rebuild response strategy better than other strategies.

H7b: When a team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, a team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression will be improved by the use of a rebuild response strategy better than other strategies.

H8: There will be a negative correlation between perceived organizational reputation and generated negative WOM.

H9: There will be a positive correlation between perceived organizational reputation and supported behavioral intentions.

Experimental Design

To examine these research questions and hypotheses, the researcher used a blend of the survey and experimental methods, an approach that has been used several times in public relations research (e.g. Brown et al., 2012; Callison, 2004; Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; 2001; Lee, 2007). In these types of studies, the participant is exposed to manipulations embedded in news articles presented in a questionnaire, giving the method the design of a quasi-experiment embedded within a survey. Despite the examples provided above, the experimental method has rarely been used in public relations research. Boynton and Dougall (2006) found that only 6 percent of articles published in Journal of Public Relations Research and Public Relations Review use experimental methods. The use of experiments in public
relations is necessary because it is the best way to test for predictive and causal effects in research (Stacks, 2011).

Experiments are designed to discover evidence of cause-and-effect relationships; in other words, an experiment is the best method to uncover whether an independent variable can cause some effect in a dependent variable (Abdi, Edelman, Valentin, & Dowling, 2009). Stacks (2011) stated that in order to achieve causality, three things must be present: 1) Changes in one variable cause changes in the other variable; 2) The effect follows the cause; and 3) A third variable did not influence the relationship.

There are two elements critical to experimental design: control and manipulation (Abdi et al., 2009; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). In a true experiment, one of the biggest advantages is that the researcher has control over the environment, variables and subjects. However, in a quasi-experiment, the researcher loses some control over the design because he/she cannot control the environment. As stated above, this brings into question the causality of the relationships under observation. Manipulation is used by the researcher to create the levels of the independent variable that will be used in the study. To manipulate the variables, the researcher creates stimuli for each level of the independent variable and randomly assigns the stimuli to the participants.

Because this study is a quasi-experimental design due to the use of online dissemination, there are several unique advantages and disadvantages. Internet experiments make it possible to recruit a larger sample size because of accessibility. Subjects can participate in an Internet experiment at any time during the day, and it can be taken in the subject’s natural setting (Reips, 2000). However, causality is called into question because the study is conducted in the participants’ natural settings. Also, there is no control over the differences between participant groups in the environment (Boynton & Dougall, 2006). Finally, only participants that are
motivated and interested in the experiment topic will participate, and there is potential for the dropout rate of an online experiment to be greater than a traditional experiment because it is easy to terminate (Reips, 2000).

Online experiments threaten internal validity because of the duration of the experiment. As opposed to a traditional lab experiment, which is completed in a few hours or days, online experiments are usually disseminated over weeks, and events that occur during the study can threaten internal validity (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Also, the increased dropout factor can threaten internal validity (Reips, 2000). However, the elimination of experimenter bias that can be present in traditional experiments can increase the internal validity of online experiments (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Traditional experiments have always been criticized for the lack of external validity due to the artificial nature (Abdi et al., 2009). However, because online experiments are usually conducted in the participant’s natural setting, this can increase external validity, which can be one of the biggest advantages of online experiments (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Two factorial experiments were designed for this study: one to investigate research questions and hypotheses related to athlete image and one to investigate research questions and hypotheses related to team image. Factorial designs involve the simultaneous analysis of two or more independent variables and allow each level of each independent variable to be tested in conjunction with the other variables and levels. The use of two experiments makes the investigation easier to manage. Instead of creating a 3 (type of transgression) X 3 (athlete response) X 3 (team response) X 2 (team crisis history) factorial design experiment, resulting in 54 distinct questionnaires, the researcher designed one 2 (type of transgression) X 3 (athlete response) factorial experiment and one 2 (type of transgression) X 2 (team crisis history) X 3
(team response) factorial experiment, resulting in 18 distinct questionnaires. The researcher manipulated the reporting of athlete transgressions using online blog postings. Tewksbury (2003) found that half of online news consumers use the Internet to view sports-related news, and the majority of views of online news from consumers involved sports-related content. Although there is an overall increase of online news consumption and a decrease of traditional news consumption, younger, college-aged news consumers get their news from online news sources rather than traditional news sources at a greater rate than older news consumers (Coleman & McCombs, 2007; Diddi & LaRose, 2006). This is relevant because the participants for this study are college students. Although the use of college student samples has been criticized, the consumption of online news among college-aged students adds some validity to the use of the sample. The researcher designed the news articles to resemble articles extracted from The Bleacher Report. According to their website, The Bleacher Report is the 4th largest sports media site with more than 25 million monthly readers (The Bleacher Report, 2012). According to Alexa.com (2012), The Bleacher Report is the 10th most visited sports website, and the most visited sports blog website. The Bleacher Report was also chosen because blogs are a more effective medium to mitigate crisis situations than online newspaper articles (Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011).

Crisis Response Analysis

In order to choose the most prevalent IRT and SCCT response strategies for the manipulations, the researcher conducted a review of relevant case studies between November 1, 2009 and November 1, 2011 that involved professional athletes in transgressions. The researcher chose 15 cases from his personal knowledge of sports transgressions that were prominent in the
media to analyze athlete and team response strategies. These cases are representative of a wide array of issues in sports. The list of cases is provided in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1
List of Transgressions used in Environmental Scan Pretest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athlete</th>
<th>Date of Transgression</th>
<th>Type of Transgression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiger Woods</td>
<td>November 2009</td>
<td>Infidelity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Roethlisberger</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td>Sexual Assault Allegations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndamukong Suh</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td>Unnecessary Roughness (on-field)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam “Pacman” Jones</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Disorderly Conduct/Resisting Arrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashard Mendenhall</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>Offensive Comments on Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floyd Mayweather, Jr.</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Allegations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan Smith</td>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>Illegal Hit (on-field)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javaris Crittenton</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
<td>Murder Allegations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dez Bryant</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>Civil Lawsuit over Stolen Merchandise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett Favre</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>“Sexting” and Inappropriate Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenny Britt</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Careless Driving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Mayfield</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
<td>Manufacturing Narcotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manny Ramirez</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Suspension for Performance-Enhancing Drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobe Bryant</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Offensive Comments (on-court)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena Williams</td>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>On-Court Tirade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After choosing the 15 cases, the researcher used Google News to find articles covering each case on the ESPN and The New York Times online websites. The New York Times was selected because of its extensive use in traditional mainstream content analysis (Roberts, Wanta & Dzwo, 2002). ESPN was selected because ESPN.com is the most visited sports news website (Alexa.com, 2011). The athlete’s name and type of transgression were used as search terms on each of the media outlets’ websites. A total of 463 articles were extracted using this method.

Then, articles that contained a statement from the athlete (or a representative of the athlete), or a representative of the team that athlete represents (if they play a team sport), were extracted. This selection yielded 178 articles with athlete responses and 87 articles with team responses.

After this extraction, the articles were coded based on the statements the players or teams gave in response to the transgressions. Using IRT, the most prevalent response strategies used for
athletes were mortification (39 articles, 22%), bolstering (32 articles, 18%) and attacking the accuser (21 articles, 12%). These three strategies are also three of the most prevalent responses present in previous scholarly literature on athlete image repair (Smudde and Courtright, 2008).

Using SCCT, the most prevalent response strategies used for teams were scapegoating (15 articles, 18%), apology (14 articles, 16%) and justification (10 articles, 12%). These were the strategies used to create the manipulations for these two experiments. All of the other strategies in both IRT and SCCT response typologies were present in less than 10 percent of the articles each.

**Experiment Case Selection**

The researcher used NFL athletes that have faced transgressions for the experiments. In order to choose cases that had a neutral perception, a preliminary screening of the perception of NFL athletes was conducted to choose cases of actual transgressions to use for the experiments. For the screening, 30 students from a large, Southeastern university were chosen to participate. Participants in the screening were asked to rate their perception of 20 NFL athletes involved in transgressions using a 7-point Likert scale item (“How would you rate your overall perception of Athlete X?”), and athletes that were perceived neutrally were considered for the study. Table 3-2 provides a list of the 20 athletes involved in the screening.

Four cases were chosen from the experiments based on the means and standard deviations from the perception question asked. The researcher chose cases where the mean perception score was close to four (on a 7-point scale), and the standard deviation was close to zero, meaning that the participant’s perception grouped closer to neutral than the extremes (very negative or very positive).
Table 3-2
NFL Athletes used for Preliminary Screening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ben Roethlisberger</th>
<th>DeSean Jackson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ndamukong Suh</td>
<td>Dunta Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam “Pacman” Jones</td>
<td>Brandon Meriweather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashard Mendenhall</td>
<td>Julian Edelman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dez Bryant</td>
<td>Aqib Talib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett Favre</td>
<td>Tyrell Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenny Britt</td>
<td>Adrian Peterson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Harrison</td>
<td>Hines Ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Cook</td>
<td>Kenny Britt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedric Benson</td>
<td>Michael Bush</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first case chosen involved Pittsburgh Steelers running back Rashard Mendenhall ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.718$). On May 2, 2011, Mendenhall made comments on his Twitter page that criticized the celebration of Osama Bin Laden’s death (Associated Press, 2011b). The second case involved Tampa Bay Buccaneers cornerback Aqib Talib ($M = 3.80, SD = 0.768$). On March 29, 2011, Garland, Texas police issued an arrest warrant for Talib for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon after firing a gun at his sister’s boyfriend. Talib was indicted for the charges in May 2011 (Associated Press, 2011c). These two cases were used for Experiment I.

The third case chosen involved Atlanta Falcons cornerback Dunta Robinson ($M = 4.17, SD = 0.618$). On September 19, 2011, Robinson was fined $40,000 by the NFL for a helmet-to-helmet hit on Philadelphia Eagles receiver Jeremy Maclin (Associated Press, 2011d). The fourth case involved Minnesota Vikings cornerback Chris Cook ($M = 4.00, SD = 0.358$). On October 22, 2011, Eden Prairie police arrested Cook on domestic assault charges (Associated Press, 2011d). These two cases were used for Experiment II.
Experiment I – Athlete Image

The first experiment addressed athlete image. Using a 2 X 3 factorial design, this experiment examined to what extent the type of transgression an athlete faces and the athlete’s response to that transgression affects the athlete’s image.

Independent Variables

Athlete transgression is operationally defined as an attack on an athlete’s image in which stakeholders perceive that the athlete has deliberately engaged in some wrong doing, violating important stakeholder values. For this experiment, the type of transgression was manipulated as either a criminal or a non-criminal transgression. A criminal transgression is defined as a transgression that violates the laws of a society and that could lead to judicial prosecution (Fuller, 2006). The Mendenhall case was used as the non-criminal transgression, and the Talib case was used as the criminal transgression.

Athlete response is operationally defined as the statement given by the athlete in response to the transgression. The statements was manipulated as one of the three response strategies prevalent in the environmental scan pretest—mortification, attacking the accuser, bolstering. These responses were manipulated as a statement embedded in a news article created by the researcher. Appendix A provides the articles and manipulations used in Experiment I.

Dependent Variables

Athlete image is operationally defined as the perception of an athlete held by the audience, shaped by the athlete’s transgression, and the athlete’s response to that transgression. Athlete image was measured using a four-item, seven-point Likert scale modified from Choi and Rifon’s (2007) scale used to measure celebrity athlete genuineness. Table 3-3 gives the four scale items used for the study. Athlete image was measured twice: after the participant reads the
article describing the transgression, and after the participant reads the article describing the athlete’s response to the transgression.

Table 3-3
Items Measuring Athlete Image (Choi & Rifon, 2007)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I believe this athlete is wise after reading this article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I believe this athlete is pleasant after reading this article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I believe I could be comfortable around this athlete after reading this article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I believe this athlete is sophisticated after reading this article.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Negative WOM is operationally defined as communication among the audience about an athlete that is detrimental to his/her success repairing his/her image. Negative word-of-mouth was measured using an adaptation of the three-item, seven-point Likert scale used by Coombs and Holladay (2007). Table 3-4 gives the three scale items used for the study. Negative WOM will be measured twice: after the participant reads the article describing the transgression, and after the participant reads the article describing the athlete’s response to the transgression.

Table 3-4
Items Measuring Negative Word-of-Mouth (Coombs & Holladay, 2007)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I would encourage people not to support this athlete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I would say negative things about this athlete to other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I would not recommend someone to cheer for this athlete during games.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

The participants for this experiment were recruited using a research participant pool at a large, public, Southeastern university. Reinard (2006) stated that to ensure adequate effect size, you should recruit at least 25 participants per level of each independent variable. After permission and IRB approval was granted, the researcher asked the members of the participant pool to voluntarily participate in the study. All participants were over the age of consent.
The researcher gave a brief description about the project, explaining the nature of the project, but not completely disclosing the purpose of the project. The participants were also told that the nature of the project could possibly cause anxiety and stress. After the oral instructions and the students read the informed consent statement, willing participants were instructed to begin the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were debriefed about the nature of the study, emphasizing that the news article was fictitious. The participants also received a written debriefing statement. The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

**Procedure**

Once participants were recruited for the study, they were prompted to visit a distinct web address that directed the participant to one of six randomly assigned online questionnaires. The participant was first directed to the informed consent statement, and after reading the statement, if the participant chose to proceed, he/she was asked to answer preliminary measures, which will be discussed in a later section.

After answering the preliminary measures, the participant was exposed to the first news article describing the nature of the transgression. Participants were either exposed to the Mendenhall transgression or the Talib transgression. After the participant read the assigned article, he/she was prompted to answer a manipulation check, the athlete image scale, and the negative word-of-mouth scale.

Next, participants were exposed to a second news article describing the transgression and a response from the athlete. Each participant was randomly assigned one of the three response strategies chosen in the pretest content analysis. After the participant was exposed to the athlete’s
response to the transgression, he/she was prompted to answer manipulation checks, the athlete image scale, and the negative word-of-mouth scale.

Finally, participants were directed to the debriefing statement thanking the participant and explaining the purpose of the study. After the statement, participants were asked to answer demographic and fan identity questions.

**Experiment II – Team Image**

The second experiment addressed team image. Using a 2 X 2 X 3 factorial design, this experiment examined to what extent the type of transgression an athlete faces, the team’s history with athlete transgressions and the team’s response to that transgression affects the team’s image.

*Independent Variables*

Athlete transgression is operationally defined as an attack on an athlete’s image in which stakeholders perceive that the athlete has deliberately engaged in some wrong doing, violating important stakeholder values. For this experiment, the type of transgression was classified from the team’s perspective, and was manipulated as either an internal or an external transgression. An internal transgression is defined as a transgression that occurred during athletic competition or team-sanctioned activities. The Robinson case was used as the internal transgression, and the Cook case was used as the external transgression.

Crisis history is operationally defined as whether or not a team has had similar athlete transgressions in the past. The researcher manipulated the team’s crisis history using a statement about the team’s history with athlete transgressions. A team with a positive crisis history dealt with no athlete transgressions in the last two years, while a team with a negative crisis history dealt with eight athlete transgression in the last two years.
Team response is operationally defined as the statement given by the team in response to the athlete’s transgression. The statements were manipulated as one of the three response strategies prevalent in the environmental scan pretest—scapegoating (deny posture), justification (diminish posture) and apology (rebuild posture). These responses were manipulated as a statement embedded in a news article created by the researcher. Appendix B provides the articles and manipulations used in Experiment II.

**Dependent Variables**

Crisis responsibility is operationally defined as the degree to which the audience blames the team for the athlete’s transgression. Crisis responsibility was measured using a six-item, seven-point Likert scale adapted from Brown and Ki’s (2011) organizational crisis responsibility scale. Table 3-5 gives the six scale items used for the study. Crisis responsibility was measured after the participant was exposed to the team’s response to the athlete transgression.

Table 3-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items Measuring Crisis Responsibility (Brown &amp; Ki, 2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The team had the capability to stop the event from occurring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The incident could have been prevented by the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The team had the resources to prevent the incident from occurring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) The team could have avoided the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) The team should be held accountable for the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) The team should not be blamed for the incident.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organization reputation is operationally defined as the perception of a team held by the audience, shaped by the athlete’s transgression, and the team’s response to that athlete’s transgression. Organization reputation was measured using Coombs and Holladay’s (1996) five-item, seven-point Likert scale modified from McCroskey’s (1966) scale used to measure credibility. Table 3-6 gives the five items used for this study. Organization reputation was measured after the participant was exposed to the team’s response to the athlete transgression.
Table 3-6
Items Measuring Organization Reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; McCroskey, 1966)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>The team is being honest about the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>I trust the team to tell the truth about this incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>In this circumstance, I am likely to believe what the team is saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>I would prefer not to trust this team’s statement about this incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>In light of this incident, this team is reputable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Negative WOM is operationally defined as communication among the audience about an organization that is detrimental to its success. Negative WOM was measured using the adaptation of the three-item, seven-point Likert scale used by Coombs and Holladay (2007) in Experiment I. Potential supportive behavior is defined as the likelihood that the audience will intend to participate in behavior that supports the team after the athlete’s transgression. Potential supportive behavior was measured using a five-item, seven-point Likert scale created by the researcher. Table 3-7 gives the five items used for this study to measure potential supportive behavior. Both negative WOM and potential supportive behavior were measured after the participant was exposed to the team’s response to the athlete transgression.

Table 3-7
Items Measuring Potential Supportive Behavior

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>After reading this article, I would watch this team’s games on television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>After reading this article, I would discuss this team in a positive light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>After reading this article, I would consume sports news that discussed this team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>After reading this article, I would attend this team’s games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>After reading this article, I would buy team paraphernalia (jerseys, T-shirts, etc.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

The participants for this experiment were recruited using a research participant pool at a large, public, Southeastern university. After permission and IRB approval was granted, the researcher asked the members of the participant pool to voluntarily participate in the study. All participants were over the age of consent. The researcher gave a brief description about the
project, explaining the nature of the project, but not completely disclosing the purpose of the project. The participants were told that the nature of the project could possibly cause anxiety and stress. After the students read the informed consent statement, willing participants were instructed to begin the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were debriefed about the nature of the study, emphasizing that the news article was fictitious. The participants also received a written debriefing statement. The survey took approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.

Procedure

Once participants were recruited for the study, they were prompted to visit a distinct web address that directed the participant to one of 12 randomly assigned online questionnaires. The participant was first directed to the informed consent statement, and after reading the statement, if the participant chose to proceed, he/she was asked to answer preliminary measures.

After answering the preliminary measures, the participant was exposed to the first news article describing the nature of the transgression and the team’s crisis history. Participants were either exposed to the Cook transgression or the Robinson transgression. A manipulated statement was embedded in the article that gives the team’s history of athlete transgressions. After the participants read their assigned article, they were prompted to answer manipulation checks.

Next, participants were exposed to a second news article describing the transgression and a response from the team. Each participant was randomly assigned one of the three response strategies chosen in the pretest content analysis. After the participants read their assigned article with the team’s response, they were prompted to answer manipulation checks, the crisis responsibility scale, the organization reputation scale, the negative word-of-mouth scale and the potential supportive behavior scale.
Finally, participants were directed to the debriefing statement thanking the participant and explaining the purpose of the study. After the statement, participants were asked to answer demographic and fan identity questions.

**Manipulation Checks and Confounding Variables**

To determine if the manipulations were successful, several manipulation checks were embedded into the questionnaire. For both experiments, the success of the response strategy manipulation was determined using three, seven-point Likert scale items that asked if response strategies were present in the second article. For a response strategy manipulation to be successful, there must be a significant difference between the mean scores for the item addressing the response strategy present in the article and the mean scores for the other two items.

For the second experiment, the success of the crisis history manipulation was determined using a seven-point Likert scale item that asked if the team had a history of player incidents similar to the one discussed in the first article. For the manipulations to be successful, there must be a significant difference between the mean scores of the manipulation check for the positive and negative crisis history conditions, and the mean score for the negative manipulation must be higher.

The researcher also measured for two variables that may have a confounding effect on the dependent variables. The first confounding variable was the participant’s degree of moral judgment. To measure this variable, the participant was given four scenarios adapted from Florian and Mikulincer (1997)’s Multidimensional Social Transgression Scale (MSTS) that describe a transgression. After reading each transgression, the participant was given two, seven-point Likert scale items that asked how severe was the accused person’s actions, and how severe
the punishment should be for the transgression. The higher the score, the more judgmental the participant is towards wrongdoing. Appendix E provides the four scenarios used in the questionnaire. The second confounding variable was the participant’s knowledge of the cases they were presented in his/her respective questionnaire. To measure this variable, the participant was given a seven-point Likert scale item that asked how informed the participant was about this case before reading the first article. The higher the score, the more informed the participant was about the case.

**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability is the ability for a scale to measure the same construct consistently over time. To measure reliability, Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure the reliability after the study is completed for each of the dependent variables for both experiments. Validity means that manipulations and scales actually measure what they intended to measure. Three types of validity were assured during the process of the dissertation: face validity, content validity, and construct validity. Face validity is whether or not the measures on surface appear to measure the constructs they intend to measure, and is usually achieved based on the credibility of the researcher. Content validity was achieved by the approval of the measures and manipulations by the researchers’ dissertation committee and a panel of experts in public relations and sports communication to ensure that they are representative of the variables they intend to measure. Construct validity was measured using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to ensure that all items that measure the specific dependent variable they intend to measure. EFA is used to discover and identify the underlying dimensions, or factors, that are present in a multi-dimensional scale (Reinard, 2006). EFA was used to analyze the scale items for each dependent variable to verify
that the items load under only one factor, which will provide evidence that the scale has high construct validity.

**Pretest**

Before the final version of the questionnaire was approved, a pretest was conducted using 56 undergraduate students from a large, public Southeastern university. The pretest was conducted to eliminate or revise any scale items that were unreliable, and to adjust the manipulations if needed. After the pretest, one of the scale items for Experiment I’s athlete image scale was omitted (“I believe this athlete is socially responsible….”) because the meaning of the item was confusing to pretest participants. One of the negative WOM items for both experiments was edited to improve reliability (From “I would recommend someone not to cheer for this athlete during games.” to “I would recommend someone to cheer for this athlete during games.”). All manipulation checks were successful; therefore, none of the articles were changed, although some of the stories were edited for spelling and grammar.

The biggest change from the pretest was the crisis responsibility scale. In the pretest, a scale modified from McAuley, Duncan and Russel’s (1992) attribution scale was used to measure crisis responsibility. This scale was used in several of Coombs’ SCCT studies (i.e. Coombs, 2004a; Coombs & Holladay, 2001) to measure crisis responsibility. When tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha, the scale was not reliable for this study ($\alpha = 0.384$). The reliability could not be adjusted to an acceptable level with the exclusion of items, so the scale was replaced by the Brown and Ki (2011) scale. A previous study by Ki and Brown (2010) also yielded a low reliability for the McAuley et al. (2010) scale, which led to the development of the Brown and Ki (2011) scale.
Statistical Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses and research questions, the reliability and validity of the manipulations and scales were tested. Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure the reliability of the dependent variables for both experiments. EFA was used to measure construct validity. Once reliability and construct validity are determined, descriptive statistics were used to determine the demographic profile of the samples of both experiments. The manipulation checks were analyzed using independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVAs) to determine if there are significant differences in scores among the levels of the independent variables. T-tests and ANOVAs were used to examine the manipulation checks because the independent variables are categorical and the dependent variables are continuous (Reinard, 2006). Specifically, the manipulation check that validates crisis history was analyzed using an independent samples T-test because the independent variable has two levels. One-way ANOVAs were used to analyze the manipulation checks that validate athlete and team response because the independent variables have more than two levels.

After the manipulations and scales were checked for reliability and validity, the confounding variables were checked to determine if they needed to be controlled for in the analysis by treating them as covariates. To determine if a variable is a reliable covariate, the confounding variable must be a significant predictor of the dependent variables in question, and there must not be a significant difference in the confounding variable based on the levels of the independent variable in question. Regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the confounding and dependent variables, and either independent-samples T-tests or one-way ANOVAs were used to determine the significant differences in means for the confounding variable based on the independent variables. If either or both confounding variables
were found to be a reliable covariate, then analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) would be used for hypotheses and research questions that required either t-tests or ANOVAs.

Once covariates were determined, then hypotheses and research questions were analyzed. Specifically, hypotheses 4 and 5 were analyzed using independent samples T-tests because the independent variables have two levels. One-way ANOVAs were used to analyze hypotheses 1, 1a, 1b, 7a, 7b, 8a, and 8b, and research question 1, because the independent variables have more than two levels, and the inquiries are not analyzing interaction effects between independent variables. Factorial ANOVAs were used to analyze hypothesis 2 and research question 2 because the independent variables have more than two levels and the inquiries are analyzing interaction effects between independent variables. If covariates were determined to be significant in any case, then ANCOVAs would be used instead of the specified statistical tests.

Correlation analysis was used to determine if there is a relationship between two continuous variables (Reinard, 2006). While correlation analysis is used to determine the degree one variable is related to another, it is not used to show causation. Because this study is not designed to determine causation, hypotheses 3, 6, 9, and 10 were analyzed using correlation analysis. Table 3-8 provides a summary table that details the hypotheses and research questions, the independent and dependent variables related to each inquiry, and the statistical test used to analyze each inquiry.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question/Hypothesis</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| H1 An athlete’s image will be better repaired by the mortification strategy than the attacking the accuser and bolstering strategies, regardless of the type of transgression. | IV: IRT response strategy  
DV: change in athlete image | One-way ANOVA |
| RQ1 Are there differences in the repair of an athlete’s image for criminal transgressions and non-criminal transgressions? | IV: transgression type, IRT response strategy  
DV: change in athlete image | One-way and factorial ANOVA |
| H2 There will be a negative correlation between perceived image and generated negative WOM. | IV: athlete image after response  
DV: negative word-of-mouth after response | Correlation analysis |
| RQ2 Which image repair strategies used following an athlete’s transgression are the most effective at reducing the negative word-of-mouth generated about that athlete? | IV: IRT response strategy  
DV: change in negative word-of-mouth | One-way ANOVA |
| RQ3 Does the amount of negative word-of-mouth generated about an athlete differ for athletes that face criminal transgressions versus athletes that face non-criminal transgressions? | IV: transgression type, IRT response strategy  
DV: negative word-of-mouth before response/negative word-of-mouth after response | Factorial ANOVA |
| H3 A team will be perceived to be more responsible for an athlete’s transgression if the transgression is an internal transgression rather than an external transgression. | IV: transgression type  
DV: crisis responsibility | Independent samples t-test |
| H4 If a team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, it will be perceived as more responsible for the current transgression. | IV: crisis history  
DV: crisis responsibility | Independent samples t-test |
| H5 There will be a negative correlation between perceived crisis responsibility and perceived organizational reputation. | IV: crisis responsibility  
DV: organization reputation | Correlation analysis |
| H6 When the team has a positive history with athlete transgressions, a team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression will be mitigated/ a team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression will be improved by the use of a diminish response strategy better than other strategies | IV: SCCT response strategy  
DV: crisis responsibility  
(7a)/organizational reputation (7b) | One-way ANOVA |
| H7 When the team has a negative history with athlete transgressions, a team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression will be mitigated/ a team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression will be improved by the use of a rebuild response strategy better than other strategies | IV: SCCT response strategy  
DV: crisis responsibility  
(8a)/organizational reputation (8b) | One-way ANOVA |
| H8 There will be a negative correlation between perceived organizational reputation and generated negative WOM. | IV: organization reputation  
DV: negative word-of-mouth | Correlation analysis |
| H9 There will be a positive correlation between perceived organizational reputation and supported behavioral intentions. | IV: organization reputation  
DV: supportive behavioral intentions | Correlation analysis |
CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

This chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section will discuss the demographic profile of the participants in both experiments. The second section will discuss the reliability and validity of the scales and manipulations. The third section will discuss the analysis of the possible confounding variables for the study. The final section will analyze each hypothesis and research question with the appropriate statistical analysis.

Demographic Profile

There were 636 participants for both experiments: 210 for Experiment I and 426 for Experiment II. Tables 4-1 and 4-2 give the distribution of participants for both experiments. For Experiment I, 114 males (54.3 percent) and 96 females (45.7 percent) completed the questionnaires. The mean age of participants was 21.45 years (SD = 2.724 years). For experiment II, 216 males (50.7 percent) and 210 females (49.3 percent) completed the questionnaires. The mean age of participants was 21.06 years (SD = 1.681 years.) Table 4-3 gives the complete demographic profile for both experiments, including racial composition and school classification.

Table 4-1
Manipulation and Participants in Experiment I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Transgression Type</th>
<th>Response Type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Mortification</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Attacking the Accuser</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Non-Criminal</td>
<td>Mortification</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Non-Criminal</td>
<td>Attacking the Accuser</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non-Criminal</td>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-2
Manipulation and Participants in Experiment II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Transgression Type</th>
<th>Crisis History</th>
<th>Response Type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-3
Demographic Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Experiment I</th>
<th>Experiment II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>114 (54.3%)</td>
<td>216 (50.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>96 (45.7%)</td>
<td>210 (49.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>12 (5.7%)</td>
<td>28 (6.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>16 (7.6%)</td>
<td>52 (12.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>104 (49.5%)</td>
<td>204 (47.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>73 (34.8%)</td>
<td>141 (33.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (1.4%)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>170 (81%)</td>
<td>353 (82.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>15 (7.1%)</td>
<td>32 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>7 (1.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>7 (3.3%)</td>
<td>9 (2.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International</td>
<td>8 (3.8%)</td>
<td>18 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7 (3.3%)</td>
<td>6 (1.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale and Manipulation Analysis

All scales used to measure the dependent variables were tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha. A scale must have an alpha value of 0.7 in order to be considered reliable.

Scales in Experiment I were measured for reliability twice: once for the scale use before
exposure to the IRT response strategy in the second news article, and once after exposure. Both the athlete image scale (Before $\alpha = 0.844$; After $\alpha = 0.886$) and the negative WOM scale (Before $\alpha = 0.842$; After $\alpha = 0.877$) were considered reliable. For Experiment II, the crisis responsibility scale ($\alpha = 0.860$), the organizational reputation scale ($\alpha = 0.849$), negative WOM scale ($\alpha = 0.870$) and the supportive behavioral intentions scale ($\alpha = 0.875$) were all considered reliable.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to measure the construct validity for the scales for each of the dependent variables. Specifically, principal component analysis was used to determine construct validity. No rotation was used because all items ideally should load under one factor. Scale items were excluded from observation if they loaded under a second factor separate from the intended factor or if they had a factor loading less than 0.60 (Reinard, 2006). If scale items were excluded from observation, then Cronbach’s alpha was recalculated to determine if the resulting scale was reliable.

For the athlete image scale, EFA was used to measure construct validity before and after exposure to the IRT response strategy in the second news article. All items for the scale had acceptable factor loadings for both before and after exposures. The athlete image scale before exposure accounted for 68.6 percent of the variance in the observed variable with a 2.74 eigenvalue. The athlete image scale after exposure accounted for 74.7 percent of the variance in the observed factors with a 2.99 eigenvalue. Table 4-4 provides the factor loadings for the athlete image scale.

For the negative WOM scale, EFA was used to measure construct validity before and after exposure to the IRT response strategy in the second news article for Experiment I, and the scale’s use in Experiment II. All items for the scale had acceptable factor loadings for all three uses. The negative WOM scale before exposure accounted for 75.9 percent of the variance in the
observed variable with a 2.279 eigenvalue. The negative WOM scale after exposure accounted for 80.2 percent of the variance in the observed variable with a 2.406 eigenvalue. The negative WOM scale in experiment II accounted for 79.63 of the variance in the observed variable with a 2.389 eigenvalue. Table 4-5 provides the factor loadings for the negative WOM scale.

Table 4-4
Factor Loadings for Athlete Image Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Loading (Before)</th>
<th>Loading (After)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) I believe this athlete is wise after reading this article.</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>0.841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I believe this athlete is pleasant after reading this article.</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td>0.894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I believe I could be comfortable around this athlete after reading this article.</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td>0.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I believe this athlete is sophisticated after reading this article.</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>0.868</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue | 2.74 | 2.99 |
Total Variance Accounted for by Factors | 68.6% | 74.7% |
Cronbach’s Alpha | 0.844 | 0.886 |

Table 4-5
Factor Loadings for Negative WOM Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Loading (Before)</th>
<th>Loading (After)</th>
<th>Loading (Experiment II)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) I would encourage people not to support this athlete.</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I would say negative things about this athlete to other people.</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td>0.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I would not recommend someone to cheer for this athlete during games.</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue | 2.279 | 2.406 | 2.389 |
Total Variance Accounted for by Factors | 75.9% | 80.2% | 79.6% |
Cronbach’s Alpha | 0.842 | 0.877 | 0.870 |

For the crisis responsibility scale, one of the scale items (“The team should not be blamed for the incident.”) was dropped from the observation because of a low factor loading. All other items had acceptable factor loadings. The scale accounted for 60.4 percent of the variance in the
observed variable with a 3.625 eigenvalue. The revised scale was considered reliable ($\alpha = 0.885$).

Table 4-6 provides the factor loadings for the crisis responsibility scale.

Table 4-6
Factor Loadings for Crisis Responsibility Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The team had the capability to stop the event from occurring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The incident could have been prevented by the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The team had the resources to prevent the incident from occurring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) The team could have avoided the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) The team should be held accountable for the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) The team should not be blamed for the incident.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue 3.625
Total Variance Accounted for by Factors 60.4%
Cronbach's Alpha 0.885

a dropped from observation; b calculated after dropped items

For the organizational reputation scale, one of the scale items (“In light of this incident, this team is reputable.”) was dropped from observation because of a low factor loading. All other items had acceptable factor loadings. The scale accounted for 63.9 percent of the variance in the observed variable with a 3.197 eigenvalue. The revised scale was considered reliable ($\alpha = 0.889$).

Table 4-7 provides the factor loadings for the organizational reputation scale.

Table 4-7
Factor Loadings for Organizational Reputation Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The team is being honest about the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I trust the team to tell the truth about this incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) In this circumstance, I am likely to believe what the team is saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I would prefer not to trust this team’s statement about this incident. [RC]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) In light of this incident, this team is reputable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue 3.197
Total Variance Accounted for by Factors 63.9%
Cronbach's Alpha 0.889

a dropped from observation; b calculated after dropped items; [RC] reverse-coded

For the supportive behavioral intentions scale, all scale items had acceptable factor loadings. The scale accounted for 67.1 percent of the variance in the observed variable with a
3.353 eigenvalue. Table 4-8 provides the factor loadings for the supportive behavioral intentions scale.

Table 4-8
Factor Loadings for Supportive Behavioral Intentions Scale

| Factor Loading | 1) After reading this article, I would watch this team’s games on television. | 0.816 |
| 2) After reading this article, I would discuss this team in a positive light. | 0.834 |
| 3) After reading this article, I would consume sports news that discussed this team. | 0.749 |
| 4) After reading this article, I would attend this team’s games. | 0.885 |
| 5) After reading this article, I would buy team paraphernalia (jerseys, T-shirts, etc.). | 0.805 |
| Eigenvalue | 3.353 |
| Total Variance Accounted for by Factors | 67.1% |
| Cronbach’s Alpha | 0.875 |

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a Tukey post-hoc analysis was used to determine the validity of the response strategy manipulations. In order for the response strategy manipulations to be considered successful, the mean score for the manipulation check that corresponds to the manipulation presented to the participant must be significantly higher than the mean scores for the other two manipulation checks. For example, the apology condition must have a higher mean score for the manipulation check that addresses that condition (“The athlete apologized for the incident”) than the other two conditions.

For Experiment I, there were significant differences among the IRT response conditions for all three manipulation checks [Mortification: F (2, 207) = 45.71, p < 0.001; Attacking the Accuser: F (2, 207) = 28.12, p < 0.001; Bolstering: F (2, 207) = 90.25, p < 0.001]. For the mortification and attacking the accuser manipulation checks, there were significant differences between the mean scores for the correct response strategy manipulation check and the other two items. For the bolstering manipulation, there was a significant difference between the bolstering and attacking the accuser manipulation checks, but there was not a significant difference between
the bolstering and mortification manipulation checks. The bolstering manipulation check did have the higher mean. Table 4-9 shows the mean scores by condition for each manipulation check. The higher the score, the more respondents agreed with that statement.

Table 4-9
Manipulation Check Scores: Experiment I Response Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manipulation</th>
<th>MC1 Score</th>
<th>MC2 Score</th>
<th>MC3 Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortification</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacking the Accuser</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>5.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MC1: The athlete apologized for his involvement in the incident.
MC2: The athlete criticized the person/people accusing him of the incident.
MC3: The athlete stressed his commitment to the team in light of the incident.

For experiment II, there were significant differences among the SCCT response conditions for all three manipulation checks {Apology: F (2, 423) = 75.57, p < 0.001; Justification: F (2, 423) = 28.72, p < 0.001; Scapegoating: F (2, 423) = 66.62, p < 0.001}. In all three manipulation conditions, there were significant differences between the correct response strategy manipulation check and the other two items. Table 4-10 shows the mean scores by condition for each manipulation check.

Table 4-10
Manipulation Check Scores: Experiment I Response Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manipulation</th>
<th>MC1 Score</th>
<th>MC2 Score</th>
<th>MC3 Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MC1: The team apologized for the player’s involvement in the incident.
MC2: The team attempted to justify the player’s involvement in the incident.
MC3: The team attempted to blame the player for the incident.

An independent-samples T-test was used to analyze the crisis history manipulation check (“The team has a history of player incidents similar to the current incident.”). The negative manipulation must have a significantly higher mean score than the positive manipulation in order
for the manipulation to be successful. There was a significant difference in the mean scores for the positive (M = 3.51) and negative (M = 4.54) conditions, \( t (424) = -0.8337, p < 0.001 \).

**Confounding Variables Analysis**

Two variables were measured to determine if they would have a confounding effect on the dependent variables: moral judgment and prior knowledge. In order to determine whether each variable needs to be accounted for in analysis, regression analyses and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. In order for each variable to be considered a covariate in the analysis of the hypotheses and research questions, the confounding variable must be significantly correlated to each possible dependent variable (analyzed using regression analysis), and there must not be a significant correlation between the confounding variable and each possible independent variable (analyzed using one-way ANOVA).

*Covariates for Experiment I*

Moral judgment was determined to be a significant predictor of both change in athlete image \( R^2 = 0.07, F (1, 208) = 15.59, p < 0.001 \) and change in negative WOM \( R^2 = 0.05, F (1, 208) = 10.68, p = 0.001 \). Moral judgment also was not significantly correlated to either independent variable: type of transgression \( t (208) = 0.308, p > 0.05 \) or type of IRT strategy \( F (2, 207) = 0.349, p > 0.05 \).

Prior knowledge was determined to be a significant predictor of both change in athlete image \( R^2 = 0.06, F (1, 208) = 13.02, p < 0.001 \) and change in negative WOM \( R^2 = 0.04, F (1, 208) = 8.143, p = 0.005 \). Prior knowledge was determined to be significantly correlated to type of transgression \( t (208) = -3.367, p = 0.001 \), but not significantly correlated to type of IRT strategy \( F (2, 207) = 1.783, p > 0.05 \).
**Covariates for Experiment II**

Moral judgment was determined to be a significant predictor for organizational reputation ($R^2 = 0.010$, $F(1, 424) = 4.239$, $p = 0.04$), but it is not a significant predictor for crisis responsibility ($R^2 = 0.008$, $F(1, 424) = 3.258$, $p > 0.05$). Moral judgment was not significantly correlated to type of transgression ($t(424) = -0.289$, $p > 0.05$), crisis history ($t(424) = -0.722$, $p > 0.05$), or type of SCCT strategy ($F(2, 423) = 0.118$, $p > 0.05$).

Prior knowledge was determined to be a significant predictor for organizational reputation ($R^2 = 0.032$, $F(1, 424) = 13.912$, $p < 0.001$), but it is not a significant predictor for crisis responsibility ($R^2 = 0.000$, $F(1, 424) = 0.098$, $p > 0.05$). Prior knowledge was not significantly correlated to crisis history ($t(424) = -0.666$, $p > 0.05$), or type of SCCT strategy ($F(2, 423) = 1.633$, $p > 0.05$). However, prior knowledge was significantly correlated to type of transgression ($t(424) = 4.334$, $p < 0.001$).

Based on the analysis of the confounding variables for both experiments, it was determined that both moral judgment and prior knowledge are reliable covariates for the analysis of the hypotheses and research questions, and must be controlled by using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Although both variables were considered reliable covariates, they explained low amounts of variance in the dependent variables, which means that there may be other confounding variables that we are not accounting for in the analysis. This will be addressed in more detail in the discussion section.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Data from Experiment I was used to answer hypotheses 1, 1a, 1b, 2-3 and research questions 1 and 2. Data from Experiment II was used to answer hypotheses 4-10.

*Effects of Type of Transgression and Type of Response towards Perceived Athlete Image*
The first hypothesis examines the effectiveness of specific response strategies on the repair of an athlete’s image, suggesting that the mortification strategy would repair an athlete’s image better than the attacking the accuser strategy or the bolstering strategy, regardless of the type of transgression. An ANCOVA was used to determine the differences among the means for the change in perception of the athlete’s image while controlling for moral judgment and prior knowledge of the case. The change in perceived image was determined by calculating the difference between the perceived image of the athlete before exposure to the response strategy and the perceived image of the athlete after exposure. The adjusted mean scores for change in perceived image were controlled based on a mean moral judgment score of 42.36 and a mean prior knowledge score of 2.9. Based on the analysis, there is a significant difference among the means for the three manipulations (F (2, 207) = 3.441, p = 0.034). LSD pair-wise comparisons found significant differences between the mortification manipulation, which was the highest change in image (controlled M = 3.550) and the bolstering manipulation, which was the lowest change in image (controlled M = 1.903). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported.

The first research question examined the differences in the image repair process for criminal and non-criminal transgressions. First, the difference in the change in perceived image for both types of transgressions was examined using an ANCOVA similar to hypothesis 1. Based on the analysis, there was not a significant difference in the change in perceived image for criminal (controlled M = 2.855) and non-criminal (controlled M = 2.404) transgression (F (1, 208) = 0.694, p > 0.05).

Next, the researcher examined the change in image caused by the response strategies for criminal transgressions. An ANCOVA was used to analyze this hypothesis similar to hypothesis 1. The adjusted mean scores for change in perceived image were controlled based on a mean
moral judgment score of 42.53 and a mean prior knowledge score of 2.41. Based on the analysis, there is a significant difference among the means for the three manipulations ($F (2, 97) = 3.820$, $p = 0.025$). LSD pair-wise comparisons found significant differences between the bolstering manipulation (controlled $M = 1.541$) and both the mortification manipulation (controlled $M = 3.582$) and the attacking the accuser manipulation (controlled $M = 3.834$).

Next, the researcher examined the change in image caused by the response strategies for non-criminal transgressions. An ANCOVA was used to analyze this hypothesis similar to hypothesis 1. The adjusted mean scores for change in perceived image were controlled based on a mean moral judgment score of 42.21 and a mean prior knowledge score of 3.35. Based on the analysis, there is a significant difference among the means for the three manipulations ($F (2, 107) = 3.921$, $p = 0.023$). LSD pair-wise comparisons found significant differences between the mortification manipulation, which was the highest change in image ($M = 3.574$) and the attacking the accuser manipulation, which was the lowest change in image ($M = 1.087$).

Next, interaction effects between type of transgression and type of response towards changes in perceived image were examined. Table 4-11 provides the controlled mean scores for all three response manipulations regardless of the type of transgression, and for criminal and non-criminal transgressions specifically. An ANCOVA was used to analyze the interaction effects present between type of transgression and type of response towards change in perceived image, and based on the analysis, there is an interaction effect present ($F (5, 204) = 3.611$, $p = 0.029$).
The Link between Perceived Athlete Image and Negative Word-of-Mouth

Hypothesis 2 examined the correlation between perceived athlete image and generated negative WOM. Specifically, it was hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between perceived athlete image and generated negative WOM: the more negative the athlete’s image is perceived, the more negative WOM generated. Correlations were calculated before and after exposure to response strategies. Based on the analysis, there were significant negative correlations between perceived image and generated negative WOM before exposure ($r (208) = -0.482, p < 0.001$) and after exposure ($r (208) = -0.521, p < 0.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Effects of Type of Transgression and Type of Response towards Generated Negative Word-of-Mouth towards Athletes

The second research question examined what response strategy was the most effective in reducing the amount of generated negative WOM towards an athlete. An ANCOVA was used to determine the differences among the means for the change in generated negative WOM while controlling for moral judgment and prior knowledge of the case. The change in negative WOM was calculated similarly to the change in perceived image. The adjusted mean scores for change in perceived image were controlled based on a mean moral judgment score of 42.36 and a mean prior knowledge score of 2.9. Based on the analysis, there is a significant difference among the means for the three manipulations ($F (2, 207) = 3.161, p = 0.044$). LSD pair-wise comparisons
found significant differences between the mortification manipulation, which produced the highest change (controlled M = 1.381) and the bolstering manipulation, which produced the lowest change (controlled M = 0.331).

The third research question examined whether the amount of generated negative WOM differs for criminal transgressions and non-criminal transgressions. First, two ANCOVAs were used to determine the differences in generated negative WOM before and after exposure to the response manipulation. Based on this analysis, there is not a significant difference between the mean scores for generated negative WOM for criminal and non-criminal transgressions before exposure to response strategies (F (1, 208) = 3.063, p > 0.05) and after exposure (F (1, 208) = 2.947, p > 0.05). Table 4-12 provides the mean scores for generated negative WOM before and after exposure.

Table 4-12
Generated Negative Word-of-Mouth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Criminal Transgressions</th>
<th>Non-Criminal Transgressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before exposure to IRT strategy</td>
<td>11.772</td>
<td>10.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After exposure to IRT strategy</td>
<td>10.974</td>
<td>10.069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means are controlled for moral judgment and prior knowledge of case

Next, interaction effects between type of transgression and type of response towards changes in generated negative WOM were examined in order to determine if certain response strategies mitigated the amount of negative WOM generated. Table 4-13 provides the controlled mean scores for all three response manipulations regardless of the type of transgression, and for criminal and non-criminal transgressions specifically. An ANCOVA was used to analyze the interaction effects present between type of transgression and type of response towards change in generated negative WOM, and based on the analysis, there is not an interaction effect present (F (5, 204) = 0.118, p > 0.05).
Table 4-13
Change in Generated Negative Word-of-Mouth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Transgression</th>
<th>Mortification</th>
<th>Attacking the Accuser</th>
<th>Bolstering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>&lt;-1.300&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;-0.734&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;-0.369&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Criminal</td>
<td>&lt;-1.459&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;-0.476&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;-0.300&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>&lt;-1.379&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;-0.605&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;-0.335&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means are controlled for moral judgment and prior knowledge of case

Factors Influencing Team Crisis Responsibility

Hypothesis 3 and 4 examined the effects of factors that influence the level of crisis responsibility a team faces for an athlete’s transgression, based on SCCT. Specifically, hypothesis 3 suggested that a team would be perceived as more responsible for an athlete’s transgression that is internal to the organization (team-related) than an athlete’s transgression that is external to the organization. An ANCOVA was used to analyze this hypothesis. The adjusted mean scores for crisis responsibility were controlled based on a mean moral judgment score of 43.09 and a mean prior knowledge score of 3.27. Based on the analysis, there was a significant difference in the mean scores (F (1, 424) = 13.36, p < 0.001), and the mean responsibility score for the internal crisis (controlled M = 17.681) was greater than the mean score for external crisis (controlled M = 15.29). Therefore, **hypothesis 3 was supported**.

Hypothesis 4 suggested that a team would be perceived as more responsible for an athlete’s transgression if the team has a negative history of similar athlete transgressions. An ANCOVA was used to analyze this hypothesis. The adjusted mean scores were controlled based on the mean scores used in hypothesis 3 for moral judgment and prior knowledge. Based on the analysis, there was a significant difference in the mean scores (F (1, 424) = 3.653, p = 0.05). The mean responsibility score for teams with a negative crisis history (controlled M = 17.116) was greater than the mean score for teams with a positive crisis history (controlled M = 15.877). Therefore, **hypothesis 4 was supported**.
The Link between Crisis Responsibility and Organizational Reputation

Hypothesis 5 examined the key relationship in SCCT: a negative correlation between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation—the more crisis responsibility that is attributed to an organization, the more negative the organization’s reputation is perceived. Correlation analysis was used to analyze this hypothesis. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, negative correlation between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation (r(424) = -0.334, p < 0.001). Therefore, hypothesis 5 was supported.

Testing SCCT Recommendations

Hypotheses 6a, 6b, 7a and 7b tested SCCT recommendations. Specifically, hypothesis 6a examined the recommendation that when a team has a positive history of athlete transgressions, that team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression is mitigated by the use of a diminish (justification) response strategy better than other strategies. Hypothesis 6b examined the recommendation that when a team has a positive history of athlete transgressions, that team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression is improved by the use of a diminish response strategy better than other strategies. Two ANCOVAs were used to examine the differences in means for responsibility and reputation for the three response manipulations. The adjusted mean scores for crisis responsibility were controlled based on a mean moral judgment score of 42.83 and a mean prior knowledge score of 3.20. Based on the analysis, there was no significant difference in the mean scores among the response manipulations for crisis responsibility (F(2, 208) = 0.243, p > 0.05) or organizational reputation (F(2, 208) = 2.065, p > 0.05). Therefore, hypotheses 6a and 6b were not supported.

Hypothesis 7a examined the recommendation that when a team has a negative history of athlete transgressions, that team’s responsibility for an athlete’s transgression is mitigated by the
use of a rebuild (apology) response strategy better than other strategies. Hypothesis 7b examined the recommendation that when a team has a negative history of athlete transgressions, that team’s organizational reputation when faced with an athlete’s transgression is improved by the use of a rebuild response strategy better than other strategies. Two ANCOVAs were used to examine the differences in means for responsibility and reputation for the three response manipulations. The adjusted mean scores for crisis responsibility were controlled based on a mean moral judgment score of 43.34 and a mean prior knowledge score of 3.33. Based on the analysis, there was no significant difference in the mean scores among the response manipulations for crisis responsibility (F (2, 212) = 1.467, p > 0.05). Therefore, hypothesis 7a was not supported. However, there was a significant difference in the mean scores among the response manipulations for organizational reputation (F (2, 212) = 5.584, p = 0.004). LSD pairwise comparisons found significant differences between the apology manipulation, which yielded the highest reputation score (controlled M = 19.373) and the justification manipulation, which was the lowest reputation score (controlled M = 16.919). Therefore, hypothesis 7b was supported. Table 4-14 shows the crisis responsibility scores for each response manipulation, and Table 4-15 shows the organizational reputation scores for each response manipulation.

Table 4-14
Perceived Team Crisis Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of History</th>
<th>Scapegoating</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Apology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>16.233</td>
<td>15.491</td>
<td>16.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>16.030</td>
<td>17.770</td>
<td>17.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>16.143</td>
<td>16.611</td>
<td>16.773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Means are controlled for moral judgment and prior knowledge of case*
Table 4-15
Perceived Team Organizational Reputation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of History</th>
<th>Scapegoating</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Apology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>18.576</td>
<td>17.985</td>
<td>19.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>18.246</td>
<td>16.919</td>
<td>19.373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>18.395</td>
<td>17.458</td>
<td>19.503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means are controlled for moral judgment and prior knowledge of case.

The Link between Organizational Reputation and Behavior

Hypotheses 8 and 9 examine the relationship between perceived organizational reputation and behavioral intentions. Specifically, hypothesis 8 suggested that there is a negative correlation between a team’s reputation and the amount of negative WOM generated: the more negative a team’s reputation is perceived, the more negative WOM generated. Correlation analysis was used to examine this hypothesis. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, negative correlation between reputation and negative WOM ($r(424) = -0.476, p < 0.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 8 was supported.

Hypothesis 9 suggested that there is a positive correlation between a team’s reputation and the amount of potential supportive behavior suggested: the more positive a team’s reputation is perceived, the more stakeholders are willing to support that team. Correlation analysis was used to examine this hypothesis. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, positive correlation between reputation and potential supportive behavior ($r(424) = 0.399, p < 0.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 9 was supported.
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of image in professional sports, and specifically to look at the impact of athlete transgressions on the image of the athlete in question and the team he/she represents. This study was unique because rather than using rhetorical methods, the researcher took key variables in image repair and crisis communication research and tested scenarios in an experimental setting. The findings should provide not only evidence to support previous rhetorical and empirical claims, but should also rationalize the need to continue this stream of research.

This chapter will be divided into three parts. First, a summary of the results from statistical analysis will be provided. Next, the theoretical and practical implications of the study for the public relations discipline will be discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study and the need for future research in this area will be discussed.

Summary of Results

The demographic profiles for both experiments were similar. The gender distribution for the study was unique because there was almost an even distribution of males and females that participated for both experiments. Because a student sample was used from a large, public Southeastern university, demographics were representative of this setting, including the median age being slightly more than 21 years, and the racial makeup being predominately White. Most of the participants were juniors and seniors because these students were at or above the age of consent.
All scales used to measure the dependent variables had a Cronbach’s alpha above 0.8, which means the scales were reliable. For the EFA, all scale items loaded under their respective observed variables, and accounted for more than 60 percent of the variance in their respective observed variables, meaning that the scale had acceptable construct validity. The scales were determined to be reliable and valid measures of the dependent variables.

All manipulation checks were successful except the manipulation check for the IRT response strategies in Experiment I. For the bolstering manipulation, there was not a significant difference between the means for the bolstering and mortification manipulation checks, although the bolstering strategy was identified as the strategy present more than the mortification strategy. The confounding variables measured (prior knowledge of the case and degree of moral judgment) were found to be reliable covariates for the analysis and were incorporated into the analysis through the use of ANCOVAs.

Summary of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Experiment I was designed to investigate whether the type of transgression an athlete faces (criminal vs. non-criminal) and the athlete’s response to that transgression (mortification vs. attacking the accuser vs. bolstering) would affect the image of the athlete in question using Benoit’s Image Repair Theory. Results showed that regardless of the type of transgression, an athlete tends to repair his/her image better if they use the mortification strategy rather than the attacking the accuser or bolstering strategy. Although there was no difference in the repair of an athlete’s image when faced with a criminal transgression versus a non-criminal transgression, there was an interaction effect present between type of transgression and type of strategy used, meaning there is evidence that the preferred strategy used to improve an athlete’s image can depend on the type of transgression the athlete faces. When looking at the criminal transgression,
results showed that the mortification and attacking the accuser strategies were equally more successful in repairing the athlete’s image than the bolstering strategy. When faced with a non-criminal transgression, results showed that the mortification strategy was more successful than the attacking the accuser and bolstering strategy.

Experiment I also examined the relationship between perceived image of an athlete and the negative WOM generated about that athlete. Results showed a significant correlation between the two variables, meaning that the more negative the athlete’s image is perceived, the more negative WOM generated about that athlete. Comparable to the impact of the type of response strategy on the change in the image of the athlete, the mortification strategy mitigated the amount of negative WOM about the athlete better than the other two strategies regardless of the type of transgression the athlete faced. There was not a difference in the amount of negative WOM generated about an athlete facing a criminal versus a non-criminal transgression, and there was not an interaction effect present, meaning that the preferred strategy used to mitigate negative WOM does not depend on the type of transgression the athlete faces.

Experiment II was designed to investigate whether the type of transgression an athlete faces (internal/team-related vs. external/not team-related) and the represented team’s history of facing athlete transgressions (positive vs. negative) affects the amount of responsibility attributed to the organization for the athlete’s transgression. Results were similar to previous studies using Coombs’ SCCT theory. More responsibility was attributed to a team when the athlete in question is facing a transgression that occurred during play or team activities rather than facing a transgression external to the team. Also, more responsibility was attributed to a team when it has a history of athletes facing transgressions.
The relationship between the amount of responsibility placed on an organization for a crisis, and the perceived reputation of that organization is the key theoretical link in SCCT. This experiment tested that relationship, and similar to previous studies, there was a negative correlation between the two variables—the more responsibility attributed to the team, the more negatively the team is perceived by stakeholders.

Experiment II also was designed to test SCCT recommendations for facing a challenge crisis—a crisis that occurs when stakeholders claim that the organization, or members of the organization, are operating in an inappropriate manner. Since an athlete transgression is a challenge by definition, this experiment tested SCCT recommendations to use certain response strategies based on the team’s history with athlete transgressions. The recommendations encouraged the use of a diminish strategy (justification) when the team has a positive history of athlete transgressions to reduce responsibility and improve reputation. However, results showed that there was not a difference among the three strategies for the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to the team or the perception of the team’s reputation. The recommendations also encourage the use of a rebuild strategy (apology) when the team has a negative history of athlete transgressions. There was no difference among the three strategies for the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to the team, but the apology strategy was successful in increasing the perception of the team’s reputation more than the other strategies.

Finally, the second experiment also looked at the link between image and behavior. According to SCCT, there is a negative correlation between a team’s reputation and the amount of generated negative WOM. Results replicated this finding—the more positive the team’s reputation, the less negative WOM generated about the team. Also, SCCT studies have found a positive correlation between a team’s reputation and the amount of potential supportive behavior.
suggested by stakeholders. Results also replicated this finding—the more positive the team’s reputation, the more stakeholders are willing to support the team.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research contributes to the empirical research devoted to crisis communication and image repair research by providing a new context for investigation. The use of experimental methods to study the use of IRT and SCCT in a sports-related context has helped provide several theoretical and practical implications for the field. Referring back to the significance of this dissertation, this section will address the implications for the investigation of image repair in sports, the role of empirical evidence in crisis communication research, and practical recommendations for sports information directors and other public relations professionals in the sports arena.

Implications for Image Repair in Sports

This study looked at the significance of using certain strategies to repair an athlete’s image during times of scandal and controversy. Similar to Brown et al.’s (2012) study on LeBron James, the mortification, or “apology” strategy was the strategy most effective in repairing an athlete’s image, regardless of the type of transgression. However, similar to Coombs and Holladay’s (2008) study on the role of apology as a strategy, there was no difference in the perception of the team’s reputation when using apology as opposed to other strategies. This raises a significant question: why is apology more effective than other strategies when addressing the individual’s (athlete’s) image, but not more effective when addressing the organization’s (team’s) image? One reason could be that the athlete is closer to the scandal than the team, which could explain why fans and stakeholders expect the athlete to apologize for his/her involvement more than they expect the team to apologize. This could be explained by an
alternate take on Coombs’ (1995) theoretical assumption of locus of control. The more internal a crisis is to an organization, the more the organization is perceived to be responsible for the crisis. Although it is understood that the athlete is a representative of the team, much like a top-ranking executive is representative of the organization, stakeholders may perceive a more lax association between the athlete and team because from a business standpoint, the athlete is not as internal to the organizational structure as top-level executives. Therefore, fans and stakeholders expect the athlete to apologize for his/her actions, but do not hold the team responsible as much for the athlete’s involvement like they would hold the team responsible for the actions of its executives. Only until an athlete continually makes mistakes do fans and stakeholders begin to hold the team responsible (Coombs, 2004; Kelley & Michela, 1980).

However, when the team has faced enough athlete transgressions to develop a negative history, apologizing led to a more positive image than other strategies. This may suggest that fans and stakeholders are more likely to hold a team accountable for issues its athletes face when it has a history of these transgressions. This points to a problem internal to the organization that needs to be addressed, and therefore fans and stakeholders expect the team to take responsibility for these issues (Kelley & Michela, 1980). This is also evident because respondents held the team more responsible for an athlete’s transgression if it was internal to the organization. Teams can somewhat control the actions of their athletes when they are involved in team activities or when they are competing, which is why teams are held more accountable for their athletes’ actions on the field or during team activities.

Athletes were perceived more negatively for criminal transgression than non-criminal transgressions. Although there was no scholarly evidence, this was expected by the researcher because of the societal norms that criminal activity violates, and the appropriate behaviors
athletes are expected to adopt due to their financial success and celebrity status (Kudlac, 2010). However, results also showed that attacking one’s accuser led to a better repair of an athlete’s image when faced with criminal activity than apologizing or bolstering. This could be a sign of a negative aspect of apologizing. Previous rhetorical studies using IRT to explore criminal transgressions have abundantly featured athletes apologizing for their actions (i.e. Kennedy, 2010, Walsh & McAlister-Spooner, 2011). The findings of this study may be an indication that fans and stakeholders are becoming somewhat numb to athletes apologizing for criminal activity, but are more willing to forgive an athlete if they apologize for something that is not criminal in nature.

Results also provided more support to the link between image and behavior. Similar to past studies (i.e. Coombs, 2004a, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2001), the perception of an athlete’s or a team’s image impacted the amount of negative WOM generated about the entity, and the potential support for the entity from its fans and stakeholders. This provides further evidence that there is a need for image management and repair in sports. An athlete’s negative image can increase the flow of negative information about that athlete and the team he/she represents, which can lead to less supportive behavior from fans and stakeholders. This presents some explanation for the examples provided in the introduction regarding the Cincinnati Bengals and Indiana Pacers. Fans are less likely to support a team that has a negative image because of its athletes. Despite this evidence, the relationship between perceived image and supportive behavior also could be affected by the team’s lack of success due to the suspensions, releases or trades of problem players. This will be addressed in the future research suggestions.
Implications for Empirical Research in Crisis Communication

This study provides further evidence that supports the use of SCCT to empirically examine organizational crisis communication practices. Many of the key theoretical claims of the theoretical framework were supported: (1) crises that are more internal to an organization will cause higher levels of attribution of responsibility, (2) when faced with a crisis, organizations with a negative history of crises will be attributed more responsibility for the current crisis, (3) the more responsibility attributed to an organization, the more negatively it is perceived, and (4) the more negatively an organization is perceived, the more negative WOM generated about that organization, and the less supportive behavior exhibited by its stakeholders. The amount of empirical evidence that supports these assumptions is important because it provides validation for claims that have been made only through anecdotal evidence and case studies in crisis communication research. It is evident that Coombs’ work with SCCT has provided an avenue for improving research in crisis communication.

The weakness in the theory lies in the assignment of crisis response strategies to mitigate responsibility in crisis situations. Similar to previous studies using SCCT (Brown & White, 2011; Coombs & Holladay, 2008) there were no significant differences in the amount of responsibility attributed to an organization based on the response strategy chosen to respond to a crisis situation. Also, the two SCCT recommendations tested in this study were not supported (Coombs 2007b). Crises are dynamic and chaotic in nature, and it may be impossible to match specific responses to crisis situations. SCCT guidelines assume that there is a “correct” response strategy to mitigate responsibility in a specific crisis situation, but it may be wiser to take the focus from providing these recommendations and begin focusing on managing the relationships between the organization and its stakeholders (Brown & White, 2011), and monitoring the
environment to prevent crisis situations and to respond to them quickly and appropriately based on the crisis history of the organization (Coombs, 2004) and whether the crisis is internal or external to the organization (Coombs, 1995). SCCT possibly benefits from the use of combinations of strategies rather than suggesting that one strategy or strategy cluster is appropriate for a crisis situation.

An interesting finding in this study is that there were no differences in the use of SCCT response strategies in the second experiment, but there were significant differences in the use of IRT response strategies in the first experiment. Sheldon (2006) argued that the biggest advantage that SCCT has over IRT is that SCCT provides a theoretical validation for matching response strategies to specific crisis situations, which therefore assumes that there should be differences in the use of SCCT response strategies for specific crisis situations, but not in the use of IRT response strategies. This study found evidence to the contrary—there were differences in the effectiveness of IRT strategies based on the type of transgression (attacking the accuser and mortification were preferred for criminal transgressions, and mortification was preferred for non-criminal transgressions) whereas there were no differences in SCCT strategies when faced with the same type of crisis according to the SCCT crisis typology (responsibility for the challenge crisis was not mitigated more by either of the response strategies). The contradictory evidence provided in this study regarding SCCT’s “matching” system does not fully validate that there are no differences in the use of SCCT strategies for certain crisis situations, but this point could suggest that IRT could be used to match response strategies to specific crises and transgressions, especially those involving individual actors. This study complements the study done by Brown et al. (2012) by providing evidence that IRT could be used to study image repair and crisis communication techniques involving individuals. SCCT is still more appropriate for
organizational crises, but would benefit from a change in focus from investigating the recommendations and “matching” system to discovering the effects of the characteristics of the crisis situation (type of crisis and performance history of the organization) on the attribution of responsibility, and the use of combinations of response strategies.

This study was unique because it controlled for two potentially confounding variables in crisis communication and image repair research: the degree of familiarity a person has about a crisis or transgression, and the degree of moral judgment a person has towards a person or organization involved in a transgression. The degree of familiarity a person has about a crisis or transgression is a purely methodological concern: if researchers continue to use actual case studies for empirical crisis communication research, prior knowledge should be considered because participants familiar with the cases may have determined their feelings toward the person or organization involved. This will make the manipulations less effective. The degree of moral judgment is important because regression analysis showed in this study that people and stakeholders that are more judgmental perceived the person or organization involved in the crisis situation more negatively. Future studies in crisis communication and image repair should account for moral judgment, and studies that use actual case studies should account for the participant’s prior knowledge of the case. This will add more validation to the research.

A finding unrelated to the focus of this study, but important for the use of SCCT in future empirical studies, is the use of the McAuley, Duncan and Russel (1992) attribution scale to measure attribution of crisis responsibility. The attribution scale was initially designed to measure individual attribution. Coombs (1996) used the full version of the McAuley, Duncan and Russel (1992) scale in the initial study in the development of SCCT and found that only locus/personal control yielded an acceptable reliability (α = .84). The other two factors—external
control and stability—did not yield acceptable reliabilities ($\alpha=.57$ and $\alpha=.44$, respectively). Subsequent SCCT studies have only used the personal control scale to measure crisis responsibility, and the scale has produced Cronbach’s alpha levels ranging from .70 (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2001) to as high as .88 (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2002). This study uses a scale created by Brown and Ki (2011) specifically for measuring organizational crisis responsibility, and it yielded a Cronbach’s alpha level of .95 in the initial testing. A shorter version of this scale was used in this study and yielded a Cronbach’s alpha level of .89. Future research should test the construct and theoretical validity of this scale, but there is evidence that supports the use of this scale for organizational crisis communication research.

**Implications for Public Relations Practitioners**

The public relations profession exists to create and maintain a positive reputation for individuals and organizations (Fearn-Banks, 2007). One way this is accomplished is through the management of the entity’s image, especially during times of crisis and scandal. This study provides more evidence that this management of crisis situations is important because it supports the link between image and behavior. It is in the practitioner’s represented person or organization’s best interests to want to maintain a positive image because it reduces the amount of negative information disseminated about the entity and increases the amount of support the entity has from its stakeholders during the crisis or scandal. This study is helpful to practitioners in the sports arena because it provides insight into what factors are important to determine the best way to manage crises and scandals.

A team’s response to a crisis does not affect the level of responsibility attributed to the team or the image of the team as much as the type of crisis and the team’s history with similar crises. Although it is still important for practitioners to choose responses that will effectively
mitigate responsibility for the crisis through systematic analysis, it is more important to monitor the crisis situation and react to it appropriately based on how internal the crisis is to the organization and the organization’s history with crisis situations. Crisis situations often require quick responses, and the time warranted to choose the “appropriate” response to a crisis may not be realistic in a natural setting. Monitoring the characteristics of the crisis or scandal to craft a message that incorporates several appropriate strategies is more realistic, especially because a sports team’s primary stakeholder (fans) is more heterogeneous than the typical stakeholder group a corporation or nonprofit organization would target.

When representing athletes, the type of transgression may be more important when choosing a response because of their inherent responsibility for the transgression. When dealing with a transgression, it is already assumed by fans that the athlete is responsible for the act in question, so the type of transgression plays more of a factor in deciding how to respond to the situation. Although apologizing seems like the “appropriate” response in all situations, results show that it may not be the most appropriate response in certain situations. Therefore, when crafting responses for an athlete, the nature of the transgression should be taken into consideration.

Although this study does somewhat support the assumptions that there are more appropriate responses to crises and scandals than others, this study also provides evidence that there are more factors that come into play rather than just the response. Theories like IRT and SCCT are important to understanding the role of crisis response, but crises by nature are dynamic and unpredictable (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006; Coombs, 2007a; Stanton, 2002). Because the crisis is always changing, it is more difficult in practice to pick one response that will mitigate the damage. Crisis communication research could benefit more from examining how appropriate
some responses are than others in certain crisis situations, rather than finding the “one strategy” that works for a particular type of crisis.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study does provide some insight into the role of image in sports by providing empirical evidence to support previous rhetorical analysis, there are some limitations for this study. Because this is an initial study that examines image repair in sports, there is an abundance of opportunities for future research that will help extend this research area.

Theoretical Limitations

This study provides insight into the use of crisis response strategies to improve an athlete’s image and the team that athlete represents in times of crisis and scandal. However, it only tests the effects of three IRT and three SCCT response strategies in four specific types of crises. Future research should look into the effects of all response strategies in both typologies, as well as testing more diverse crisis scenarios. This would produce a more comprehensive outlook on the effects of response strategies in crisis situations that could evolve into a framework of the impact of response strategies in specific types of transgressions athletes face. This could also provide more evidence to support or refute SCCT recommendations.

A key aspect of SCCT is the role of relationship history in determining how responsibility is attributed in crisis situations. In previous studies, if an organization has a negative relationship history with its stakeholders, more responsibility is attributed to the organization during times of crisis. This study did not take into account the relationship history of the team involved because relationship history is difficult to account for with a sample of participants that is not a stakeholder group of the organization. When manipulating for relationship history, is it better to measure a true organization-public relationship (OPR) rather
than manipulate the history with a statement, similar to how crisis history is manipulated in this study (Brown & White, 2011). Future research should look at the role of OPRs in the crisis communication and image repair process by using actual stakeholder groups of sports team during times of crisis and scandal.

This study controlled for two confounding variables: prior knowledge and degree of moral judgment. However, these variables explained very low levels of variance in the dependent variables. Because of the dynamic nature of transgressions and crises, as well as the societal and cultural significance of sports, there are several other variables that could be accounted for, either as a confounding variable, predictor or factor in image repair and crisis communication studies (i.e. gender, race, type of sport, level of fan involvement, etc.). Future studies should account for these variables in order to determine if they have a role in the image repair and crisis communication process.

Several dependent variables affected during crisis and scandal can also be examined through empirical methods. Future studies should look at outcomes such as the acceptance of the response strategies by stakeholders and the amount of anger and emotion displayed about a transgression. From a marketing and advertising standpoint, the impact of athlete transgressions on endorsement value, brand loyalty and image, and purchase intentions should be examined.

Practitioners would benefit from more crisis communication research that looks at the dynamic nature of crisis situations. There are three ways future research can benefit practitioners. First, the effects of outside entities from the organization-public relationship should be investigated to provide a clearer outlook on a crisis situation. Crises are rarely just between an organization and its stakeholders. Oftentimes, outside entities (media outlets, anonymous sources of information, protestors, online communities, etc.) can affect the crisis landscape. Future
research should look at the effects of these entities on the crisis situation, and the sports arena is a meaningful landscape to examine these effects.

Second, this study examines the content of the crisis response, but did not examine the form of the crisis response. Coombs (2006) stated that the form of crisis response has been guided mostly by case study and anecdotal research, not by empirical methods; although Huang (2008) found that crisis managers believe that the form of the response is more effective in predicting trust and relational commitment from stakeholders than the content of the response. Future studies should look at the role of the form of the response on the crisis situation.

Finally, this study looks at the communication of athletes and organizations during times of scandal or crisis. Future research should begin integrating the examination of the actions by these athletes and teams after they are faced with a crisis situation. The actions that an entity takes to mitigate the damage from a crisis may be just as, if not more important than an entity’s statements. Future research should look at actions as well as words and the role each plays in the crisis situation.

**Methodological Limitations**

The use of a convenience student sample hinders the generalizability of the study to a wider population, although for theory-building studies the use of a student sample is acceptable. Future studies could benefit from the use of panel groups that are more representative of the population under investigation. This would improve the generalizability of studies in this area of research to a wider audience. Reliability suffered slightly because the experiment was not conducted in a laboratory setting, but online in the participants’ natural setting. This reduces the amount of control the researcher had for the experiment. Another limitation is that experiments
are usually artificial in nature, which can reduce the generalizability of the research. However, the use of actual case studies does improve the generalizability of the study.

**Conclusion**

It is evident that the maintenance of a positive image is important, and this is truly evident in the sports arena. Attacks on an athlete’s image can not only affect that athlete, but can affect the team that athlete represents. This study is the second attempt of the researcher to investigate the role of image repair in sports (Brown et al., 2012) and the first attempt to look that the impact of athlete transgressions on the team he/she represents using organizational crisis communication theory. As evident in the limitation and future research section of this chapter, this is the beginning of a research stream that should help researchers and practitioners in public relations, sports communication, advertising and marketing understand the impact of damage to an athlete’s image, the factors that intensify damage to one’s image, and more importantly how to maintain positive image and improve negative images. This study provides a foundation for an area of research that is relatively undeveloped yet worth of additional examination.
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110


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Aqib Talib – Criminal Transgression

Warrant Issued for Aqib Talib for Assault
Tuesday, March 29, 2011

Police in a Dallas suburb have issued an arrest warrant for Tampa Bay Buccaneers cornerback Aqib Talib, accusing him of firing a gun at his sister's boyfriend.

Garland police said Tuesday they believe Talib and his mother, Okolo Talib, shot at the man March 21. The man wasn't injured. Earlier that day, the man had been listed as a suspect in a disturbance and was charged with assault and interference with an emergency phone call from that incident.

Authorities issued arrest warrants for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon for Talib and his mother. She turned herself in Tuesday.

Police say Aqib Talib is set to turn himself in later this week. His agent, Todd France, did not immediately return a call.

Aqib Talib's bail will be set at $25,000, according to the Garland Police Department.

"We are deeply troubled by the serious charges filed against Aqib Talib," Bucs general manager Mark Dominik said in a team statement. "Due to current labor circumstances, we will withhold any further comment or action."

A Garland police spokesman said in a radio interview with Tampa station WDAE (620 AM) Tuesday afternoon that detectives met with Aqib Talib last week and continued their investigation before making the decision to charge him with a crime. The spokesman said the charge is a second-degree felony, which can carry a prison sentence of five to 20 years.

Okolo Talib was booked Tuesday morning on a charge of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon with an additional charge of felon in possession of a firearm, which was added based on a prior conviction. Her bond was set at $25,000 for the assault charge and $5,000 for the possession of a firearm charge.

Although NFL players are currently locked out, Commissioner Roger Goodell said last week they still are subject to the league's personal conduct policy and disciplinary action can be taken after the labor situation is resolved.
Talib Turns Himself into Police, Makes Statement  
Friday, April 1, 2011

Tampa Bay Buccaneers cornerback Aqib Talib turned himself into police Thursday night after an arrest warrant was issued for his involvement with an altercation with his sister’s boyfriend.

Talib reported to the Garland police on charges of assault with a deadly weapon. Garland police said Tuesday they believe Talib and his mother, Okolo Talib, shot at the man March 21. The man wasn't injured. Okolo Talib turned herself in Tuesday.

After turning himself in to police, Talib made his first public statement about the charges. Talib (insert manipulation statement here)

Talib’s bail has been set for $25,000. Although NFL players are currently locked out, Commissioner Roger Goodell said last week they still are subject to the league's personal conduct policy and disciplinary action can be taken after the labor situation is resolved.

Mortification Strategy:
Talib apologized to his fans and the Buccaneers organization for his involvement in the altercation.

“I apologize to the entire Buccaneers’ family for my behavior during the past week. My actions have not been representative of what our organization stands for, and I am sorry for my involvement with this matter. I hope that this can be solved quickly so that I will not be any more of a distraction to my team.”

Attacking the Accuser Strategy:
Talib accused the victim of providing false information to the police about his involvement.

“The accusations against me are not true. I did not shoot at my sister’s boyfriend, and I was not involved in a fight with him. I hope that the police investigation can resolve this matter quickly so that my name can be cleared from this matter.”

Bolstering Strategy:
Talib stressed that his involvement with this case should not overshadow his commitment to the Buccaneers and the city of Tampa.

“I hope that the Buccaneers’ organization and fans can overlook this matter and focus on my loyalty and commitment to the team and the Tampa community. I will continue to strive to be a force on the field, and a loyal citizen off the field.”
Rashard Mendenhall – Non-Criminal Transgression

Mendenhall Tweets about bin Laden's Death Spark Criticism
Tuesday, May 3, 2011

Pittsburgh Steelers player Rashard Mendenhall is not the kind of running back who is timid about hitting the hole.

He is also apparently not timid about hitting the "tweet" button.

Mendenhall ignited a Twitter controversy by questioning the events of 9/11 and expressing sympathy for Osama bin Laden.

His first tweet on the subject read, "What kind of person celebrates death? It's amazing how people can HATE a man they have never even heard speak. We've only heard one side ... "

Then he retweeted a comment that read: "I'm not convinced he was even behind the attacks we have really seen no evidence to prove it other than the gov telling us"

Then Mendenhall tweeted: "We'll never know what really happened. I just have a hard time believing a plane could take a skyscraper down demolition style." Mendenhall later deleted this tweet.

His original tweet thread continued with, "I believe in God. I believe we're ALL his children. And I believe HE is the ONE and ONLY judge."

He also tweeted, "For those of you who said you want to see Bin Laden burn in hell ... I ask how would God feel about your heart?"

Mendenhall's tweets have drawn criticism. Steelers president Art Rooney issued this statement: "I have not spoken with Rashard so it is hard to explain or even comprehend what he meant with his recent Twitter comments." Sports radio talk shows in Pittsburgh -- and around the nation -- were fielding calls on Monday about his comments, and many journalists have written columns critical of Mendenhall’s comments.

On his Twitter page, Mendenhall identifies himself as a "conversationalist and professional athlete." Mendenhall has 13,631 followers on Twitter, and he personally follows 66. Included in the group he's following is the Dalai Lama, comedian Sarah Silverman and the Park Community Church in Chicago.
Mendenhall Makes Statement Addressing bin Laden Comments
Thursday, May 5, 2011

Pittsburgh Steelers running back Rashard Mendenhall addressed the criticism he has faced after making comments on Twitter following Osama bin Laden’s death during a press conference Wednesday.

Mendenhall ignited a Twitter controversy by questioning the events of 9/11 and expressing sympathy for Osama bin Laden on Monday. His comments set off a firestorm of criticism from reporters and other members of the NFL community.

During the press conference, Mendenhall (insert manipulation comments here)

On his Twitter page, Mendenhall identifies himself as a "conversationalist and professional athlete." Mendenhall has 13,631 followers on Twitter, and he personally follows 66. Included in the group he's following is the Dalai Lama, comedian Sarah Silverman and the Park Community Church in Chicago. Mendenhall has not tweeted, however, since making the controversial comments.

Mortification Strategy:
During the press conference, Mendenhall apologized to the Steelers and their fans for the comments.

“I tweeted those comments before thinking about the backlash they would cause. I apologize to my team and my fans for the stir I have caused because of my statements. I hope that my actions will not affect the Steelers organization and the values they represent.”

Attacking the Accuser Strategy:
During the press conference, Mendenhall lashed out towards the criticism about his comments.

“Anyone that has dismissed my comments as stupid and uninformed does not understand my intentions. I attempted to encourage people to think about the details, and instead people have accused me of being anti-American, which is a totally ignorant conclusion.”

Bolstering Strategy:
During the press conference, Mendenhall stressed that he hoped his comments did not overshadow his contributions to the Steelers.

“I hope that the Steelers community can overlook my comments and focus more on my commitment to my team. I am dedicated to continuing my role on this team and bringing another championship to Pittsburgh.”
Dunta Robinson – Internal Transgression

Dunta Robinson Fined 40K for Hit
September 19, 2011

Dunta Robinson will pay for his flagrant hit on the Eagles' Jeremy Maclin, but he won't be suspended.

The NFL on Monday fined the Falcons cornerback $40,000 for the hit in which he led with his helmet and crashed into Maclin in the third quarter of Atlanta's 35-31 win over Philadelphia on Sunday night. Robinson was penalized 15 yards for unnecessary roughness. The league did not suspend Robinson although it has said hits like the one he put on Maclin could lead to such action.

In a letter sent to Robinson, NFL vice president of football operations Merton Hanks noted that "future offenses will result in an escalation of fines up to and including suspension."

Commissioner Roger Goodell was advised of the decision, and said "we felt this was the appropriate discipline."

On the play with 6:12 left in the third quarter, the league said Robinson lowered his head and made forcible contact to the head and neck area of Maclin, who still made the catch. He was slow to leave the field but returned to the game.

Robinson can appeal to former NFL coaches Art Shell and Ted Cottrell, who are paid by the league and the NFL Players Association to handle those cases. Their appeal must be heard by the second Tuesday following notification of the discipline.

Replays clearly showed Robinson leading with his helmet, something the league has been adamant about eliminating. The NFL this year also banned players from launching themselves into a defenseless opponent.

(insert team history manipulation statement here)

Positive Manipulation:
This latest incident is out of the ordinary for the Atlanta Falcons. The team has not been involved with many on-field incidents, with this being the first incident a Falcons player has been involved since 2008.

Negative Manipulation:
This latest incident is the most recent in a number of offenses on-field involving the Atlanta Falcons. The team has had seven Falcons players involved in on-field incidents since 2008.
Falcons Makes Statement Following Robinson’s Fine
September 21, 2011

Atlanta Falcons head coach Mike Smith addressed the media about the NFL’s fine for cornerback Dunta Robinson’s helmet-to-helmet hit Sunday during the team’s pre-game press conference.

The NFL on Monday fined the Falcons cornerback $40,000 for the hit in which he led with his helmet and crashed into Maclin in the third quarter of Atlanta's 35-31 win over Philadelphia on Sunday night. Robinson was penalized 15 yards for unnecessary roughness. The league did not suspend Robinson although it has said hits like the one he put on Maclin could lead to such action.

During the press conference, Smith (insert team manipulation statement here).

(insert team history manipulation here)

Robinson can appeal to former NFL coaches Art Shell and Ted Cottrell, who are paid by the league and the NFL Players Association to handle those cases. Their appeal must be heard by the second Tuesday following notification of the discipline.

Scapegoating Statement:
During the press conference, Smith stressed that the actions of Robinson were not representative of the Falcons organization.

“The Atlanta Falcons do not promote vicious hits like the one Dunta(Robinson) was fined for this week. This is a unique incident from one player, and is not representative of the way we play football in Atlanta.”

Justification Statement:
During the press conference, Smith stressed that the hit was not intentional and that Robinson did not seek out to hurt Maclin.

“The Atlanta Falcons stress the safety issues that were identified by the league, and Dunta(Robinson), just like the other members of the team, do not intentionally seek to injure opposing players. The hit was an accident, and should be treated as such.”

Apology Statement:
During the press conference, Smith apologized for Robinson’s actions during the game.

“The Atlanta Falcons organization would like to apologize to Jeremy (Maclin) and the Eagles for the incident involving Dunta (Robinson) on Sunday. This was an unfortunate incident, and we are deeply sorry for the actions of Dunta.”
Minnesota Vikings cornerback Chris Cook was arrested early Saturday on domestic battery charges, and the team said Cook, who has started the past three games, will not play this weekend against the Green Bay Packers.

Cook, 24, was arrested without incident after someone called 911 around 2 a.m. to report hearing people across the street yelling and screaming, Eden Prairie police spokeswoman Katie Beal said.

The second-year pro was booked on two charges, including one count of domestic assault, and was being held without bail Saturday at Hennepin County jail, according to online records. Prosecutors have 48 hours in which to charge Cook, who has a court hearing scheduled for Monday morning.

Bob Hagan, the Vikings’ spokesman, said Cook has been ruled out of Sunday’s game against unbeaten Green Bay. Earlier, the team issued a statement saying it didn’t plan to comment about the arrest until it could learn more about what happened.

The loss of Cook for Sunday’s game against the pass-heavy Packers is a huge blow to the Vikings’ already depleted secondary. Cornerback Antoine Winfield is listed as doubtful with a neck injury and starting safety Jamarca Sanford likely is out with a concussion.

Cook has started in Winfield’s place over the last three games opposite Cedric Griffin, who has yet to return to his old form while coming off his second torn ACL in the last two years.

Without Cook, Asher Allen will likely step into the starting role with Marcus Sherels moving into the nickelback spot, giving the Vikings two of their top three cornerbacks under 5-foot-10. Rookie Brandon Burton also could be activated to provide some depth against Aaron Rodgers and the Packers, who run a wide-open passing attack that floods the secondary with receivers.

(insert team history manipulation here)

Positive Manipulation:
This latest incident is out of the ordinary for the Minnesota Vikings. The team has not been involved with many off-field incidents, with this being the first incident a Vikings player has been involved since 2008.

Negative Manipulation:
This latest incident is the most recent in a number of offenses off-field involving the Minnesota Vikings. The team has had seven Vikings players involved in on-field incidents since 2008.
Minnesota Vikings head coach Leslie Frazier addressed the media Monday morning about cornerback Chris Cook’s arrest Saturday morning.

Cook was booked on charges of domestic assault and battery and was being held without bail Saturday at Hennepin County jail, according to online records. Cook, 24, was arrested without incident after someone called 911 around 2 a.m. to report hearing people across the street yelling and screaming, Eden Prairie police spokeswoman Katie Beal said.

During the press conference, Frazier (insert team statement manipulation here).

(insert team history manipulation)

Cook has started in Winfield’s place over the last three games opposite Cedric Griffin, who has yet to return to his old form while coming off his second torn ACL in the last two years, but did not play in a 33-27 loss to the Green Bay Packers. The Vikings will address his role with the team after Monday’s hearing.

Scapegoating Statement:
During the press conference, Frazier stressed that the actions of Cook were not representative of the Vikings organization.

“The Minnesota Vikings do not condone the activity of Chris (Cook) this weekend, and we will address the incident once we receive further information. Cook’s involvement with this incident is not representative of the conduct of our players.”

Justification Statement:
During the press conference, Frazier stressed that the details of Cook’s arrest are not clear, and that once further information is available, Cook should be released.

“Based on the information we have about this incident, the Vikings organization is convinced that there are details of this matter that are contradicting. Once the evidence and statements are brought into question, we believe that Chris (Cook) will be found innocent of these charges, and we can move on as an organization from this incident.”

Apology Statement:
During the press conference, Frazier apologized for Cook’s arrest and absence during Sunday’s game.

“The Minnesota Vikings organization would like to apologize to our fans for the behavior of Chris Cook. This is an unfortunate incident, and we are deeply sorry for the distraction this has caused for our team’s performance.”
APPENDIX C – INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

NFL Athletes and Image Repair

Principal Investigator: Mr. Kenon A. Brown, Ph.D. Student
Supervising Professor: Dr. Eyun-Jung Ki, Assistant Professor

Informed Consent Statement

To the Participant:

You have been invited to participate in a research project conducted by a doctoral student in the College of Communication and Information Sciences. You will be asked to read two short articles about current events involving NFL athletes, and after each article, you will be asked to answer a few questions about your opinion and reaction to the articles.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty, and if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed. This study has no impact on your class grade. Your complete identity will remain confidential and anonymous. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. The questionnaire will take approximately 15-20 minutes. In order to receive extra credit, you must submit your name at the end of this questionnaire; however, the names submitted will be collected in a separate file and after submission to your respective professors, the list will be destroyed. The list will not be used in any way to identify submission.

You must be 19 years of age to participate in this study. The scope of the questionnaire may cause anxiety, and students with stress or anxiety issues are encouraged to either not participate or discuss the study with the principal investigators before continuing.

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Kenon A. Brown, by mail at 440 Reese Phifer Hall, P.O. Box 870172, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, or by email at kenonabrown@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (205) 348-8461.

If you wish to proceed with the study, please proceed to the next page and click the TinyURL link provided to access your version of the questionnaire. DO NOT CLICK THE ARROWS on the next page!!!
APPENDIX D – DEBRIEFING AND THANK-YOU STATEMENT

To the Participant:

I want to thank you for participating in this study. The questionnaire was designed to test your responses to image repair strategies based on actual case studies involving NFL players. The news story provided, although based on current events, was fictitious. The statement was developed for the study, and the article was manipulated to test several image repair strategies. As stated on the consent form, your participation in this study was voluntary, and your identity will remain confidential and anonymous.

As a reminder, if you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Kenon A. Brown, by mail at 440 Reese Phifer Hall, Box 870172, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, or by email at kenonabrown@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (205) 348-8461. If you wish to withdraw your participation from this study, please inform the investigator before you submit this questionnaire. Withdrawing your participation from this study will not affect your research participation credit. In order to receive extra credit, you must submit your name at the end of this questionnaire; however, the names submitted will be collected in a separate file and after submission to your respective professors, the list will be destroyed. The list will not be used in any way to identify submission.

Please provide the following demographic and follow-up information and thank you once again for your participation. Also, if receiving extra credit for your participation, you will be prompt to provide your name at the end of this questionnaire.

Thank You,

Kenon A. Brown
Ph.D. Student
College of Communication and Information Sciences
APPENDIX E – SCENARIOS FOR MORAL JUDGMENT SCALE

Scenario 1:

"My father was the main victim," says the owner of a company that collapsed following a conspiracy between the factory's accountant and a competing company. "I got over it. I have new, fascinating plans for the future, but I don't think that my father's broken heart can be fixed; he established this company, ran it for years, and transferred it to my hands anticipating its expansion and success. Since its closing, his world has darkened as if the loss of the factory was accompanied by a loss of his will to live.

Scenario 2:

"The vehicle hit me, but my son is the victim," said the father who was hit in front of his son while a young driver drove through the residential area at a speed of 100 mph. "Half a year after the accident, I have totally recovered, but he is still afraid of the sound of a car. He can't travel in a moving vehicle. He walks to and from school, which is two miles from our house, trying to avoid all roads. The boy who was happy and carefree has turned anxious and paranoid."

Scenario 3:

A faulty diagnosis from the doctor brought turmoil to the family. The doctor diagnosed the girl with a rare liver disease that required treatment overseas. The parents sank into debt to finance the stay abroad, but the treatment was found to be unnecessary. The father said in anger, "When he heard of the mistake, the doctor said, 'Be happy that she's healthy,' but it's very hard to be happy. We've been left without an apartment, we're barely able to feed our four children, and all their childhood pleasures were taken from them."

Scenario 4:

"I've been isolated and humiliated forever," said the youth, who was incriminated by the police investigator as an accomplice to a terror organization. The investigator brought evidence in a dishonorable way, which led to the conviction of the youth as revenge after a conflict between the investigator and the youth. "Three years I sat in jail for no wrongdoing on my part, and even now that his lie has come out, I am still guilty. They still see me as a traitor, and none of my friends are willing to be seen with me. Nothing can turn the clock back."
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kenon Ashanti Brown is a native of Memphis, TN, and a graduate of Central High School (c/o 2000). He attended The University of Tennessee where he received a B.S. in Journalism and a M.S. in Public Relations. During and between his bachelor’s and master’s education, Kenon worked for eight years in management and marketing positions in the restaurant industry, including several years as the local marketing manager at Buffalo Wild Wings. After receiving encouragement from his thesis chair, Dr. Candace White, Kenon began pursuing his doctoral degree at The University of Alabama, where he specializes in sports image repair and crisis communication.

During his time at Alabama, Kenon received the McNair Fellowship and was appointed as a Graduate Teaching Fellow. He taught several classes in public relations, journalism and sports communication. Kenon has published articles in Journal of Public Relations Research, Public Relations Review, and Journal of Sports Media, and has presented papers at annual conventions for both the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and the National Communication Association.

Kenon will be joining the faculty in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at Alabama beginning August 2012.
IRB APPROVAL FORM

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying Information

Principal Investigator
Name: Kenon A. Brown
Department: Advertising and Public Relations
College: College of Communication and Information Sciences
University: The University of Alabama
Address: 440 Reese Phifer Hall
Telephone: (865) 243-5617
FAX: 
E-mail: kenonabrown@gmail.com

Second Investigator
Name: Dr. Bruce Berger
Department: Advertising and Public Relations
College: College of Communications and Information Sciences
University: The University of Alabama
Address: 440 Reese Phifer Hall
Telephone: (205) 348-7692
FAX: 
E-mail: berger@appr.ua.edu

Third Investigator
Name: 
Department: 
College: 
University: 
Address: 
Telephone: 
FAX: 
E-mail: 


Date Printed: December 18, 2011
Funding Source: none

Type of Proposal: X New

__ Revision __ Renewal __ Completed __ Exempt

Attach a renewal application
Attach a continuing review of studies form

Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):
Type of Review: Full board

IRB Action:

Rejected Date: 
Tabled Pending Revisions Date:
Approved Pending Revisions Date:

✓ Approved—this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 2-7-04

Items approved: 
Research protocol: dated
Informed consent: dated
Recruitment materials: dated

Approval signature


129