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Image Restoration Theory: An Empirical Study of Corporate Apology Tactics Employed by the U.S. Air Force Academy

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Image Restoration Theory: An Empirical Study of Corporate Apology

Tactics Employed by the U.S. Air Force Academy

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated with respect to my step-father, James R. Allen Jr., who

passed away at far too young an age on April 8, 2004. He taught me as a young child the

value of hard-work, tenacity, public service, and standing up for what you believe in. It

was only through the life lessons he shared that I was able to complete this project. He is

sadly missed, and deeply appreciated.

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Of course, I have to thank the entire career field of U.S. Air Force Public Affairs professionals who are doing worthy work, serving invisibly in hotspots all around the globe at this very moment. I know the battles you fight - Thanks for your service.

Col. (Dr.) Jay DeFrank, USAF, gave me this opportunity, and encouraged me to "be fearless and honest" with the thesis content. Fellow USF grad students Coby O'Brien and Marcia Watson were always available to help with coding, offer excellent advice, or just listen. I'm grateful to know all of you.

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ABSTRACT

Adverse relationships between an individual or corporation and its publics can destroy credibility, relationships, marketability, and economic welfare. As such, a genre of discourse is needed to help individuals and organizations respond to charges of wrongdoing. Therefore, the study of image restoration is worthwhile because it provides insight into an important function of our lives.

For this thesis study, a content analysis was conducted of media releases and stories produced by the U.S. Air Force regarding a series of sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy in 2002. The purpose of the study is two-fold. First, it determines the image restoration strategies employed by the U.S. Air Force during a crisis situation.

Its second – and primary – objective is to advance (or reinforce) current image restoration theory by determining whether specific image restoration tactics encourage a positive or negative reporting trend from independent newspapers, and measuring the effectiveness of tactics comprising Benoit's Image Restoration Theory as applied in this particular situation by the U.S. Air Force. Combined, these analyses will demonstrate that Benoit's Image Restoration Theory can be prescriptive rather than simply descriptive (as noted in the review of literature) with the ultimate intent of the study being a determination of how independent media reacts to the image restoration tactics employed by the U.S. Air Force.

Chapter One: Introduction

In today's society, the importance of image cannot be overstated.

Organizations and individuals alike desire to achieve and maintain a positive

public image because doing so has value and worth on several different levels.

According to Benoit (1995, p. vii), "Human beings possess a basic instinct to engage in

recurrent patterns of communicative behavior designed to reduce, redress, or avoid

damage to their reputation (or face or image) from perceived wrong-doing. Complaints

are routinely leveled at people in all walks of life for all sorts of alleged misbehavior;

accordingly, we are repeatedly faced with situations that impel us to explain or justify our

behavior, to offer excuses or apologies, for those aspects of our behavior that offend and

provoke reproach from those around us. Our face, image, or reputation is valuable."

Therefore, when a reputation is threatened, individuals and organizations are

motivated to present an image defense: explanations, justifications, rationalizations,

apologies, or excuses for behavior.

According to Benoit and Hanczor (1994), image may be defined as "the

perceptions of the source held by the audience, shaped by the words and deeds of the

source, as well as by the actions of other relevant actors" (p. 3). Brinson and Benoit

(1996) define image as "the perceptions of the rhetor held by the audience, shaped by the

words and deeds of that rhetor, as well as the actions of others." Moffitt, (1994) defined

image as a single impression shared by an audience.

Since the early 1990's, according to Benoit and Brinson (1994), organizations "have become more aware of their responsibility for contributing to society in economic, social, environmental and political ways" (p. 76). More than a decade ago, Brody (1991) stated "Organizations are being held to new standards of accountability." One can argue, in the aftermath of such massive scandals as Enron and Worldcom, that this mantra has become even truer today.

When accused of objectionable behavior, reputations can be damaged (Benoit 1995). Brown and Levinson (1978) observe that "people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened" (P. 66). Goffman (1967) explains that "when a face has been threatened, face-work must be done" (P. 27). Similarly, Schlenker (1980) writes that "predicaments can damage his or her identity…adversely affecting relationships with the audience" (p. 131).

Adverse relationships between an individual or corporation and its publics can damage or destroy credibility, relationships, marketability, and economic welfare. As such, a genre of discourse is needed to help individuals and organizations respond to charges of wrongdoing. Therefore, the study of image and image restoration is worthwhile because it provides insight into an important function of our lives.

To understand image restoration, we must define what damages image – that is, what constitutes an attack, crisis, or threat. According to Benoit (1995) "an attack on one's image, face, or reputation is comprised of two components: 1.) an act occurred which is undesirable, and 2.) you are responsible for that act" (p. 71). Both of these conditions must be believed to be true by the salient audience for a reputation to be at risk. Whether or not either of the statements actually is true is irrelevant; perception by

the audience is all that is needed to damage a reputation. Benoit is also careful to point out that there is a proportional relationship between how much a reputation will be damaged and the extent to which the organization or person is held responsible.

For this thesis study, a content analysis was conducted of media releases and stories produced by the U.S. Air Force regarding a series of sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy in 2002. The Air Force Academy is a public, federally-funded educational institution charged with producing commissioned military officers since 1955. In 1976, the first women cadets were admitted to the Academy, and, as of May 2004, women comprise 17 percent of the cadet wing. (Air Force Academy Demographics, 2004).

In January 2003, female cadets began contacting members of Congress with complaints of sexual assault and indifference from commanders. Such complaints, plus inquiries from local congressional leaders, instigated several investigations by the Air Force, the Pentagon, and eventually, Congress itself. The probes documented 142 allegations of sexual assault since 1993. That number, officials concede, may actually be low, as the Air Force's general counsel working group reported that the fear of retribution prevented some cadets from reporting sexual assault and other offenses at the hands of fellow cadets.

As with any unit in the Air Force, climate surveys are conducted annually at the Academy, and recent surveys included cadet comments that showed not just a sexual assault problem, but deeper problems as well. According to the latest 2003 academy survey, 22 percent of male cadets still believe women do not belong at the academy.

Meanwhile, an independent advisory commission known as The Fowler Commission, (headed by former U.S. Congresswoman Tillie Fowler of Florida), formed to study the academy sexual assault issue, found that this tolerance of sexual abuse was bred over a period of time. In March 2003, the Secretary of the Air Force, a civilian appointed by the President of the United States and charged with oversight of the entire U.S. Air Force, and the Chief of Staff, the service's highest ranking military officer, replaced the four top academy leaders and drew up new institutional policies. They called it the "Agenda for Change," and it addressed leadership, cadet life and the broader academy climate. (Air Force News Service, March 20, 2003).

A very high level of media interest and Congressional oversight continued at the Academy throughout the year, and the media continued to scrutinize events there related to this story even as late as May 2004.   As such, this study attempts to identify the specific image restoration strategies in media releases and external newswire stories as created and distributed by the U.S. Air Force relating to a series of sexual assaults in 2002 at the U.S. Air Force Academy, as defined in the context of Benoit's image restoration theory.

The purpose of the study is two-fold. First, it will determine the image restoration strategies employed by the U.S. Air Force during a crisis situation – specifically, a finite period of time in which sexual assaults against female cadets enrolled at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., were alleged to have been committed, and in which senior Air Force leaders were removed from command and the service itself for failure to "exercise the degree of leadership in this situation that is expected of commanders" (Air Force Print News, July 11, 2003).

Its second –and primary – objective is to advance (or reinforce) current image restoration theory by determining whether specific image restoration tactics encourage a positive or negative reporting trend from independent newspapers, and determining the effectiveness of tactics comprising Benoit's image restoration theory as applied in this particular situation by the U.S. Air Force. Combined, these analyses hoped to demonstrate that Benoit's image restoration theory could be prescriptive rather than simply descriptive with the ultimate intent of the study being a determination of how independent media reacts to the image restoration strategies employed – proactively or reactively – by the U.S. Air Force.

One factor that must be considered is whether or not the products being released by the Air Force are proactive or reactive. This study does not assume that the Air Force is the proactive source one hundred percent of the time. In many cases, the Air Force proactively produces a news release and distributes it to independent news sources, where the sources react to it in a particular way – positively or negatively. In other cases, the opposite may be the case – a story may run in a newspaper, and the Air Force responds to that story with a release of its own. In those cases, image restoration tactics are reactive.

Chapter Two will discuss the appropriate literature related to the problem just described. Chapter Three will describe and discuss the research methodology selected to analyze the data. Chapter Four will present and analyze the data collected using the methodology described in Chapter Three. The study continues with Chapter Five, which explicates the findings of the data from Chapter Four. Chapter Six completes the study with a summary of conclusions drawn from the data, along with limitations of the study, implications for Public Relations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Image restoration discourse has wide application for both individuals and organizations. Benoit, as author of the definitive Image Restoration Theory (1995), has written or co-authored several image restoration studies on a diverse group of subjects. Corporations, organizations, governments, religious figures, celebrities, athletes, politicians, products, high-profile criminals, and even intellectual property (copyrights for things such as the "Atkins Diet," for instance) have all been analyzed at various times by differing researchers. Each subject has, of course, experienced varying degrees of success with their image restoration strategies, but Benoit's research has shown that certain combinations of tactics from the discourse are more effective than others for a given specific condition.

Benoit's theory is based in large part on the works of theorists who have previously attempted to address the concept of image restoration. Several approaches have been developed for explaining verbal self-defense, some developed in the fields of communication/rhetoric and some in sociology. Rosenfield (1968), Ware and Linkugel (1973), Burke (1970), and Ryan (1982) present several verbal rhetoric-based image restoration strategies, but each theory includes options neglected by the others. The social science-based work of Scott and Lyman (1968) and Kruse (1981) regarding accounts also contributed to Benoit's theory.

Rhetorical Approaches

An important form of rhetoric attempts to restore one's image, face, or reputation following accusations or suspicions of wrongdoing. With roots firmly embedded in the rhetorical field, image restoration strategy, as applied to the field of public relations, is framed in the concept of crisis communication. The research of Marcus and Goodman (1991) and Coombs (1995) created similar contexts that substantively describe situations likely to require apologetic discourse. The four contexts – accidents, scandals and illegalities, product safety incidents, and social irresponsibility – all are likely to face criticism from a stakeholding public.

According to Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2001), most current work argues that crisis is a natural phase of an organization's development. They note that crisis – as much as "business as usual" – is a fundamental part of a business' life cycle, and as such, will affect virtually every enterprise at one time or another. Therefore, crisis communication and management are essential skills for leaders at all levels to master, or at least be well-versed in.

By extension, image restoration theory is also based on risk communication. According to Palenchar and Heath (2002), risk communication "addresses scientific evaluations of risk, the perceptions lay people have of them, and actions that are warranted in light of the degree of risk and people's tolerance of them" (p. 127). Otway (1992) noted "The main product of risk communication is not information, but the quality of the social relationship it supports. Risk communication is not an end itself; it is an enabling agent to facilitate the continual evolution of relationships (p. 227)." It is for exactly this reason that image restoration lends itself to the concept of risk

communication so easily – image repair efforts are really post-crisis attempts to salvage or repair damaged relationships.

Coombs (1999) noted that the crisis response is viewed as a symbolic resource that can be used to protect an organization's reputation and to affect stakeholders' future interactions with the organization by shaping perceptions of the crisis and the organization itself. Such responses align themselves perfectly with the goals of image restoration strategy.

Yet another public relations concept encompassing image restoration is that of issues management. According to Heath (1997, p. 6), issues management includes identifying, communicating, and influencing a set of organizationally relevant public perceptions and attitudes. This, Heath notes, includes contestable claims about facts, values, or policy – all aspects of image restoration strategy.

Expanding on the topic, the theoretical works of Bormann (1985) also give rise to corporate apologia and image restoration in the form of symbolic convergence theory. The theory postulates that, "Through their conversations and by attending to messages they encounter, people build a symbolic reality that furnishes meaning, emotion, and motive for action" (Bormann, 1985). Such a statement aptly describes the desired effect of image restoration – a favorable symbolic reality, and a motive for action.

Although many theorists focus primarily on individuals, Benoit and Brinson (1994) believe that organizations must maintain an image as well. Because image is such a central concept to the field of public relations, firms and organizations may take both preventive and restorative approaches to image problems (Heath and Nelson, 1986).

This study, however, focuses solely on the restorative aspects of public relations – primarily Benoit's image restoration theory. The following works provide the rhetorical foundations on which Benoit's theory is based.

Rosenfield's Analog

In 1968, Rosenfield performed an analysis on two separate political speeches – Nixon's famous "Checkers" speech (1952), given as Dwight D. Eisenhower's running mate, and a speech by Harry S. Truman while President (Benoit, 1995, p. 10).

Nixon's speech was primarily a defense from charges that he maintained a campaign "slush" fund. Rosenfield wrote that there were "four similarities in the two discourses which I take, at this time, to represent constants in the apologetic equation" (1968, p. 449). According to Benoit (1995, p. 11), Rosenfield's four characteristics of apologetic discourse are: "a brief, intense controversy; attacks on the opponent; a concentration of data in the middle third of the speech, and a recycling of arguments from past speeches."

Benoit and other scholars criticized the theory, noting that, while useful as a beginning, the first factor "describes the scene more than the discourse, and the third and fourth factors give us no idea what sort of claims or rhetorical strategies are developed by the data lumped in the middle or by the recycled arguments" (1995, p. 11).

Multiple scholars and theorists extended Rosenfield's work, and all were critical. Evidence was challenged, and Campbell (1983) questioned the attempt to develop a genre on the basis of an analog of only two instances. Regardless of the reason, the theory

was eventually shelved in favor of the more extensive theory of Ware and Linkugel (1973).

Ware and Linkugel's Apologia

Ware and Linkugel, in what is perhaps the most well-known article on the subject of message strategies (1973), espoused four broad venues of self-defense which could be used to recover public image (also known as apologia): denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.

Denial is the most straightforward (and self-explanatory) strategy. Simply put, an individual or corporation may simply deny having committed the act of which it was accused. If the act did not occur, or if the accused did not commit the act, then the accused reputation (image) should not be damaged.

Bolstering is a strategy in which the accused tries to build a rapport and identify with the audience. In other words, the accused tries to reinforce positive things done in the past in order to minimize the negative feelings towards the most recent act of wrong-doing. The actor tries to "identify himself with something viewed favorably by the audience" (Ware and Linkugel, p. 277). The negative feelings regarding the most recent aspects will remain the same, but goodwill from past deeds will produce a certain amount of positive effect towards the actor, negating some of the recent negative effect.

Differentiation is a redefinition strategy that divides a singular context into two separate meanings (Hearit, 2001). This is the most frequently-used tactic in image restoration. In essence, an organization may try to disassociate itself from a negative act by blaming an individual worker or a subcontractor. This is an attempt at "separating

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some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship from some larger context in which the audience presently views that attribute" (p. 278).

Ware and Linkugel's final strategy of self-defense is *transcendence*. This act "joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view that attribute" (p. 280). For example, gang members who justify breaking laws or social norms by arguing that their loyalty to the gang is more important than the law would be one example of transcendence, according to Benoit (1995, Sears, p. 91). The audience may view loyalty as a positive attribute; thus, think of the gang members and the negative act in a more positive light.

Ware and Linkugel's four strategies of self-defense, which were founded on the work of social psychologist Abelson (1959), can be formed into pairs to form four postures of self-defense. The four postures, as articulated by Benoit (1995, p. 13):

Absolutive: Denial and Differentiation
Vindictive: Denial and Transcendence
Explanative: Bolstering and Differentiation
Justificative: Bolstering and Transcendence.

Ware and Linkugel point out that a rebuttal may contain more than two of these four strategies, and they contend that "the speeches of self-defense usually rely most heavily for their persuasive impact upon two of the factors" (1973, p. 282).

Burke, on Purification

The third approach used by Benoit to develop his discourse on image restoration arises from Kenneth Burke's work regarding purification (1970). According to Benoit, (1995, p. 17) guilt is the primary motive in Burke's theory of dramatism. Burke, Benoit

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says, interprets guilt as "a representation of an undesirable state of affairs, an unpleasant

feeling, which occurs when expectations concerning behavior are violated, as they

inevitably are" (1995, p. 18). Thus, attacks on a reputation, which implies that behavior

has been negative, motivates individuals to remove or reduce guilt, thereby helping to

restore image.

Burke cites two processes for expunging guilt and restoring reputation: victimage

(also known as scapegoating) and mortification (admission of guilt and request for

forgiveness).

Burke's work was applied by various researchers to many different situations,

almost all in the political realm of the 1960's and 70's. Analysis of Senator Edward

Kennedy's Chappaquiddick address, US Representative George Hansen's felony fraud

conviction, President Nixon's Watergate speech, and San Francisco Mayor Joseph

Alioto's response to a serial killer in his city were all evaluated for effectiveness with

varying results. According to Benoit (1995, p. 18), one study of Burke's discourse

extended to corporate rhetoric, though most studies involve political rhetoric. Together,

these studies demonstrate how this approach aids in understanding the reduction of guilt

through discourse.

Ryan's Theory of Kategoria

The fourth stage in Benoit's image restoration discourse is gleaned from Ryan's

1982 work, which maintains that "one must carefully consider the defense (apologia) in

light of the specific attack (kategoria)" (Benoit, 1995, p. 20). Essentially, Ryan argues

that the most valuable assessment can be made by comparing the two phases – attack and

defense – and gauging the effectiveness of both sides. The critic, then, must evaluate both phases in order to make a judgment on effectiveness.

Ryan edited a book in 1988 which contains 17 applications of this approach by various authors. As with Burke, almost all of the applications are from the political realm, although other studies in the book include a corporation, a religious figure, a scientist, and a key legal trial.

Ryan's work is important to Benoit's theory because it was the first to actively advocate and justify the importance of examining the defense in light of the attack (Benoit, 1995, p. 26).

Other Rhetorical Criticisms

While the works of Rosenfield, Ware and Linkugel, Burke, and Ryan were the four main cornerstones of Benoit's theory, several other studies contributed significantly to the development of the theory, according to Benoit (1995, p. 26).

Several studies, he says, do not fall neatly into the four categories, yet still wield important contributions to the discussion. Some of the most notable ones involved strategy. In 1982, Benoit himself analyzed President Richard Nixon's discourse in the Watergate Scandal, and identified the following strategies that emerged from that study: emphasis on investigation; shifting of blame; refocusing of attention; indicting his main accuser; emphasizing confidentiality, mandate and cooperation; using executive privilege; and quoting from the transcripts (p. 26). Benoit reasoned that Nixon's defense was ineffective in part because he shifted the blame to his own subordinates, meaning he was still ultimately responsible for Watergate.

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Benson's 1988 study of Johnson & Johnson Corporation's defensive strategies after the second *Tylenol* poisoning episode concluded that it successfully used key elements of flexibility (tentative language, strategic ambiguity, trial balloons, portraying actions positively) and pro-action (communicating frequently, using viable spokespersons, and portraying motives positively) (p. 27).

Rowland and Rademacher (1990) reported on President Ronald Reagan's rhetoric on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its "Superfund" controversy. They concluded that Reagan successfully employed three main strategies: emphasizing his general commitment to positive values rather than advocating specific policies, blaming subordinates, and taking action that was symbolic to end the crisis (Benoit, 1995, p. 27).

However, when studying Reagan's attempt to use similar strategies to combat the Iran-Contra Tower Commission Report, Benoit found that "Reagan was not as successful" (1995, p. 27). Benoit attributed this to Reagan's "passive style" of leadership being "much less appropriate in important policy questions – like arms sales to Iran – than in day-to-day details of running the EPA" (1995, p. 27). In other words, a correlation exists between saliency (how important, or rather, how much direct impact a negative act has) and the ability to restore one's image with the affected audience.

Rhetorical Conclusion

According to Benoit, these rhetorical approaches provide the basis for two claims about image restoration discourse. First, these works are largely independent of another (1995, p. 28). While each work may have comparable subject matter, advocate the employment of similar tactics, and describe analogous factors in their various outcomes,

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no single rhetorical discourse thus far discussed has been exhaustive. No overlap exists among them. Each has missed at least one aspect that has been covered elsewhere, and in most cases, each has espoused a unique factor not found in another area. Benoit's theory is largely a composite of such rhetorical works, expanding on the various discourses, integrating them, and making them more complete.

The second claim Benoit makes, which is supported by the review of rhetorical approaches, is that these theories are "more descriptive than prescriptive" (1995, p. 29). Ware and Linkugel's theory of apologia and Burke's two means of purification present available options but do not offer advice about using these alternatives. Hence, according to Benoit, "rhetorical theories are descriptive, not prescriptive." Thus, the second area of Benoit's focus – accounts – will offer more helpful suggestions concerning when to use which strategy.

<div align="center">Social Science Approaches and Accounts</div>

In addition to the aforementioned rhetorical influences on Benoit's theory, it is also important to examine the other major theoretical area on which it is based – that of the social sciences. Major contributing typologies in establishing Benoit's theory are Sykes and Matza (1957), Scott and Lyman (1968), Goffman (1971), Schonbach (1980), and Schlenker (1980).

Sykes and Matza's Typology of Accounts

According to Benoit (1995, p. 33), Sykes and Matza developed the "first typology of accounts." The two researchers, in attempting to understand juvenile delinquency,

<div align="center">15</div>

proscribed five "techniques of neutralization" used to legitimize delinquent behavior,

including: denial of responsibility; denial of injury; denial of victim; counterattack and

condemnation; and lastly, an appeal to higher loyalties. Benoit claims that Sykes and

Matza's argument about these five techniques legitimizing delinquent behavior is

"somewhat unusual" (1995, p. 33) because most view these utterances "as occurring

after, rather than before, the offensive behavior." This typology provided a clear basis for

Scott and Lyman's work a decade later.

Scott and Lyman's Analysis of Accounts

Scott and Lyman's analysis of accounts (1968) was groundbreaking work and is

recognized as the leading approach in the field of image restoration. The authors

developed their approach by first defining an account (p. 46) as "a statement made by a

social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior." The researchers specifically

defined two separate types of accounts – excuses and justification. They define excuses

as "accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate,

but denies full responsibility," while justification was defined as an account in which

"one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality

associated with it" (p. 47).

The researchers take care to further subdivide each account – excuse and

justification – and it is in these subdivisions that one can most clearly see the basis for

Benoit's image restoration theory.

Scott and Lyman (1968) subdivided excuses into four categories: accidents,

defeasibility, biological drives, and provocation (also known as scapegoating). In his

1995 work, Benoit points out that Scott and Lyman's category of defeasibility is comparable to Sykes and Matza's (1957) denial of responsibility.

Further drawing on Sykes and Matza's 1957 work, Scott and Lyman described six subsets of justification: denial of injury, denial of victim, condemning the condemners, appeal to loyalty, sad tales, and self-fulfillment. The first four arise directly from Sykes and Matza, while the last two are Scott and Lyman's own additions.

Goffman's Research Contribution

In Goffman's 1971 work, he described several conversational responses to possible negative-image incidents. They are, in no particular order; denial that the act occurred or that the actor is guilty of it; redefine the act as non-offensive, [which Benoit (1995, p. 35) compares to Scott and Lyman's (1967) strategy of justification]; admit guilt but argue that negative consequences were not reasonably foreseeable; admit the act but claim reduced competence [which Benoit again compares to Scott and Lyman's (1967) notion of excuses], and finally, admit carelessness in performing the act or ignorance of the undesirable consequences. Goffman argues that admitting carelessness is the least effective strategy, but is careful to point out that it is different from his third response of arguing that negative consequences were unforeseeable, because in that strategy, no one could have foreseen the negative outcome.

Goffman also advocates apologizing. He notes that an apology consists of essentially splitting oneself into two halves – a bad half and a good half. The bad half commits the negative act, and the good half deplores it. He indicates that a complete apology consists of five basic elements: expression of regret; acknowledgement of

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expected behavior; repudiation of the behavior and the self for committing it; a promise to behave correctly in the future; and atonement and/or compensation.

A last, notable point made by Goffman is that of requests as remedial moves. Benoit (1995, p. 35) interprets Goffman to mean that requests (usually for forgiveness or excusal) are offered *before* an offensive event, i.e "Do you mind if I squeeze past you?" whereas accounts and apologies are typically offered up after the wrongful behavior. Requests, Benoit says, "function to reduce the ill feeling that might be generated by untoward behavior" (1995, p. 35).

Schonbach's Taxonomy

Another researcher whose work was influential to Benoit was Schonbach. Benoit notes that, in a short essay by Schonbach (1980), he "presented a new taxonomy based both on the previous literature and on accounts elicited from subjects who were asked to imagine themselves in a failure event" (Benoit, 1995, p. 36). Schonbach defined "failure event" to include "both deviant acts committed and obligations omitted" (Schonbach, 1980, p. 195). Therefore, Schonbach recognized that images may be damaged not only by what has been done, but also by what has not. The new taxonomy Benoit refers to is essentially an expansion of Scott and Lyman (1968) and Sykes and Matza (1957).

Schonbach's taxonomy includes two new categories of image repair tactics – coordinate with excuses; and justifications, labeled concessions, and refusals. In 1990, Schonbach completed further research into accounts, and prepared "an extensive list of fourteen concessions, twenty seven excuses, and forty-two refusals" (Benoit, 1995, p.

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36), which eventually was used by Benoit as a foundation for his own image restoration theory.

Schlenker's Versions of Accounts

Schlenker's work (1980) contains three different versions of accounts that were not explicated by previous researchers, although they are similar in nature. They are, in order of presentation: defenses of innocence; excuses; and justifications.

The "defense of innocence" account claims that the negative event was not the fault of the actor at all. According to Benoit (1995, p. 37), it is akin to Schonbach's strategy of claiming (denying) that the negative event did not happen.

The second account - excuses – seeks to diminish the role (and responsibility) of the actor for the negative action. As a further subset of the "excuses" account, Schlenker specifically mentions "scapegoating," i.e. passing the blame to someone else, and diffusion of responsibility - taking some blame but also spreading it across a larger group to lessen the impact. Schlenker notes that both of these variants are extensions of Scott and Lyman's 1968 work.

Schlenker's third and final account, justification, is exactly that – rationalizing the action to lessen the negative impact on the actor's image.

Other Social Science Contributors

Although the above-mentioned researchers made the most profound impact on Benoit's work, many other scholars made significant contributions as well. In 1981, researchers Tedeschi and Reiss refined and expanded the work of Scott and Lyman

(1968). According to Benoit (1995, p. 38), Tedeschi and Reiss "added new excuses, such as 'distraction by other events,' 'lack of time for deliberation (crisis),' 'drugs,' 'coercion by others,' 'hypnotized,' and 'brainwashed.'"

Additionally, Tedeschi and Reiss revised certain aspects of Scott and Lyman's typology, Benoit noted (1995). The researchers offered, for example, "six specific new types of self-fulfillment" (Benoit, 1995, p. 38), and also presented additional detailed justifications, such as different forms of appeal to higher authorities (.i.e. God, Satan, and government), reputation building, appeal to norms of justice, and appeal to humanistic values (Benoit, 1995, p. 38).

Additionally, Benoit cites (1995) the work of Semin and Manstead (1983) as an influence of image restoration theory. Semin and Manstead reviewed most of the literature previously described in the social sciences section of this writing, and from that developed a detailed tactical list of image restoration strategies. Their approaches may be broken down to include two main sets of theories – one for excuses and justifications, and one for denials, refusals, claims of innocence, and apologies.

Essentially, the work of these seven sets of researchers, along with the four previously discussed in the rhetorical approaches section, are the most influential in the development of a defining image restoration theory.

From these scholars, rhetorical and social science approaches laid the foundation of what was to become Benoit's image restoration theory.

Benoit's Image Restoration Theory

According to Benoit himself, his theory is founded on two key assumptions. The first assumption, he notes, "is that communication is a goal-directed activity" (1995, p. 63). The second is that "maintaining a positive reputation is one of the central goals of communication."

As briefly mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Benoit notes that "an attack on one's image, face, or reputation is comprised of two components: 1.) an act occurred which is undesirable, and 2.) you are responsible for that act" (p. 71). Both of these conditions must be believed to be true by the salient audience for a reputation to be at risk.

Recognizing this, Benoit had a desire to "offer a typology that is more complete than those found in the rhetorical literature while avoiding the extreme detail found in some descriptions of accounts…" which lead to the list of strategies in this typology of image restoration (1995, p. 74).

Benoit further notes that "those who desire extremely detailed lists of these strategies can consult Schonbach (1990), who lists almost one hundred and fifty categories and subcategories" (p. 93). He notes that he finds it more useful to list image restoration strategies at "a higher level of abstraction" (p. 93). By this, Benoit means that his more concise list is exhaustive and less wieldy, as well as being easier to conceptualize.

Benoit organized his typology into five distinct categories, three of which have variants or subcategories: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

Table 1. Image Restoration Strategies.

Denial

Simple denial – did not perform the act

Shifting the blame – act performed by another

Evading of Responsibility

Provocation – responded to act or action of another

Defeasibility – lack of information or ability

Accident – act was unintentional mishap

Good Intentions – meant well in doing the act

Reducing Offensiveness of Event

Bolstering – stress good traits

Minimization – act not very serious

Differentiation – act is less offensive than it appears

Transcendence – act is negative, but other vital considerations at stake

Attack accuser – reduce credibility of accuser

Compensation – reimburse victims and affected persons

Corrective Action – plan in place to solve and prevent action from reoccurring

Mortification – take responsibility and apologize for action

Source: Benoit, 1995, p.95

Audiences

Benoit points out that there are three types of audiences that the rhetor (accused) will sometimes face. First, the actor faces the external audience, e.g. those who are the

primary people with whom the rhetor hopes to rebuild his/her image. Second, the rhetor

tries to establish positive reputation or image with the secondary audience, i.e. Jane yells

at John in front of co-workers, and John seeks to save face in front of all concerned.

Lastly, Benoit describes the third-party audience. One example is if the actor attempts to

save image from corporate stockholders but not caring what the impact is on the media

who spread the negative perception in the first place.An additional distinction made by

Benoit (1995) is that there exist two types of attacks on image – attacks on policy, and

attack on character. In fact, the author notes that sometimes, there is no clear accusation

at all. "The accusation may arise generally in the media, for example, rather than from a

rhetor's explicit *kategoria*," he says (p. 85). In such cases, the attack, while still

important, becomes more difficult to analyze.

Athletes, both professional and amateur, have long been subjects of image

restoration studies. Benoit, along with Hanczor, published one such study in 1994

regarding the tarnished image of Tonya Harding, the figure skater who was better known

for an attack against Nancy Kerrigan, her chief rival, than for her Olympic skating

performance. Earlier, in 1984, Nelson had completed another such study analyzing the

defensive discourse of women's tennis star Billie Jean King for her affair with her former

female secretary.

The most influential study in this arena was completed by Kruse (1981). Kruse

determined that, for a situation to be considered apologetic, it must meet three criteria.

First, it must feature an ethical charge of wrongdoing. Second, it requires the cleansing

of reputation to be the primary motive for response. Lastly, it must be delivered by the

self, in defense of self. (Heath, 2001, p. 102).

Kruse, in her examination of defense of team sport, concluded that *apologia* of sports figures do not differ strategically from the other character defenses (Benoit and Hanczor, 1994, p. 416). According to Benoit and Hanczor, Kruse's identification of bolstering and expressions of regret or remorse are recurrent themes in the analysis of sports figures and apologia. This is a relevant point in this study because, although not focused on athletes, the study does involve the restoration of images for organizations and individuals alike.

In summary, this review of literature has had five purposes. First, it placed the topic of image restoration in a historical context. Additionally, it assessed and demonstrated the value of previous studies, it justified this research on the topic by demonstrating that image restoration has been more descriptive than prescriptive, and it provided a thorough theoretical framework for the study, rooted in rhetorical approaches and social sciences. Lastly, through examination of previous studies, the researcher was aided in the selection and design of the methodological procedures which are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Research Questions

Because there has been a dearth of research conducted in the area of prescriptive image restoration tactics, research questions are most appropriate for this study. From the above review of literature, the following arose:

RQ1: In dealing with the Air Force Academy sexual assault scandal, did the Air Force employ any image restoration tactics espoused by Benoit? If so, which specific tactics were employed?

RQ2: Is a proactive or reactive approach by the Air Force more effective in securing a positive or balanced news story?

RQ3: What is the relationship between story balance and issue stage?

RQ4: What were the most effective sources used by the Air Force to garner positive images in independent news stories?

R5: Which tactics, or combination of tactics, were most successful in securing a positive image of the Air Force in the media during the crisis?

RQ6: Which factors affect story balance?

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study identifies the specific image restoration strategies in media releases as created and distributed by the U.S. Air Force relating to a series of sexual assaults in 2002 at the U.S. Air Force Academy, as defined in the context of Benoit's Image Restoration Theory.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is two-fold. First, it will determine which image restoration strategies, if any, were employed by the U.S. Air Force during a particular crisis situation – specifically, a period of time in which sexual assaults against female cadets enrolled at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., were alleged to have been committed, and in which senior Air Force leaders were removed from command and ultimately the service itself for failure to "exercise the degree of leadership in this situation that is expected of commanders" (Air Force Print News, July 11, 2003). Its second –and primary – objective is to establish whether specific image restoration tactics were effective in encouraging positive reporting trends and discouraging negative ones in independent newspapers.

Additionally, a secondary research goal is to analyze independent media coverage of the scandal – more specifically, stories appearing in large metropolitan daily newspapers. This analysis will determine whether the independent media coverage casts the Air Force Academy and its leadership in a positive or negative light – essentially

measuring the effectiveness of tactics comprising Benoit's Image Restoration Theory as applied in this particular situation by the U.S. Air Force. Combined, these analyses will demonstrate that Benoit's Image Restoration Theory can be prescriptive rather than simply descriptive (as opposed to what was noted in the review of literature) with the ultimate intent of the study being a determination of how independent media reacts to the image restoration strategies employed proactively or reactively by the U.S. Air Force.

The study scientifically demonstrates which tactics worked best for the Air Force in this specific situation, and which were not effective. Such information establishes a baseline of effective tactics which may be used by public relations practitioners in assessing which tactics are appropriate for a given situation and which ones will likely be ineffective.

Method of Study

Given the scarcity of research examining a prescriptive rather than descriptive nature of image restoration theory, a formal, descriptive method was most appropriate for this study. The nature of a research situation such as this lends itself to a limited selection of methodology which may be used to successfully complete the study. Thus, this research will use content analysis methodology to examine news releases composed by the U.S. Air Force regarding the 2002-2003 sexual assault scandal at its Air Force Academy, as well as resulting stories as printed in major local and national newspapers independently covering the events as they unfolded. The Air Force's news releases and articles will be coded for recurring themes, and patterns from the various texts will be identified.

Content analysis is not only a research method, but also a research concept, with varying definitions of the subjects. While Stempel (2003) noted that content analysis is a quantitative technique that seeks to draw conclusions from observations of content, Walizer and Wienir (1978) defined it as a systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information.

Krippendorf (1980), who successfully justified the importance of descriptive aims in content analysis studies, defines content analysis as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context, and Kerlinger (2000) defined it as a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. Finally, Stacks (2002) called it "a systematic, objective, and quantitative method for researching messages" (p. 107).

The method is "viewed as an objective and neutral way of obtaining a quantitative description of the content of various forms of communications: thus, counting the mention of specific items was important" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 117). Clearly, these researchers definitively place content analysis on the side of quantitative methods.

Although widely recognized as a quantitative research method, some researchers note that content analysis also encompasses aspects of qualitative research. This study takes both a quantitative and qualitative approach to content analysis, with nominal level data and subjective data required for the analysis.

Content analysis is "a quantitatively-oriented technique by which standardized measurements are applied to metrically defined units and these are used to characterize and compare documents" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 464). Stacks (2002) noted that "it is an informal method in that the data it operates on are basically qualitative-deriving,

from responses to open-ended questions or from observing certain messages in the media" (p. 107). Continuing, he noted that content analysis allows the researcher to "look at qualitative data in a quantitative manner."

Researchers can use less formal methods to gather and evaluate data, which is then categorized and quantified, allowing for qualitative interpretation, and thus may be considered both qualitative and quantitative.

To demonstrate this concept, a content analysis may be conducted by analyzing two distinct types of content - latent or manifest. Stacks defines manifest content as the more quantitative of the types; in fact, it is "what one actually sees and counts" (Stacks, 2002, p. 109). He continues to define manifest content as "the actual word, phrase, character, item, or space or time measure counted."

Latent content, on the other hand, is more qualitative. Stacks notes that latent content "deals with the underlying or deeper meanings of the message" (Stacks, 2002, p. 109). By its very nature, latent content is thematic, and therefore less quantifiable. Wilke (2003) posited that, "while manifest content deals with meaning found on the surface, latent analysis runs deeper into the thematic realm" (P. 54). Stacks notes that "these themes become what is measured; but because they are attitudinal in nature, they are typically more difficult to count and must be measured via some scale or other measurement system" (Stacks, 2002, p. 109).

Although latent content does provide insight into "the value of the communication or message under study," (Stacks, 2002, p. 109), content of this type remains open to criticism of validity because it is largely subjective and susceptible to researcher bias. In

this study, both latent and manifest content are analyzed in order to lend credibility to its findings.

As Marshall and Rossman (1999) note, content analysis is viewed by social science researchers as a method for describing and interpreting "the artifacts of a society of social group" (p. 117). As a unique branch of the military, with its own language, traditions, customs, and rank structure, the U.S. Air Force qualifies in terms of this research as a distinct social group. Further, as Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that material for a content analysis can be "any form of communication, usually written materials" (p. 117), content analysis remains the most appropriate method to conduct this research, and the coding in this study encompasses both manifest and latent content – quantitative and qualitative.

There are several excellent reasons why content analysis is the appropriate research method for this study. First, its popularity among researchers and students can be attributed to its versatility, as it can be used to analyze any type of media, including news releases, newspapers, magazines, internet sites, radio broadcasts, and video content – virtually any form of communication.

Additionally, according to Wilke (2002), "One of the greatest strengths of content analysis is that it is non-reactive and unobtrusive," (p. 52). Thus, data is collected with no disruption to the subject, while other research variables such as timeframe are left to the discretion of the researcher with no impact to the study. Lastly, the procedure may be described clearly, and it results easily replicated and verifiable.

Conversely, content analysis also entails researcher interpretation, which, as noted earlier, exposes it to criticism of possible researcher bias. Additionally, this method of

research is also subject to errors in data interpretation; incorrect sampling; generalization; and inter-coder reliability, calling its validity into question. Denzin and Lincoln note that certain ideas may only be conveyed "in the textual arrangement of narrative, descriptions, and tropes" (1994, p. 267), which explains how a content analysis may be "unable to capture the context within which a written text has meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 464). However, the application of sound scientific research methods - such as measuring inter-coder reliability with Holsti's (1969) formula, and establishing valid, sufficient sample sizes - effectively dispels such criticisms.

Universe of Study

To maintain validity, this research requires a well-defined universe from which to select its content. For the first analysis, news releases from the U.S. Air Force itself regarding the events are deemed by the researcher as most appropriate. News releases about the sexual assaults and their impact on the military that were written solely by U.S. Air Force or Department of Defense personnel are displayed on the Air Force's internet newswire service, AFLINK (www.af.mil), and are appropriate research material, as AFLINK is the main source of non-queried information for journalists and the public. A finite number of news releases will be gathered from this site for the first phase of the analysis. The timeframe for material selection from AFLINK for inclusion in the study will exactly match the timeframe for material selection for the independently-produced newspaper stories: February – May 2003.

The events at the Air Force Academy occurred in the fall of 2002, but did not become public news until early in 2003, when the story was first broken by a Colorado

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Springs television news affiliate. The story was immediately picked up by local

newspapers such as the *Denver Post* and the *Colorado Springs Gazette*.

Immediately, the story grew and garnered more national media attention,

culminating with the dismissal of several senior leaders from the Academy in the spring,

and U.S. Senate hearings in the summer. Because interest in the story waxed and waned

through various time periods (spring was much busier than summer, when school was not

in session) and venues, (local and national television, national magazines, local and

national newspapers all covered the story to varying degrees) it would be difficult to

make a valid comparison and analysis of the material had the researcher chosen to

include all available material.

As such, the time period that the researcher chose for inclusion of materials for

the study was the initial first four months of the scandal – February, March, April and

May 2003. These four months were by far the busiest timeframe of the scandal, and

included the initial breaking of the story, responses from the President of the United

States, members of Congress, Air Force and Academy leaders, cadets, relatives, alumni,

faculty and staff, civilian assault/rape counselors, local law enforcement, and Colorado

civic leaders. Additionally, the corrective actions taken by the organization and the

removal of the Academy's four senior leaders garnered more media attention that any

other timeframe for the scandal.

Accordingly, it is appropriate that all media releases produced by the Air Force

and posted to the site during this timeframe will be gathered for inclusion in the study.

Additionally, the universe for this study will include newspaper articles

researched and written by independent reporters from large daily metropolitan

newspapers during the same timeframe (February – May 2003). The researcher chose

this medium for several reasons. First, there is a large, sufficient amount of articles about

the subject available to be analyzed. Second, the printed medium is readily available for

analysis and remains a more tangible public record than a broadcast or spoken word.

Though it may be possible to secure transcripts of the various electronic

newscasts, there would be virtually no way to account for how many stories had been

produced because accountability of broadcasting archives are poorer than accountability

of newspapers, which have excellent archives and morgues. Also, when dealing with

electronic media, it is very difficult to ascertain the size of the viewing audience, which

varies much more than the average daily readership of a large metropolitan newspaper.

Newspaper readership, on the other hand, has a well-established census.

Further, since most newspapers adhere to a particular standard of reporting known

as "Associated Press Style," the stories lend themselves easily to comparison. The

format is nearly identical in each, whereas in broadcast journalism, a less-formal format

is in evidence at the local television news affiliate level. Different broadcasting formats

and reporting styles do not lend themselves to comparison as well as printed newspaper

stories.

Lastly, the newspaper format allows for easy transmittal to national wire services

such as Associated Press, Knight-Ridder, or Reuters, and can be run world-wide, whereas

broadcast stories that get picked up tend to be rewritten and rebroadcast at a national

level by national-level anchors and reporters. In other words, newspaper reporters tend to

maintain a constant "beat" and act as the single voice for their publication, following a

story through its progression, while television news formats often switch reporters,

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changing to more senior broadcasters as the story becomes larger and gains more exposure.

In general, individual broadcasters do not follow specific stories as long as their newspaper counterparts. It is factual and well-recognized that electronic newscasts are not as consistent as newspapers with matching and maintaining individual reporters for specific stories.

As such, newspapers stories were the chosen format for analysis of this research. To maintain consistency, the newspapers considered for this research were all metropolitan daily newspapers.

Newspaper Selection

Because the Air Force Academy is such a large institution, comprised of more than 4,000 cadets representing all 50 U.S. States, more than 1,500 faculty and staff members, and a large budget of federal tax dollars, the story has national news appeal. It is easy to determine that local newspapers be included in the universe of this study - particularly the *Colorado Springs Gazette* and the *Denver Post*, which have covered the story more than most other media and are the largest metropolitan daily newspapers geographically-located nearest the Academy itself. The six newspaper sources for the 208 media stories were the *Denver Post*, *Rocky Mountain News*, *Colorado Springs Gazette*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*.

Initially, the researcher intended to use only stories from the top ten daily metropolitan newspapers according to circulation as defined by *Editor and Publisher.*

Table 2. Top Ten Newspapers in the US by Weekday Daily Circulation.

1. USA Today	2,616,824
2. Wall Street Journal	2,091,062
3. New York Times	1,676,885
4. Los Angeles Times	1,379,258
5. Washington Post	1,029,966
6. Chicago Tribune	1,002,166
7. New York Daily News	805,350
8. Dallas Morning News	785,876
9. Philadelphia Inquirer	749,793
10. Houston Chronicle	747,404

Source - *Editor and Publisher*, February 2006

While most of the top 10 major metropolitan newspapers did cover the story, the vast majority of the printed stories in these newspapers were wire service stories reprinted from wire services such as Associated Press, Reuters, and Knight-Ridder. Thus the researchers determined that the six newspapers were better suited to be included in the study because they were by far the newspapers which covered the scandal most extensively and allowed the greatest amount of material to be collected for the most thorough analysis.

As could be reasonably expected, the major Colorado daily newspapers by far had the most coverage of the scandal. The *Denver Post, Rocky Mountain News*, and *Colorado Springs Gazette* all had numerous stories on the subject during the selected timeframe. Exact frequencies are shown in Chapter Four.

Additionally, *USA Today* proved to be a valuable source for stories, as did the *Washington Post*, which had a beat reporter specifically dedicated to the story, and the

New York Times, which reported each development and also had a team of beat reporters

consistently covering the story.

Table 3. Newspapers included in study, by weekday daily circulation.

1. USA Today	2,616,824
2. New York Times	1,676,885
3. Washington Post	1,029,966
4. Denver Post	286,197
5. Rocky Mountain News	286,004
6. Colorado Springs Gazette	102,036

Source - *Editor and Publisher*, February 2006

Sampling Methodology

The LexisNexis search engine database (http://lexis-nexis.com) was the sole

source used to gather news stories. LexisNexis was chosen as the search engine because

this database is renowned throughout the academic world as reliable, extensive, up-to-

date, and technologically-capable of providing multiple sources of news and media

coverage.

This guided news search in LexisNexis required five distinct steps. To compile

the sample, all five steps were separately completed.

Step one was to select the news category – of the several distinct categories

available, *U.S. News* was most appropriate, and it was selected. Next, the news sources

had to be selected by state, so the appropriate home states of the six selected newspapers

were chosen for each instance. New York was chosen for the *New York Times*, Virginia

for *USA Today*, Colorado for the *Denver Post*, *Colorado Springs Gazette*, and *Rocky*

Mountain News, and D.C. for *The Washington Post*. Step three consisted of choosing a

specific news source from each state, i.e. one search was conducted in the Colorado

section for the *Denver Post*, a second individual search conducted in the same section for

the *Rocky Mountain News*, and a third separate search was accomplished for articles from

the *Colorado Springs Gazette*. Step four was the listing of the search terms. For this, the

researcher limited the search to articles containing the words "Air Force Academy Sexual

Assault Scandal." Lastly, step five was identifying the date range: February – May 2003.

To maintain research integrity, certain types of newspaper stories which were

found by the search engine were omitted, including editorials, letters to the editor, and

stories very loosely related which contained no more than a single passing reference to

the Air Force scandal. For example, a sexual assault scandal which broke at nearby

University of Colorado generated many news releases that also made reference to the Air

Force Academy assaults, but the Academy was clearly not the focus of the story, nor

were assaults which occurred there. If the story made only a mention or reference to the

Academy situation, it was not included.

Article Selection

The study included every available news article in which the focus of the story

was the Air Force Academy Sexual Assault Scandal from a given source for the given

timeframe, with the exceptions listed above. In all, 208 stories from six different major

metropolitan daily newspapers were found meeting this criteria.

Thus, the total amount of stories coded was 208 which had value for the analysis, and 20 Air Force-produced news stories were analyzed. In total, 228 products were coded.

Unit of Analysis

Each single, complete news release or story served as the unit of analysis for this study. Each product was analyzed and nominal level data collected in multiple categories: military or media product, month of publication, length of story in words, placement of story (front page, metro section, etc), sources of quotes, and whether the story was proactive or reactive. A complete copy of the code sheet can be found at Appendix A.

Analysis Methodology

Along with the nominal data, each Air Force product was analyzed by trained coders to determine which image restoration tactic was employed by the Air Force in the specific release or story. Table 2 in Appendix A contains the definitions of the five major image restoration strategies, including the 12 various subcategories. Although not considered mutually exclusive, Table 2 is exhaustive and reliable. The Air Force may employ more than one tactic – therefore, it cannot be mutually exclusive. The list is exhaustive in that it includes all categories as currently defined by Benoit's Image Restoration Strategy (Benoit, 1995). Lastly, the taxonomy is reliable and supported by prior research (Rosenfield (1968), Ware & Linkugel (1973), Burke (1982), and Ryan (1982).

Additionally, each independent news release was examined by trained coders to determine its thematic interpretation – positive, negative, or balanced. Table 3 in Appendix A contains the definitions coders will use to classify a story as positive, negative or balanced.

Coder Selection

As a guard against personal bias of a coder, two coders were used. Coder One (the researcher) reviewed all stories and releases in the study. Each article was analyzed and coded independently. Appendix A is a copy of the code sheet used.

Additionally, to eliminate personal bias and to ensure validity of the coding, a second trained coder was utilized for this research. The second coder analyzed 22.36 percent of the independently-produced newspaper stories for each phase, and 33.3 percent of the news releases – the Air Force-produced material.

Table 4. Inter-Coder Statistics.

Coder	Number Releases Coded	Percent Releases Coded	Number Stories Coded	Percent of Stories Coded
Coder One	20	100	208	100
Coder Two	6	33.3	45	22.36

The number of Air Force-produced releases that were coded by the second coder was 6 out of twenty – a 30% rate. Additionally, the second coder analyzed 45 independent media stories – a 21.6% rate. Together, Coder Two analyzed 22.36% of all products in the study.   As each news release/story/article is numbered in ascending order,

the products analyzed by the second coder were selected by a third, independent person

through a random number selection, one through 20 for Air Force produced stories, and

21 through 228 for independent media stories. Both coders were graduate students; one

specialized in public relations while the other specialized in advertising. Both were fully

conversant with public relations academic literature. The results are described fully in

Chapter Four.

Inter-Coder Reliability

To further ensure the reliability of coding analysis and inter-coder reliability,

Holsti's formula (1969) was used to produce a coefficient of reliability of .88. Although

the resulting coefficient is within acceptable scientific levels, (>.80), Holsti's method is

sometimes criticized because the possibility exists that coder agreement may occur "by

chance – an amount that is a function of the number of categories in the analysis" (p.

157). As such, Scott's (1955) *Pi* could be applied in this instance as a second method of

addressing inter-coder reliability.

However, the researcher determined that with the high number of choices required

from the coders in analyzing the subjective data, a calculation of *Pi* is not necessary or

prudent. This is because coders were asked to identify which of 15 tactics, if any, were

present in the release/story. Coders could have identified the use of all 15 tactics in a

given story, or none, or any combination of the 15 available tactics. Essentially,

thousands of combinations of tactics exist in each analysis. Therefore, with thousands of

possibilities to choose from, the likelihood of coder agreement strictly by chance is

minimal. As such, Holsti's formula is sufficient in determining inter-coder reliability.

Disagreement among the work of the two coders did initially exist. When Holsti's formula was first applied, a low coefficient was produced which indicated poor reliability between the two coders. However, after analysis of the data by an independent third party, it was found that the two coders had each defined a key variable differently (yet each consistently,) resulting in the low coefficient. After discussion and clarification among the coders, it was determined that a particular tactic - provocation - had been consistently defined and coded differently by each coder. The traits which one defined as "provocation" were defined by the other as "corrective action." Once the definition was clarified between the two coders, the differences were reconciled and the coefficient of agreement rose substantially to a scientifically-acceptable level of .88.

Data Collection

Once the coding of all 228 products was complete, the data was transferred to a spreadsheet in *Microsoft Excel*.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies) were utilized to tabulate results of closed-ended, nominal data. Cross-tabulations were used to analyze the remaining data.

The *Excel* spreadsheet was analyzed by the computer program *SPSS* (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), which performed frequencies and cross-tabulations in the following areas: military or media product; month of publication; length of story; placement of story in newspaper; newspaper source; whether the story reflected the Air Force positively, negatively, or in a balanced light; sources cited in the story; whether Air Force was proactive or reactive with the story, determine main subject of criticism or attack for the story; identify which tactics were used by the Air Force in their own

products; and identify which tactics were used by the Air Force to defend themselves in

newspaper stories. The results of the analyses are explicated in Chapter Four in narrative

form, with tables illustrating categorical comparisons.

Chapter Four: Results of Data Analysis

The purpose of this study has been to advance (or reinforce) current Image Restoration Theory by determining whether specific image restoration tactics encourage a positive or negative reporting trend from independent newspapers, and to determine the effectiveness of tactics comprising Benoit's Image Restoration Theory as applied in this particular situation by the U.S. Air Force. The following research questions were tested:

RQ1: In dealing with the Air Force Academy sexual assault scandal, did the Air Force employ any image restoration tactics espoused by Benoit? If so, which specific tactics were employed?

RQ2: Is a proactive or reactive approach by the Air Force more effective in securing a positive or balanced news story?

RQ3: What is the relationship between story balance and issue stage?

RQ4: What were the most effective sources used by the Air Force to garner positive images in independent news stories?

RQ5: Which tactics, or combination of tactics, were most successful in securing a positive image of the Air Force in the media during the crisis?

RQ6: Which factors affect story balance?

This chapter initially offers demographics and frequencies, and will then expand to include cross-tabulations to demonstrate the relationships between each individual variable.

Descriptive Statistics

In total, 228 products were coded and analyzed. The first 20 products analyzed were news releases produced directly by the Air Force, with the remaining 208 being newspaper stories as described in Chapter Three.

The Air Force's products equaled 8.8 percent of the study, while the independent newspaper stories accounted for 91.2 percent.

Table 5 – Source of Coding Materials.

Source	Number	Percent
Military Releases	20	8.8
Newspaper Stories	208	91.2

Volume of Stories

The second frequency examined was the number of stories produced in each of four months – February, March, April and May of 2003. The data showed that the month of March produced the most stories, with April being the second busiest production month.

Table 6 – Frequencies of Production Month.

Month	Number	Percent
February	36	15.8
March	97	42.5
April	61	26.8
May	34	14.9

This pattern demonstrates that in this particular sustained crisis, the majority of media stories arrived mid-crisis, a fact useful in answering **RQ 4**. -- In which phase of a sustained crisis – early, middle, or late – is it best for an organization to communicate to its target audience?

Length of Story

The third frequency analyzed was length of story.

Table 7. Frequencies of Story Lengths.

No. of Words	No. of Stories	Percent of Stories
Below 500	81	35.5
500-1000	94	41.2
More than 1000	53	23.2

Of the 228 stories analyzed, 81, or 35.5 percent, contained less than 500 words, according to Lexis-Nexis, which contains an actual word count for each story. By-lines,

datelines, and head lines are not included in these statistics.   Accounting for more than

40 percent of total stories analyzed were stories containing 500 to 1000 words. Lastly,

less than a quarter of items in the study contained more than 1000 words. Thus, stories

on this particular subject were of differing lengths, though most often of intermediate size

– between 500 and 1000 words.

Alone, this information is not in itself compelling. However, its usefulness stems

from the opportunities it provides for cross-tabulations with other measurements, such as

balance of the story as compared to length, or length of story as compared to month of

publication, which may indicate whether stories got longer or shorter throughout the

crisis. Such cross-tabulations were completed and analyzed, and will be discussed later in

this chapter.

Placement

The role of placement of a story in a particular newspaper is directly related to its

visibility. The front page of a newspaper is analogous to the lead story of a television

news broadcast – placement there is directly relative to the level of importance the story

has as decided by the news editor (or producer). There are some differences, however.

With newspapers, more than a single story may be presented on one page, and most

front-page stories are not complete, but "jump" to an interior page for continuation and

completion.

Also, because many major metropolitan newspapers are not tabloid format, they

have multiple front pages – one for each section. Typically, there is a world news

section, followed by the local news section, with varying subsets such as business, arts

and leisure, and sports. Each section provides another opportunity for a story to get "front page" exposure. In terms of garnering visibility, it is better for a story to be placed on the front page of an interior section than to be placed inside the front section, according to the Poynter Institute (*Eyes on the News*, Poynter,1991). Lastly, according to the same Poynter study, stories placed "above the fold" on page one occupy the prime space in any newspaper.

As such, placement of the story is important in message delivery and reception. Placement plays a pivotal role in how many people will actually read the story and receive the messages. Once the frequencies of placement are accomplished, cross-tabulations may be performed with other frequencies such as source of story, balance of story, source of quotes, and actions taken by the Academy, to aid in interpreting the results. The results of such tabulation may aid future public relations practitioners by arming them with the knowledge of how deeply their messages are penetrating a particular market. Such knowledge serves to help practitioners determine the effectiveness of their messages, enabling them to make adjustments to their tactics and strategies.

Source

For this portion of the study, seven sources were used from which stories were collected. These sources were chosen in accordance with the sampling methodology explained in Chapter Three.

The following table shows the sources of the stories, the number of stories originating from each source, and their numbers expressed as a percentage of the overall total number of stories collected for the study.

Table 8. Frequencies of Newspaper Sources.

Newspaper Source	Number/Stories	Percent
Denver Post	73	35.1
Rocky Mountain News	44	21.2
Colorado Springs Gazette	49	23.6
New York Times	23	11.1
Washington Post	11	5.3
USA Today	8	3.8

These figures, when gathered and cross-tabulated with other values from the study, could help a researcher define biases and tendencies on the part of the source – valuable information a public relations practitioner could use in choosing and applying image restoration tactics. Additionally, when cross-tabulated with other variables such as balance of story, (positive, negative, or neutral,) the data can indicate which image restoration strategies are effective, based on whether the tone of the stories for a given source have become more positive in response to applied tactics. This information is extremely useful to public relations practitioners, because it can help shape the message, refine the target audience, and gauge effects.

Table 9. Frequencies of Balance and Sources.

Newspaper Source	Positive	Negative	Balanced
Denver Post	21.9	34.2	43.8
Rocky Mountain News	15.9	27.3	56.8
Colorado Springs Gazette	28.6	28.6	42.9
New York Times	13.0	60.9	26.1
Washington Post	0	54.5	45.5
USA Today	12.5	37.5	50.0

Balance

The sixth demographic examined was balance. Coders examined all 208 non-military stories, assigning each one an overall attribute of positive, negative, or balanced. All stories produced by the Air Force were assigned a code of "99" for the *SPSS* spreadsheet. Though assigning a characteristic attribute to a particular story may seem like a simple step, for the purpose of accurate research it is the most critical. For this research to remain valid, coders must exercise great care and consistency throughout this phase, and inter-coder reliability (described later this chapter) is critical for legitimacy of the research.

Quote Sources

In this section, the coders indicated which sources the authors of each story cited. Here, it is important to note that only one category could be used per person. For example, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force is a General Officer, a senior Air Force leader, parent of an Academy graduate, and Air Force Academy alumnus. Only one box could be selected by the coder to categorize this speaker– coders were instructed to select the single box that best represented the primary role the speaker was in at the time.

Coders decided the primary role the speaker was in while quoted, and coded accordingly. Every quote from every story was analyzed.

The data tabulations for this section were broken down as follows:

Table 10: Frequencies of Quote Sources.

Source of Quotes	Freq	%
Air Force Public Affairs Spokesperson	74	31.9
Air Force Senior Leader (Colonel, General, AF Secretary)	122	52.6
Assault Victim	28	12.1
Other Air Force Member	46	19.9
Current/Former Legislators (Senator, Congressmen, etc.)	104	44.8
Sexual Assault Counselors/Advocates	37	15.9
Civilian (Friend, Relative, Academy Alumni, etc)	45	19.4

This information shows that most of the dialogue for the story consists of quotes between senior Air Force leaders and Congressional legislators, primarily members of Congress from Colorado, as well as members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Victims and sexual assault counselors were the groups least quoted.

Stance

If the product was a newspaper story, coders were asked to indicate whether the story was proactive (initiated by the military) or reactive (military reply/response to media inquiry). Additionally, coders could choose "undetermined."

This information provides valuable insights to the researcher – it demonstrates how frequently the Air Force finds itself in a reactive position, and, once cross-tabulated with quote sources (as shown later in this chapter), it yields valuable information on the correlated rates of success for proactive versus reactive stances.

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The results of the Stance frequency are presented below:

Table 11. Stance.

Stance	Number	Percent
Proactive	86	42.1
Reactive	63	30.9
Undetermined	55	27.0

In this instance, coder agreement was again paramount for study legitimacy. Inter-coder reliability was within the parameters set by the researcher.

Subject of Attack

For each given article, coders were asked to identify the main subject of criticism by the author. Even the positive newspaper stories tended to attack either policy, individuals (usually senior leadership) or the organization (the Academy itself). Coders identified only the main subject of attack, thus there could be only one subject per article.

Table 12. Subject of Attack.

Subject of Attack	Frequency	Percent
Individual	49	24.1
Policy	50	24.6
Organization	46	22.7
None	58	28.6

Coder agreement was again paramount for study legitimacy. Inter-coder reliability was within the parameters set by the researcher.

Image restoration tactics used by military

For the purposes of including all data in one data set for comparative purposes all stories, i.e. news releases and media coverage, were submitted to the same code sheet. In the case of Table 13, all news stories were coded as missing data in order to account for them despite the fact that they were not analyzed for image restoration tactics. As mentioned before of the total of 228 stories submitted for coding, 208 (91.2%) were news coverage of the issue and 20 (8.8%) were releases produced by the military. As a result Table 13 excludes news coverage and only reports only on the news releases issued by the military (n=20).

Table 13: Image Restoration Tactics Employed by Military.

Variable	Yes (%)	No (%)
16. Simple denial – did not perform the act	1 (5)	19 (95)
17. Shifting the blame – act performed by another	2 (10)	18 (90)
18. Provocation – responded to act or action of another	1 (5)	19 (95)
19. Defeasibility – lack of information or ability	8 (40)	12 (60)
20. Accident –act was unintentional mishap	0 (0)	20 (100)
21. Good intentions – meant well in doing the act	0 (0)	20 (100)
22. Bolstering – stress good traits	13 (65)	7 (35)
23. Minimization – act is not very serious	0 (0)	20 (100)
24. Differentiation – act is less offensive than it appears	0 (0)	20 (100)
25. Transcendence – act is negative, but other vital consideration at stake	1 (5)	19 (95)
26. Attack accuser – reduce credibility of accuser	0 (0)	20 (100)
27. Compensation – reimburse victims and affected persons	0 (0)	20 (100)
28. Corrective action – plan in place to solve and prevent reoccurrence	15 (75)	5 (25)
29. Mortification – take responsibility and apologize for action	4 (20)	16 (18)
30. No tactic	0 (0)	20 (100)

The results indicated that the most prevalent image restoration tactics the military used were corrected action (75%), bolstering (65%), defeasibility (40%), and mortification (20%). The tactics least used were shifting the blame (10%), denial (5%), provocation (5%), and transcendence (5%). Tactics not employed at all were accident, good intention, minimization, differentiation, attacking accuser, and compensation.

Image restoration tactics in newspaper stories

Table 14 shows which image restoration tactics appears in newspaper stories. In this table all military news releases were treated as missing data.

Table 14. Image Restoration Tactics in Newspaper Stories.

Variable	Yes (%)	No (%)
31. Simple denial – did not perform the act	12 (5.8)	196 (94.2)
32. Shifting the blame – act performed by another	28 (13.5)	180 (86.5)
33. Provocation – responded to action of another	0 (0)	208 (100)
34. Defeasibility – lack of information or ability	47 (22.6)	161 (77.4)
35. Accident –act was unintentional mishap	1 (0.5)	207 (99.5)
36. Good intentions – meant well in doing the act	0 (0)	208 (100)
37. Bolstering – stress good traits	44 (21.2)	164 (78.8)
38. Minimization – act is not very serious	5 (2.4)	203 (97.6)
39. Differentiation – act is less offensive than appears	1 (.5)	207 (99.5)
40. Transcendence – act is negative, but other vital consideration at stake	12 (5.8)	196 (94.2)
41. Attack accuser – reduce credibility of accuser	4 (1.9)	204 (98.1)
42. Compensation – reimburse victims and affected persons	2 (1.0)	206 (99)
43. Corrective action – plan in place to solve and prevent reoccurrence	81 (38.9)	127 (61.1)
44. Mortification – take responsibility and apologize for action	24 (11.5)	184 (88.5)
45. No tactic (no military comment)	63 (30.3)	145 (69.7)

The results indicated that the most prevalent image restoration tactics found in the newspaper stories were corrective action (38.9%), defeasibility (22.6%), bolstering (21.2%), shifting the blame (13.5%) and mortification (11.5%). The tactics least used were accident (.05%), differentiation (.05%), compensation (1.0%), attack the accuser (1.9%), and minimization (2.4%), transcendence (5.8%) and simple denial (5.8%)

Two tactics not mentioned at all were provocation and good intentions. In 30.3% of news stories, no military comment or tactic was recorded.

Chi Square Correlations

Relationship between story balance and type of attack

To determine the effect of a type of attack on story balance, Variable 6 (Balance) was cross-tabulated with Variable 15 (Attack). The correlation produced a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=6} = 70.848, p < .001$). To determine where the statistical significance was, the expected count for each cell was examined. If a cell offered a count larger than the expected count, the results from that cell were deemed significant.

In the case of positive stories the actual count was lower than the expected count in every case, indicating a lack of significant correlation. In 40% of negative stories an individual would be attacked. In 34.3% of negative stories the organization would be attacked. There was not a statistically significant correlation between negative stories and attacks on policy because the expected count was higher than the actual count. The only statistical significance between balanced stories and attacks were when policy was attacked (30.4%).

Table 15. Statistically Significant Correlations between Balance and Attack.

Type of Attack / Story Balance	% of occurrences where individual, was attacked	% of occurrences where policy was attacked	% of occurrences where an organization was attacked
Positive	--	--	--
Negative	40.0	--	34.3
Balanced	--	30.4	--

Relationship between story balance and stance

To determine the effect of a proactive or reactive approach by the Air Force on story balance, Variable 6 (Balance) was cross-tabulated with Variable 14 (Stance). The correlation produced a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=4}$ =79.722,p<.001). To determine where the statistical significance was, the expected count for each cell was examined. If a cell offered a count larger than the expected count, the results from that cell were deemed significant.

In the case of positive stories the actual count was higher than the expected count in the case of a proactive reaction by the military, indicating a significant correlation. In 90% (n=36) of cases, proactive action yielded a positive story. In 61.1% (n=44) of cases a reactive stance would yield a negative story. Balanced stories were evident in 42.4% (n=39) of proactive actions. In 38.0%(n=35) of cases where no reactive strategy could be determined, stories were also balanced.

Table 16. Statistically Significant Correlations between Balance and Reaction.

Type of Reaction / Story Balance	% of Proactive Cases	% of Reactive Cases	% of Undetermined Cases
Positive	90	--	--
Negative	--	61.1	--
Balanced	42.4	--	38.0

Relationship between story balance and issue stage

To determine the effect of the stage of crisis had on story balance, Variable 6 (Balance) was cross-tabulated with Variable 2 (Month). The correlation produced a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=6}$ =20.978,p<.01).

February and March, the first two months of the crisis, yielded negative stories. Of the stories yielded in February, 20.3% (n=15) were negative. In March, 55.4% (n=41), were negative. In contrast, the only statistically significant results in April and May were between positive story balance and crisis stage with 48.8% (n=20) positive stories in April and 14.6% (n=6) positive stories in May. In April, 28% (n=26) and in May 18.3% (n=17) of the stories appearing were balanced.

Table 17: Significant Correlations between Balance and Issues Phase.

Phase Story Balance	Feb % of cases (n)	March % of cases (n)	April % of cases (n)	May % of cases (n)
Positive	--	--	48.8 (20)	14.6 (6)
Negative	20.3 (15)	55.4 (41)	--	--
Balanced	--	--	28.0 (26)	18.3 (17)

Relationship between story balance and source of quote (PA, Senior leader, etc)

To determine the effect that the source of quotes had on story balance, Variable 6 (Balance) was cross-tabulated with several variables relating to type of spokesperson. There was a statistically significant relationship between story balance and when the victim of assault was quoted. The correlation produced a statistically significant

relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =19.952,p<.001). The expected cell count indicated that in 71.4% of cases (n=20) when the victim was quoted, the story was negative. The story was positive in 22.8% (n=41) and balanced in 47.2% (n=85) of cases when the victim was not quoted.

There was a statistically significant relationship between story balance and when an Air Force member was quoted. The correlation produced a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =6.306,p<.05). To determine where the statistical significance was, the expected count for each cell was examined. If a cell offered a count larger than the expected count, the results from that cell were deemed significant. In 32.6% (n=14) of cases when an Air Force member was quoted, the story was positive. The story was negative in 35.4% (n=58) and balanced in 48.2% (n=79) of cases when an Air Force member was not quoted.

There was a statistically significant relationship between story balance and when a legislator was quoted. The correlation produced a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =20.958,p<.001). In 42.2% (n=43) of cases when a legislator was quoted, the story was negative, and was balanced in 51.0% (n=52) of cases. The story was positive in 32.1% (n=34) of cases when a legislator was not quoted.

There was a statistically significant relationship between story balance and when an advocate for the assaulted was quoted. The correlation produced a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =6.972,p<.05). In 50.0% (n=18) of cases when an advocate was quoted, the story was negative. The story was positive in 22.7% (n=39) and balanced in 44.8% (n=77) of cases when an advocate was not quoted.

Relationship between story balance and newspaper placement

There was a statistically significant relationship between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 7 (Placement of the Story). The correlation produced a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{df=6}$ =13.660,p<.05). In 37.8% (n=28) and 40.5% (n=30) of cases a story was negative when it was placed on the front page or in section 1 of the newspaper, respectively. In 39.0% (n=16) and 41.5% (n=17) stories were positive when they were placed in section A or the local/metro sections, respectively. Stories were balanced in 38.7% (n=36) of cases when they were in the local/metro section.

Relationship between story balance and strategies

There was a statistically significant relationship between Variable 6 (Balance) and variable 34 (Defeasibility) ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =6.974,p<.031). In 48.9% (n=23) of cases, stories were negative when defeasibility was used as a strategy.

There was a statistically significant relationship between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 37 (Bolstering) ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =23.757,p<.001). In 45.5% (n=20) of cases, stories were positive when bolstering was used as a strategy. In 38.9% (n=65) and 47.6% (n=78) of cases, stories were negative or balanced respectively when bolstering was not used.

Additionally, a statistically significant relationship was found between story balance and mortification as a strategy ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =9.107, p<.05). In this instance, mortification produced 25.0% (n=6) of positive stories and 58.3% (n=14) of negative stories. When mortification was not used, it produced a balanced story in 48.4% (n=89) of cases.

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Another statistically significant relationship was found between story balance and no tactics as a strategy ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =10.427, p<.01). In this instance, using no discernable tactic produced a balanced story in 60.3% (n=38) of cases. This indicates that strategy - an organization being proactive in defense of itself – does influence the outcome (balance) of newspaper stories.

Relationship between story balance and tactics

Cross-tabulation between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variables 16-30, all tactics employed by the Air Force in their news releases, revealed no statistically significant relationships. Due to the small amount of news releases produced by the Air Force for the universe of the study (n=20), a correlation between the news releases and the news articles could not be run because there is no way to discern which releases resulted in which specific news reports. This is a limitation of the study that will be further explicated in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the image restoration strategies employed by the U.S. Air Force during a crisis situation. The crisis related to a time in which sexual assaults against female cadets enrolled at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., were alleged to have been committed. As a result, senior Air Force leaders were removed from their command and the service itself for failure to "exercise the degree of leadership in this situation that is expected of commanders" (Air Force Print News, July 11, 2003).

The second objective of this study was to advance current image restoration theory by determining whether specific image restoration tactics encourage a positive or negative reporting trend from independent newspapers, thus determining the outcomes of tactics proposed in Benoit's Image Restoration Theory as applied in this particular situation.

The study also aimed to determine whether independent media reacted positively or negatively to the image restoration strategies employed in a particular situation.

Research Questions and Findings

As mentioned, six research questions were posed. Each research question will be discussed in numerical order.

It is important to note again that when the researcher refers to positive, negative, or balanced outcomes and stories, it is in terms of the perspective of the U.S. Air Force.

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RQ1: In dealing with the Air Force Academy sexual assault scandal, did the Air Force employ any image restoration tactics espoused by Benoit? If so, which specific tactics were employed?

The research result indicated that the US Air Force employed several of the image restoration techniques found in Benoit's taxonomy. It specifically identified those image restoration techniques which were used, how frequently each was used, and whether the effect was positive or negative.

The most prevalent image restoration tactics the military used were: 75% - corrective action (has a plan in place to solve and prevent action from reoccurring); 65% - bolstering (stressing good traits only); 40% - defeasibility (lack of information or ability); and 20% - mortification (take full responsibility and apologize for action).

The tactics least used were 10% - shifting the blame (act was performed by another, not us), 5% - denial (did not perform the act at all), 5% - provocation (responded to act or action of another,) and 5% - transcendence (act is negative, and they did it, but vital considerations are at stake).

Tactics not employed at all were accident – act was unintentional; good intention – meant well in doing the act; minimization – the act is not serious or wrong; differentiation – act is much less offensive than it appears; attacking accuser – reduce the credibility of the accuser; and compensation – reimburse affected persons.

Chi Square correlations between story balance and type of image restoration strategy yielded several statistically significant relationships. There was a statistically significant relationship between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 34 (Defeasibility)

$(\chi^2_{df=2} =6.974, p<.031)$. In 48.9% of cases, stories were negative when defeasibility was used as a strategy.

There was also a statistically significant relationship between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 37 (Bolstering) $(\chi^2_{df=2} =23.757, p<.001)$. In 45.5% of cases, stories were positive when bolstering was used as a strategy. In 38.9% and 47.6% of cases, stories were negative or balanced, respectively, when bolstering was not used.

Another statistically significant relationship was found between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 44 (Mortification) as a strategy $(\chi^2_{df=2} =9.107, p<.05)$. In this instance, mortification produced 25.0% of positive stories and 58.3% of negative stories. When mortification was not used, it produced a balanced story in 48.4% of cases.

Another statistically significant relationship was found between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 45 (No tactics used) $(\chi^2_{df=2} =10.427, p<.01)$. In this instance, using no discernable tactic produced a balanced story in 60.3% of cases.

RQ2: Is a proactive or reactive approach by the Air Force more effective in securing a positive or balanced news story?

The study confirmed prior research (Benoit, 1995a) that indicated a proactive approach by an organization in employing image restoration tactics is more effective in securing a positive or balanced news story than a reactive approach.

A Chi Square correlation was performed on two variables – Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 14 (Stance). As defined earlier, stance indicates whether the organization acted proactively, reactively, or undetermined, as interpreted by trained coders. The correlation revealed that in 90.0 % of cases (n=36), when the organization was proactive, the story was positive. Cross-tabulation also revealed that in 61.1 % of cases (n=44), the

stories were negative when the organization was found to be reactive. Additionally, in

42.4 % of cases (n=39), the story was balanced when the organization was proactive.

RQ3: What is the relationship between story balance and issue stage?

Research in this study indicated a strong correlation between story balance (found

in news reports) and issue stage. Issue stage, as it relates to this study, can be defined as

the point in the crisis that a particular action is taken – early, middle, or late. As described

earlier, the universe of this study is limited to the months of February, March, April and

May of 2003. Frequencies demonstrated that at the earliest stage of the crisis, when very

few image restoration techniques were being applied, the stories were mostly negative.

Cross tabulations produced a statistically significant correlation between two

variables – Variable 6 (Balance) was cross-tabulated with Variable 2 (Month) ($\chi^2_{df=6}$

=20.978,p<.01). The earliest stage of the crisis yielded primarily negative stories, while

later stages, after image restoration techniques were applied, yielded more positive and

balanced news stories.

February and March, the first two months of the crisis, yielded negative stories.

Of the stories yielded in February, 20.3% (n=15) were negative. In March, 55.4%

(n=41), were negative. In contrast, the statistically significant results in April and May

were between positive story balance and crisis stage with 48.8% (n=20) positive stories in

April and 14.6% (n=6) positive stories in May. In April, 28% (n=26) and in May 18.3%

(n=17) of the stories appearing were balanced.

Additionally, 57.3% of stories were produced in the first two months, February

and March, the first half of the crisis period. Only 41.7% of the total number of stories

from the defined universe were produced in the final two months (April and May), the last half of the crisis period.

These statistics demonstrate the validity of timely application of image restoration techniques. For example, the Air Force was late to engage the media on this topic, thereby resulting in more negative stories at the beginning of the crisis. Once the Air Force did engage the media more actively, the crisis was already at a high point of media saturation, making it more difficult to get their key messages out into the media, or more importantly, to get their side in print and into the public's mind for consideration.

In the initial stages of the crisis (February), the Air Force took little action to defend itself, thus, most of the stories were negative. As the story gained momentum (March and April), and more negative stories appeared, the Air Force was prompted into action (response). Thus, stories became more balanced. As the story waned (May), the Air Force was able to get its message heard, and stories became more balanced, and even positive in some cases.

Although specifically applicable only in this case, this data is generalizable to public relations practitioners. It demonstrates that the earlier an organization rises to defend itself, the better chances it has in minimizing damage to its reputation.

RQ4: What were the most effective sources used by the Air Force to garner positive images in independent news stories?

This study yielded conclusive results regarding the most effective quoted sources to garner positive images in the news media. Chi Square correlations between story balance and source of quote were conducted, and a statistically significant correlation was found between several of those variables.

One such correlation was found between story balance and a victim of sexual assault being quoted. The correlation showed that in 71.4% of cases when a victim of assault was quoted, the story was negative. The story was positive in 22.8% and balanced in 47.2% of cases when the victim was not quoted.

Additionally, there was a statistically significant relationship between story balance and an Air Force member being quoted ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =6.306,p<.05). In 32.6% of cases when an Air Force member was quoted, the story was positive. The story was negative in 35.4% and balanced in 48.2% of cases when an Air Force member was not quoted. Thus, from an Air Force perspective, it was significantly better for the organization to be quoted by one of its own members than not in terms of positive or balanced news coverage. This demonstrates high levels of involvement and accountability.

There was also a statistically significant relationship between story balance and when an elected legislator was quoted ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =20.958,p<.001). In 42.2% of cases when a legislator was quoted, the story was negative, and it was balanced in 51.0% of those cases. The story was positive in 32.1% of cases when an elected legislator was not quoted.

Another statistically significant relationship was found between story balance and when an advocate for the assaulted was quoted ($\chi^2_{df=2}$ =6.972,p<.05). In 50.0% of cases when an advocate was quoted, the story was negative. The story was positive in 22.7% and balanced in 44.8% of cases when an advocate was not quoted.

These statistically significant relationships demonstrate that it is overwhelmingly better to have someone from the organization in crisis speak than to have no speak at all, if the goal is to gain positive or balanced news coverage.

RQ5: Which tactics, or combination of tactics, were most successful in securing a positive image of the Air Force in the media during the crisis?

Despite no dearth of descriptive statistics coded in the study, no statistically significant relationship were found between the variables of Air Force image restoration tactics and story balance. This was due to the finite number of releases produced by the Air Force in the universe of this study (n=20). There were simply too few releases in each category of image restoration techniques.

It was also not possible to run a correlation between image restoration tactics used and image restoration tactics reported on because it was impossible to determine what story coverage resulted from specific news releases. However, closer investigation of the frequencies show that 12 of the 14 image restoration tactics Benoit describes in his taxonomy do appear in the newspaper stories covering the crisis.

The most prevalent image restoration tactics found in the newspaper stories were corrective action (38.9%), defeasibility (22.6%), bolstering (21.2%), shifting the blame (13.5%) and mortification (11.5%). The tactics least used were accident (.05%), differentiation (.05%), compensation (1.0%), attack the accuser (1.9%), and minimization (2.4%), transcendence (5.8%) and simple denial (5.8%), while two tactics – good intentions and provocation – were not used at all.

Table 18. Tactics Found in Newspaper Stories, in Descending Order.

Tactic	n (%)
Corrective action – plan in place to solve and prevent reoccurrence	81 (38.9)
Defeasibility – lack of information or ability	47 (22.6)
Bolstering – stress good traits	44 (21.2)
Shifting the blame – act performed by another	28 (13.5)
Mortification – take responsibility and apologize for action	24 (11.5)
Simple denial – did not perform the act	12 (5.8)
Transcendence – act is negative, but other vital considerations at stake	12 (5.8)
Minimization – act is not very serious	5 (2.4)
Attack accuser – reduce credibility of accuser	4 (1.9)
Compensation – reimburse victims	2 (1.0)
Differentiation – act is less offensive than appears	1 (.5)
Accident –act was unintentional mishap	1 (.5)
Provocation – responded to action of another	0 (0)
Good intentions – meant well in doing the act	0 (0)

RQ6: Which factors affect story balance?

Several factors have been shown through this study to affect story balance, including stance (proactive or reactive), source of message from organization (spokesperson, senior leader, member of organization), issue stage (how early in the crisis the organization responds), and tactics used by an organization in defense of itself.

Other factors that were examined for correlations to story balance in this study include newspaper story placement (front page, inside, local section,); type of attack by newspaper, i.e. which source was attacked – an individual in the organization, a policy of the organization, or the overall organization itself; and length of story, as relating to word count per story.

As discussed in Chapter Four, there was a statistically significant relationship

between Variable 6 (Balance) and Variable 7 (Story Placement). In 37.8% (n=28) and

40.5% (n=30) of cases, a story was negative when it was placed on the front page or in

section 1 of the newspaper, respectively. In 39.0% (n=16) and 41.5% (n=17) stories were

positive when they were placed in section A or the local/metro sections, respectively.

Stories were balanced in 38.7% (n=36) of cases when they were in the local/metro

section.

In the case of positive stories the actual count was lower than the expected count

in every case, indicating a lack of significant correlation. In 40% of negative stories an

individual would be attacked. In 34.3% of negative stories the organization would be

attacked. There was not a statistically significant correlation between negative stories

and attacks on policy because the expected count was higher than the actual count. The

only statistical significance between balanced stories and attacks were when policy was

attacked (30.4%).

Lastly, Chi Square correlations found no statistically significant relationship

between story balance and length of story (word count.)

Chapter Six: Conclusions

Image restoration theory is an important area of research with many implications for both mass communications and public relations. As the economies of the world continue to globalize, and with world-wide communication happening in real time, companies and organizations realize that communication to a variety of publics is critical to thrive and survive.

At no time is communication more important for an organization than in time of crisis. The subject of crisis communication is well-researched and plentiful – so much so that most public relations practitioners are well-versed in seeing exactly how an organization's reputation can be damaged before it actually happens. Indeed, public relations managers can usually predict with great accuracy, very early in a developing crisis, how an organization will ultimately be impacted on several fronts by that very crisis. Each front, however, can in almost all cases lead back to a single issue – reputation.

Implications for Public Relations

In the review of literature for this study, researchers all agreed that corporate apologia was descriptive, but many argued whether or not it could also be prescriptive.

Building on Benoit's image restoration theory, this study attempted to further theory-driven public relations research by taking a methodological approach towards establishing prescriptive measures for use by practitioners of image restoration. It is

important to note that while the results of this study are only generalizable to this specific case, the implications are broad for image restoration theory, and deserve further study.

Six research questions were posed in this study. Each research question has been answered in chapters 4 and 5. From those questions and their respective answers, five main findings arose. They are identified and extrapolated below.

First Finding: The Air Force did use several of Benoit's Image Restoration Tactics, including corrective action, bolstering, defeasibility, mortification, shifting the blame, denial, provocation and transcendence.

Largely self-explanatory, this is important because it demonstrates a classic case of how an organization in crisis reacts. Whether cognizant or not, the U.S. Air Force applied not one, but several image restoration tactics – some more than others, and each at particular times. In fact, several seemed to be used in a type of "trial and error" method – particular tactics were applied, and for some reason did not work, which in turn lead to new tactics being applied. It also demonstrates that image restoration for organizations, like individuals, is instinctive.

Second Finding: In an overwhelming number of instances relating to this case, a proactive stance resulted in a positive story. Conversely, when the organization was reactive, a majority of the stories were also negative.

This finding demonstrates the importance of having qualified public relations experts on the staff of almost any organization that cares about its reputation. If an organization wants to impact the messages being sent about itself, it must proactively seek to provide input to the sender of those messages, whether they be journalists, competitors, or dissenters. Failure to proactively shape a message results in a void which

another organization or person can exploit to their advantage at your organizations expense.

Third Finding: The earlier that information can be released by an organization in defense of itself, the better the chances are that the story results will be balanced or positive in the perception of the organization in crisis.

This is arguably the single most important finding in the study. Too often, organizations believe that if they simply do not react to bad news, the bad news will go away. This research supports the mantra of most public relations professionals – bad news does not get better with time – left alone, it usually gets worse.

Fourth Finding: In times of crisis, readers of news stories are most likely to view an organization in a favorable or balanced light when senior leaders of that organization speak on its behalf, as opposed to public relations personnel. However, it is still better to have a public relations person or one of its members speak than to have no one speak at all.

This finding can have major implications on many organizations who would heed it. For any number of reasons, top leaders of some organizations sometimes fail to engage the media, the public, or their stakeholders in times of crisis. Instead, they issue a short press release with minimal detail and no opportunities for questions from those interested parties. This finding demonstrates the importance of putting a human face on a crisis – preferably from top leadership itself, but at least from a spokesperson if no one else is available. Failure to engage at all with key publics in times of crisis is certain to be interpreted as guilt and may result in further crisis for an organization.

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Finding Five: Several factors affect story balance, including stance (proactive or reactive), source of message from organization (spokesperson, senior leader, member of organization), issue stage (how early in the crisis the organization responds), and tactics used.

Relating to this study, story balance is important because it correlates to how effectively the organization is mounting its defense. It is helpful to know with a degree of certainty which factors affect story balance so that practitioners can then aim their efforts most effectively at those that will garner results – especially when time is of the essence as it so often is during a crisis.

One final, major implication of the study is that it aids practitioners in determining cause and effect as relating to image restoration tactics. Practitioners who subscribe to the tactics espoused by Benoit can, through this study and many case studies like it, gain a reasonable expectation of what may happen when a particular topic is applied, or not applied.

Taken wholly in context, this data combine to indicate exactly what the Air Force could have done to improve its chances of success in reaching its goal of garnering additional balanced or positive (from its own perspective) news stories. The data show that a perfect scenario for the Air Force would include the following: an early start on its own defense, meaning an immediate response (not waiting days or weeks after the attacks began to defend itself); a proactive approach by the Air Force to provide information; participation by senior leaders as spokespersons, and when that is not possible, using public relations people to respond to questions and act as the organization's primary spokesperson; and the appropriate use of image restoration tactics by the Air Force,

including in this case mortification (in reality, this tactic was used sparingly and much too late), corrective action and bolstering (both used with frequency and some success in this instance.)

Continuing with the perfect case scenario, the result for the Air Force would be coverage inside the newspaper, and off of page one, since the data show that front page coverage was most often negative, and the story would be longer than 1000 words, since the data show that longer stories tended to be more balanced than shorter stories. Also, in a perfect case, the defense would be mounted against an attack on policy versus an attack on an individual or the organization itself, since the data show that in 30.4% of balanced stories, the attacks were against policies of the institutions rather than against individuals or the institution itself. Lastly, if a victim or advocate of sexual assault was quoted, the data shows that the story was much more likely to be negative from the perception of the Air Force.

It is important to note, however, that while this study can be helpful to the practitioner in telling what to do in the midst of a crisis, it does not help at all in determining how to prevent the crisis in the first place. Thus, helpful as it is, it is not a "magic bullet" or cure all for any crisis that may arise. It is a useful tool with roots in risk communication, issues management, and crisis communication, but it cannot replace or repair problems caused by poor management. While it may ease the "symptoms" of a crisis, only sound organizational management will actually "heal" the wound.

Study Limitations

Although this study has several limitations, it does have broad implications and practicality for several differing fields of study: crisis communication, risk communication, public relations, mass communication, and social science. It is important to note that although the results that arise from this study are generalizable only in this particular case, the findings are important and will add voice and weight to both future studies of this subject, as well as previous studies which bear similar results, including dozens of case studies conducted by Benoit and various researchers in the past.

One significant limiting factor was that, due to the small amount of news releases prepared by the Air Force in its defense within the parameters of the study (n=20), it was not possible to run a correlation between image restoration tactics used and image restoration tactics reported on in newspapers because it was impossible to determine what story coverage resulted from specific news releases.

Additionally, the study is limited by its own parameters. Singular in scope, the study has a well-defined universe, which is a positive trait in research, but also leaves the study subject to criticism that different results could arise if additional variables were introduced. The study could be recreated with additional variables for future research, including different newspapers, a different taxonomy (perhaps Schonbach, who offers a more explicated list of tactics) and a different organization type – possibly a business, a non-profit agency, or another branch of the U.S. Government.

Demographic information gathered through this study remains important despite not producing a significant Chi Square analysis. Demographics regarding story placement (where in the newspaper the story appeared) show that in almost all cases,

front page news stories on this subject were negative, while stories inside the newspaper

tended to be balanced or positive. Also, length of story was an important factor as well,

with frequencies and demographics indicating that the longer a story was in word count,

the more likely it was to be balanced or positive in the perspective of the Air Force.

Further analysis is warranted on these topics in future studies.

Another limitation of the study is that only one medium was studied – that of

newspapers. In today's world, with internet and on-line weblog access at an all-time high

globally, communication is getting more and more complex. This bears future study to

determine if these findings are applicable only to newspapers, or to define which media

they apply. Studies could be accomplished on television news casts, weblogs, internet

news stories, and even radio or podcasts.

One important limitation of the study is that it assumes that the organization has a

reputation to begin with. In fact, many prominent public relations researchers argue

against the value of reputation to an organization. Although some practitioners consider

the concept of image, or reputation, as valuable, scholars such as Grunig argue against

the value of reputation. (Grunig, 2000).

For example, each year, a Harris Poll is conducted called *Confidence in Major*

U.S. Institutions. In eighteen of the past twenty years, the U.S. Military has led that poll

as the U.S. institution that enjoys the greatest amount of public confidence. Although the

percentage of Americans who feel the military is *very competent* or *competent* varies

widely from year to year, (ranging from percentiles in the high 60s to mid 40s), through

2005 it remains highest on the list, above institutions such as clergy, academia, public

education, law enforcement, business, industry, the Supreme Court, and legislators in national and local government.

However, if an organization had no reputation at all – and remained perfectly neutral – perhaps unknown – a similar study may have very different findings. In this case, if the first time that an organization is heard about publicly is during a time of crisis, the impact could be expected to be vastly different. Clearly, the role of existing reputation is one deserving of more study.

Additionally, further research can be conducted in this area to determine which tactics were used at which stage of the crisis. This could provide practitioners with valuable information that could be useful in helping them select which tactics are appropriate to use at which specific times.

In conclusion, despite these limitations, this study succeeds in marrying theory and practice for the benefit of the practitioner. In today's world of high speed electronic media, it is clearly important for an organization to be able to effectively get its key messages to the proper target audiences – a task that is becoming increasingly difficult with so many venues and messages competing for people's attention. A crisis can arise at any time, and these tactics have valuable use for the practitioner who is cognizant of the full array of choices they have in arising to the defense of their organization. Thus, the theory is valid, and is clearly deserving of further study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Code Book

Code Book

     This codebook is designed to assist in the process of coding the attached

news releases and stories. The releases and stories are to be coded in the precise

manner as the codebook reads.

Coding Instructions

     This study will examine news releases and stories regarding the sexual

assault scandal at the U.S. Air Force Academy as produced and distributed by the

Department of Defense and/or the U.S. Air Force. Additionally, stories printed in

various daily newspapers (as detailed in the methodology section of this research)

will also be examined.

     When coding individual releases or stories, you should examine the

content carefully. You may write directly on the hardcopies of the

releases/stories, marking them with pen, pencil or a highlighter to identify image

restoration tactics.

Code Sheet

Part One—General (Nominal) Information

To be filled out for each news release/story used for this study.

1.) Indicate if item is military product or independent media product:

Military Product	1	
Media Product	2	

2.) Indicate Original Month of Publication:

Month   Value

February 2003	1	
March 2003	2	
April 2003	3	
May 2003	4	

3.) Indicate Length of Story/Release in Words:

Length   Value

Below 500 words	1
500-1000 words	2
More than 1000 words	3

4.) If Product Is Newspaper Story, Indicate Placement:

Front Page	1
Front Section (Section A)	2
Local/Metro Section	3
Undetermined	4

5.) If Product Is Newspaper Story, Indicate Source:

Denver Post	1
Rocky Mountain News	2
Colorado Springs Gazette	3
New York Times	4
Washington Post	5
USA Today	6
Undetermined	7

6.) If product is newspaper story, indicate whether it casts the U.S. Air Force Academy
and its leadership in an overall positive, negative, or balanced light:

Positive	1
Negative	2
Balanced	3

7.) If product is newspaper story, indicate which sources the author cited in the story.
Check all that apply, but use only one category per each person, i.e Chief of Staff
of the Air Force is a General, yet is also an Air Force member. You would check
only the box for Senior Leader. Sexual Assault counselor who happened to be an
Air Force member would be categorized only as Sexual Assault Counselor, etc:

Air Force Public Affairs Spokesperson	1
Air Force Senior Leader (Colonel, General, Secretary of AF)	2
Assault Victim	3
Other Air Force Member	4
Current or Former Legislators (Senator, Congressmen, etc.)	5
Sexual Assault Counselors/Advocates	6
Civilian (Friend, Relative, Academy Alumni, etc)	7

8.) If product is newspaper story, indicate whether the story was proactive (initiated by
the military) or reactive (military reply/response to media inquiry):

Proactive	1
Reactive	2
Undetermined	3

9.) For the given newspaper article, indicate the MAIN subject of criticism or "attack" by
the author. Select only one:

Individual(s) (Commandant, Superintendent, AF Secretary, etc)	1
Policy (Sexual harassment policy, etc.)	2
Organization, (DoD, Air Force, Academy, Commission, etc.)	3

Part Two – Qualitative Data

In defining his Image Restoration Theory, Benoit organized his typology into five distinct categories, three of which have variants or subcategories: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

9.) For each <u>news release</u> produced by the <u>military</u>, indicate which of the following tactics may be found. Please check all that apply. Please note that you are checking only for an appearance of the tactics, not the number of times it appears.

Simple denial – did not perform the act	1
Shifting the blame – act performed by another	2
Provocation – responded to act or action of another	3
Defeasibility – lack of information or ability	4
Accident – act was unintentional mishap	5
Good Intentions – meant well in doing the act	6
Bolstering – stress good traits	7
Minimization – act not very serious	8
Differentiation – act is less offensive than it appears	9
Transcendence–act is negative, but other vital considerations at stake	10
Attack accuser – reduce credibility of accuser	11
Compensation – reimburse victims and affected persons	12
Corrective Action - plan in place to solve and prevent reoccurrence	13
Mortification - take responsibility and apologize for action	14

10.) For each newspaper story, indicate which of the following tactics may be found. Please check all that apply. Please note that you are checking only for an appearance of the tactics, not the number of times it appears.

Simple denial – did not perform the act	1
Shifting the blame – act performed by another	2
Provocation – responded to act or action of another	3
Defeasibility – lack of information or ability	4
Accident – act was unintentional mishap	5
Good Intentions – meant well in doing the act	6
Bolstering – stress good traits	7
Minimization – act not very serious	8
Differentiation – act is less offensive than it appears	9
Transcendence–act is negative, but other vital considerations at stake	10
Attack accuser – reduce credibility of accuser	11
Compensation – reimburse victims and affected persons	12
Corrective Action - plan in place to solve and prevent reoccurrence	13
Mortification - take responsibility and apologize for action	14