

5-13-1999

To our Readers : A Study of Guilt Redemption in Newspaper Corrections

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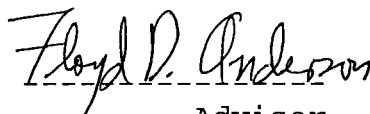
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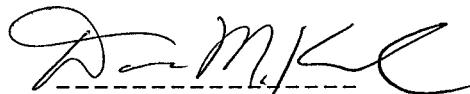
To our readers:
A study of guilt redemption in newspaper corrections

By
Maidstone Mulenga

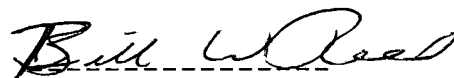
A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Department Of Communication,
State University of New York at Brockport
in candidacy for the degree of Master of Arts



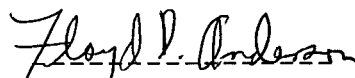
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Brockport, New York

May 13, 1999

Abstract

With journalism credibility at its lowest ebb, more newspapers are taking time to correct mistakes and apologize for errors. In this thesis, I use Kenneth Burke's theories to analyze newspaper corrections through guilt-redemption, purification and image restoration strategies. This study looks at two types of redemptive rhetoric and image-restoration strategies: front-page apologies and daily corrections from four newspapers. The front-page apologies are from *The News Examiner* and the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. The daily corrections are from *The New York Times* and the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*.

This thesis contends that newspapers should use mortification in corrections and apologies because it is the proper rejoinder in maintaining credibility with readers, even when victimage is the preferred strategy of guilt redemption.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my dear wife, Chanda Charity Bwalya Mulenga. Thank you for all the support and love through the years, and for reading a lot of material that you were not interested in. And to my daughters, Lukonde and Mukuka. I hope I am setting a good example for you.

Acknowledgments

To my advisor, Dr. Floyd Anderson, for providing valuable direction. To committee members Dr. Donna Kowal and Dr. Bill Reed, for providing insight and constructive criticism. To all my professors during my graduate studies at SUNY Brockport, without whose support and instruction, this thesis would not have been possible. To Dr. Frederic Powell and Dr. Alice Crume for those encouraging notes on my term papers. To Dr. Ruth Seymour, for guiding me through turbulent transition years in Detroit. To Dr. Bernard Brock, my advisor at Wayne State University for introducing me to Kenneth Burke. To *Detroit Free Press* News Editor Alex Cruden, for encouraging me when I almost gave up on a dream. To former Port Huron *Times Herald* Publisher Bill Monopoli, for urging me to follow my heart. To Gannett, for providing the tuition reimbursement program, without which I would have not completed my master's degree. I am forever indebted to you.

Maidstone Mulenga

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Thou shall not fabricate. No exceptions. No excuses."

Boston Globe's Patricia Smith.

- June 19, 1998.

-apologizing for making up people in columns.

The Democrat and Chronicle strives to cover the news accurately, fairly and honestly. It is our policy to correct errors of fact or statements needing clarification.

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Never before has there been such a "wreckage of journalistic integrity" in one year (Integrity matters, 1998). *The New York Times* referred to it as "a major assault on the revered [journalism] principles" (Frantz, 1999). The incredible loss of journalism credibility was heightened last year with at least five major media organizations admitting errors or mistakes. Although newspapers rarely admit making errors because

of a pervasive apprehension that admitting imperfection denotes unreliability (Giobbe, 1996), more newspapers are owning up to mistakes, humbling as the experience maybe (Kuczynski, 1998).

The journalistic mea culpas of last year show how more editors are readily admitting mistakes. Although the major black-eye that the journalism profession suffered last year was the \$10 million, front-page apology by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* (which is discussed in detail later in this paper), other incidents were equally embarrassing. At the *Boston Globe*, columnist Mike Barnicle resigned after admitting that he had faked a story about a boy who died of cancer. At the same newspaper, award-winning columnist Patricia Smith was asked to resign after she admitted making up people and quotes in her columns. The leading cable news channel, CNN, and *Time* magazine retracted a story they did jointly after failing to verify the authenticity of the source who alleged that U.S. military used a nerve agent in pursuing defectors during the Vietnam War. *The New Republic* magazine fired associate editor Stephen Glass for fabricating at least 27 stories.

Interestingly, it was also the same year that a study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors revealed that there is a severe decline of credibility in newspapers and that there is a disconnect between the media and their audiences. "Americans say they're tired of having sensational stories crammed down their throats," says a study, released in December by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Examining our credibility, 1998).

Sensationalism aside, a newspaper's credibility often is undermined by little mistakes. More than one-third of respondents in the ASNE study said they see spelling or grammatical mistakes in their paper more than once a week _ 21 percent said they see them nearly every day. Twenty-three percent said they find factual errors in the news stories of their daily paper at least once a week.

While 73 percent of adults in the ASNE study said they have become more skeptical about news accuracy, those who have firsthand knowledge of a news story were the most critical. Thirty-one percent said they had been the subject of a news story or had been interviewed by a reporter. Of that group, 24 percent

said they were misquoted and 31 percent found errors in the story.

Readers welcome corrections, though. Sixty-three percent said they "felt better" about the quality of the news coverage when they saw corrections.

These corrections are more acceptable, I argue, if they are phrased properly. Hence, it is the contention of this thesis that redemption rhetoric by newspapers _ whether it is in front page-apologies or daily corrections_ should incorporate mortification.

This thesis asserts that using mortification when correcting errors or apologizing is the proper rejoinder for newspapers in maintaining credibility with readers, even when victimage is the preferred strategy of guilt redemption.

Method and data

In this study, I use Kenneth Burke's theory of guilt redemption to analyze newspaper corrections and apologies. First, I sketch a typology of Burke's work and the studies on guilt-redemption, purification and image restoration. Then I review the correction

policies at newspapers. Finally, I relate this cycle of guilt-redemption to the specific efforts by newspapers.

There are two types of redemption rhetoric and image-restoration strategies analyzed in this study: front-page apologies and daily corrections. The front-page apologies are from *The News Examiner* and the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. These two newspapers were picked for this study because of the uniqueness of their apologies. One apology was based solely on one quote while the other was based on the ethical techniques in investigative journalism. The two papers are also at the extreme ends of the newspaper industry. One is a large, metropolitan newspaper with a circulation of more than 300,000 while the other is a small-town community newspaper with less than 20,000 in circulation figures. The fact that both are owned by the Gannett Company, the largest newspaper chain in the United States, is a mere coincidence.

The daily corrections were collected from *The New York Times* and the *Democrat and Chronicle* from November 1998 to February 1999. *The New York Times* was selected for this study because it is one of the largest circulating newspapers in the United States. The

Democrat and Chronicle was picked because it is a local paper, catering for a regional audience.

The data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Rhetoric criticism served as the qualitative method, taking advantage of the fact that rhetorical criticism is a dominant area in communication studies (Smith, 1998, Black, 1990, and Gill, 1994). Content analysis served as the quantitative method because of its flexibility as it is applied to text (Rubin, Rubin, & Piele, 1993; Reinard, 1994 and Giles, 1993).

Reinard (1994) notes that content analyses are useful for monitoring the content of mass media communication. Other studies (Bridges & Bridges, 1998; Corrigan, 1990; Gomery, 1992; Beam 1993; and Reisner, 1992;) have shown that content analyses can be useful when characterizing communication and making interesting comparisons.

Understandably there are limitations to content analysis. While the method is useful in describing communication trends, it is restricted to descriptions. The method does not permit one to draw cause and effect conclusions. While content analysis can show the amount

of corrections in the newspaper, it does not help reveal the impact the corrections have on the readers or how well the corrections or apologies are crafted.

This is where rhetorical criticism _ which interprets and evaluates communication events and their consequences _ comes in (Bryant, 1953; Campbell, 1982 and Campbell & Jamieson, 1990).

By looking at rhetoric as "the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols" (Burke, 1966; Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990), one can say that newspapers, consciously or otherwise, use rhetorical strategies in corrections and apologies (Black, 1980; Leff & Procaro, 1985 and Aird et al., 1998)

These corrections and apologies can be explained and judged as being effective or not. Rhetoric in newspaper apologies can be judged as good pragmatically, "that is whatever the given ends, the rhetorical means seem casually important in reaching them," or qualified good, "that is, given a good means, the rhetoric in question is an embodiment of such means" (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990, pp. 19).

CHAPTER 2

IMAGE AND CREDIBILITY

A newspaper's credibility is linked to its image. Hence the need to restore that image when errors threaten to destroy credibility. A number of studies show that guilt redemption is inextricably linked to image restoration (Major & Atwood, 1997; Neuwirth, 1998; Mathis, 1997; Malcolm, 1998 and Smith J.H., 1998).

Image restoration strategies have been used in crises by major corporations like Coke and Pepsi in responding to competitive advertising; Exxon in the aftermath of Valdez oil spill; Union Carbide in the wake of the Bhopal gas poisoning, and by public figures (See Williams, 1990; Thomsen & Rawson, 1998; Goffman, 1967; Brinson & Benoit, 1986; Benoit, Guillifor & Panici, 1991; Benoit & Well, 1996; and Benoit & Lindsey, 1987).

Benoit (1995) offers a unique perspective on image restoration by including ideas from the study of rhetorical criticism. Elsbach (1997) notes that rhetorical critics take a speech-oriented view of image

restoration, examining prolonged discourse and relating image restoration specifically to human communication patterns. Benoit refers to Ware and Linkugel (1973)'s theory of "apologia" which discusses image restoration in terms of apologetic "postures" or "stances" in which two or more image restoration strategies are combined and used in complex "self-defense speeches." Elsbach (1997) further notes that rhetorical critics induce these types of image restoration strategies by examining entire speeches or discussions, rather than by looking at single image restoration statements, as do most psychological theories of image management. A good example of this is the study by Anderson and McClure (1998) on the redemptive identification in Ted Kennedy's 1980 presidential campaign (See also Ronsenfield, 1968; Campbell & Jamieson, 1990; Sullivan, 1993; Slagell, 1991 and Benoit, 1982).

This is why both single image restoration statements (front-page apologies) and series of text (daily corrections) are studied in this thesis.

Benoit & Brinson (1994) describe image as "the perception of the source held by the audience, shaped by the words and acts of the sources" and that

"audience" members are those individuals "salient to the source at the time" (p. 76). For newspapers, the audience comprises the readers and the advertisers. When journalists ignore rules they use to govern themselves, Paterno (1998) argues, they "invite disdain and anger from the public, who now rank journalists right up there with lawyers and used car salesmen" (p. 24).

Goffman (1967) says, "face-work must be done" when image is threatened or distorted (p. 27). Other studies have also stressed the importance of image restoration. Schlenker (1980) says predicaments can damage one's identity and thus "adversely affecting relationships with the audience" (p.131). Brown & Levinson (1978) also say that people should "defend their faces if threatened" (p. 66). Paterno (1998) says editors should explain to readers the rationale for potentially inflammatory decisions. "If it's clear that a news organization has thought through the ramifications of its actions, it's much more likely that people will respect the ultimate decision even if they don't agree with it" (p. 24).

There is also an economic urge for companies to restore their images. Brody (1991) says "early response can minimize the extent to which organizations are damaged" (p.189) and Williams (1990) in a study of Exxon shows that economic consideration is at the top of the resolve to salvage one's image because lost trust may translate into lost cash. (See also, Higgins & Synder, 1989; Underworld, 1983 and Turow, 1997.)

Image restoration model

Benoit (1995) proposes a model of five general image restoration strategies: (1) denial, (2) evading responsibility, (3) reducing the offensiveness of the act, (4) taking corrective action, and (5) mortification. While this model is no more descriptive or comprehensive than that provided by Schonbach (1980), its typology is more inclusive than previous frameworks.

Denial

Denial strategy is when an organization or a person accused of wrongdoing simply denies committing the offense (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). In denial, the person or organization can also deny that the act occurred (Schonbach, 1980; Schlenker 1980; Semin &

Manstead, 1983; or Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). With this strategy, it is also possible to admit doing the act while denying that it was in any way harmful (Brinson & Benoit, 1996). A related option is for the rhetor or the accused person to attempt to shift the blame. This is what Burke (1970) refers to as victimage, asserting that someone other than the accused actually committed the offensive act and that the accused should not be blamed.

Evading responsibility

In evading responsibility, the rhetor can use four versions. In one version, the accused can say his or her actions were justified response to another person's offensive act and that the rhetor's actions were reasonable reaction to the provocation (Scott and Lyman, 1968). In the second version, the accused can claim defeasibility (Scott & Lyman, 1968), alleging that the rhetor lacked information about or had no control over important elements of the situation (Schonbach, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Semin & Manstead, 1983). A third version of evading responsibility is by claiming that the offensive act was an accident (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Tedeschi &

Reiss, 1981; or Semin & Manstead, 1983) and that the rhetor can not be held accountable if the act happened accidentally. Fourthly, rhetor can evade responsibility by suggesting that the offensive act was done with good intentions (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). This is based on the notion that people are not held responsible fully if they can show that they had good intentions even if what they ended up doing was wrong.

Reducing offensiveness

The third image restoration strategy, reducing the offensiveness, features six versions (Benoit, 1997). One, a rhetor can bolster the audience's positive feelings toward the accused by offsetting the negative feelings toward the wrongful act (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Rhetors can do this by describing the positive characteristics they have or positive acts they have done in the past. The second option in minimizing the offensiveness of the wrongful act by making the less offensive than it first appeared (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Schonbach, 1980; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; and Semin & Manstead, 1983).

The third way the accused can reduce the offensiveness of the act is by using differentiation

(Ware & Linkugel, 1973), distinguishing the act he or she performed from other similar but more offensive actions and by doing so the act performed by the rhetor seem less offensive. The fourth way rhetor can reduce the offensiveness of the act is by employing transcendence (Ware & Linkugel, 1973), attempting to place the act in a more favorable context. A rhetor could point to higher values to justify the act (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Schonbach, 1980; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; and Semin & Manstead, 1983). The fifth way to reduce the offensive act by attacking the rhetor's accusers (see Rosenfield, 1968; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Schonbach, 1980; Semin & Manstead, 1983; and Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Finally, the rhetor may reduce the offensiveness of the act by compensation, reimbursing the victim and by doing so, help mitigate the negative feeling arising from the act (Schonbach, 1980).

Corrective action

The fourth image restoration strategy is corrective action through which the rhetor offers to repair the problem, which Benoit (1995) says includes restoring the state of affairs existing before the

offensive action and/or promising to prevent the recurrence of the offensive act. He says Goffman (1971) treats this as a component of an apology, although it can occur without one. A willingness to correct and/or prevent the problem can help the accused's image (Brinson & Benoit, 1996).

Mortification

The fifth image restoration strategy is mortification which is well articulated by Burke (1970, 1973). This is when the rhetor confesses and begs for forgiveness. Mortification requires the accused to take responsibility for the action and to issue an actual apology. If the apology is seen to be sincere and is accepted, the aggrieved may choose to pardon the wrongful act (Benoit, 1995, p. 79).

While an individual or organization may employ any one of these strategies in an attempt to restore reputation, Benoit (1995) suggests that multiple image repair strategies are most frequently used. Each strategy has its greatest effect under certain circumstances (Ross, 1993).

If the organization or individual were falsely accused, denial might be an effective initial approach.

Once the accused has established his innocence through denial, bolstering may still be required to repair residual effects of damage to his reputation.

Mortification, for example, might be used to precede corrective action (Haley, 1998, Aird et al., 1998). As I shall later discuss, Burke's theory of dramaticism offers two image restoration strategies designed specifically to expunge guilt ("victimage" - or scapegoating - and "mortification" - or apology).

Although, this perspective has been based largely on content analysis of public speeches by politicians (see Anderson & McClure, 1998; Sullivan, 1993; Rosenfield, 1968; Benoit, 1982; Benoit & Wells, 1996; and Birdsell, 1990), it is my assertion that it can be used to analyze newspaper corrections and apologies.

Summary

Several studies offer strategies for image restoration and building credibility. One of them is the image restoration model with five parts; denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Denial is best used when the organization or person not guilty of the allegations or charges. Evading responsibility is

effective when some other vessel can carry away the guilt. This is related to victimage. Reducing offensiveness of the act works when an organization or individual can show that the offense is not as bad it appears. Doing corrective action is important when the offense demands such a response. Mortification is the preferred method for guilt redemption if the organization or individual is completely responsible for the error or mistake. Any of these strategies can be used alone or in combination with the other.

CHAPTER 3

KENNETH BURKE'S WORK

One of the leading scholars on guilt redemption is Kenneth Burke. The American scholar's career as a writer and critic spans nearly seven decades and included millions of printed words. Burke began writing as an art critic in the 1920s and progressed to political writing in the 1930s and to dramatistical writings in 1950s and 1960s.

Burke's work on nature, scope and functions of rhetoric has been hailed by scholars for the insightful perspectives. By understanding his definitions and concepts, one can only begin to appreciate Burke's contribution to rhetoric.

Burke defines rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce cooperation in other human agents" (1966. p. 16). Rhetoric is "rooted in an essential function of language itself, ... the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (Burke, 1950, p. 41-43). Burke says identification is the key to persuasion. He says identity or consubstantiation is the quality of sharing attributes.

Identification has several functions, according to Burke. He says identification occurs through common goals and background, through common enmity and or challenge and through unconscious association. Burke says division or lack of identification, is the natural state of separate human beings. He says the human experience is inherently individual and thus divisive and that is why rhetoric intends to replace division with identification. Burke also notes that unconscious motivation occurs when identification is made without awareness or willful intent.

Burke's rhetoric encompasses both traditional and non- traditional forms of discourse; both the verbal and non-verbal, and is confined to that which is "designed to elicit a 'response' of some sort." "Wherever there is persuasion there is rhetoric, wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion," he says (Burke, 1969, p.171-173). Rhetoric, according to Burke, always "defines situations for individuals," helping to form attitudes. Rhetoric deals with problems, encouraging acceptance of the unchangeable and justifying action about the changeable. Rhetoric also gives commands or instructions of some kind,

helping to determine actions to be taken (Smith, C. R., 1998).

Dramatism

Dramatism is the way Burke chooses to study human motivation through the analysis of drama (Overington, 1977). In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke offers the Pentad as a method to understand the dramatic nature of human society. This essential method is designed to break down statements of motives to the simplest level. Burke says five terms constitute the Pentad: act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. Burke sees act as being any intended action. Scene is the area and or location, time period, or situation in which the action takes place. The agent is who performs the act. Agency is how the act was carried out or what tools were used to help. The purpose is the reason for the agent to do the act. Burke later decided to sometimes include attitude as a sixth element to be considered in motivation. Attitude is the manner in which the act was carried out (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, p.181).

Burke offers Pentadic ratios to describe relationships between elements of the Pentad that can be used to determine the appropriateness of certain

components of rhetoric. Ratios suggest a relationship of propriety, suitability, or requirement among the elements. An examination of all the ratios helps the critic in discovering which term in the Pentad receives the greatest attention by the rhetor.

Earlier scholarly studies on Burke tended to draw a strong association between Burke and Aristotle. Some argue that, though Burke certainly draws much from Aristotle and other classical thinkers, to praise Burke for his capacity to reiterate the work of traditional rhetorical scholars is to do Burke an injustice. Others say that the main importance of Burke's writing is the new concepts he introduces (See Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1997; Heath, 1979 and Heath, 1984). Most of the studies specifically focus on the Burkeian concept of identification and showing that the concept provides a great deal of additional rhetorical scholarship. Other studies have focused on the linking Burke's dramatism with his perspective on semiotics, a link he suggested in *A Grammar of Motives* (Brock, 1985; Brock, 1990; Brummett, 1981 and Swartz, 1996).

In studying language, Burke offers a way in which we can look at how we separate from nature. He says

language not only separates us from nature but also divides us from the each other. Language, with its use of "no" and its various "thou shalt nots" creates conditions for hierarchy. But even with hierarchy, humans are not satisfied with their positions, Burke says, noting that "Those up are guilty of not being down and those down are guilty of not being up" (Burke, 1966, p.15). Because humans are not capable of obeying all commandments, this creates a guilt-ridden society. And with guilt comes the need to absolve guilt.

Guilt redemption

Burke believes that the dramatic nature of the world can be explained by the interrelationships of negative, hierarchy, acceptance and rejection, guilt, purification and redemption. Burke says language creates the condition for a guilt-ridden society. He says in nature the negative does not exist "every natural condition being positively what it is" (Burke, 1961, p.19). Everything simply is what it is and as it is. The only way something can not be something is if it is something else. An apple for example, is an apple; in no way can it be not an apple. Burke says negatives are purely linguistic constructs, without

real-world counterparts. He argues that language is unreal, insofar as, "the word is not the thing" and has led to hierarchy.

By introducing the negative, language or symbolic action separates us from Nature as Burke says in his definition of humans: "Being bodies that learn language thereby becoming wordlings; humans are the symbol-making, symbol-using, symbol-misusing animal; inventor of the negative; separated from our natural condition by instruments of our own making; goaded by the spirit of hierarchy; acquiring foreknowledge of death; and rotten with perfection" (1966, p. 16).

Burke describes the process of redemption in his poem "Cycles of Terms implicit in the idea of 'Order'":

Here are the steps
 In the Iron Law of History
 That welds Order and Sacrifice;
 Order leads to Guilt
 (for who can keep commandments!)
 Guilt needs Redemption
 (for those who would not be cleansed!)
 Redemption needs Redeemer
 (which is to say, a Victim!).
 Order
 Through Guilt
 To Victimage
 (hence: Cult of the kill)...(1961, p. 4-5)

Kenneth Burke says, "Guilt needs redemption (for who would not be cleansed!)." Comparing guilt relief

with excretion, Burke notes that "only by excretion can the body remain healthy" (1966, p.341). Mackey-Kalis and Hahn point out that "excretion, a physical cleansing of the body, is compared with guilt redemption, a moral cleansing of the soul" (Mackey-Kalis & Hahn, 1994, p.3).

Pollution, or "guilt," is Burke's equivalent to the Christian concept of original sin, an offense that cannot be avoided or a condition that all people share. In newspapers, the sins range from simple errors like misspellings to wrongs like fabrication of facts. Burke says guilt arises from the nature of hierarchy because it is rooted in our language system. Since no man is capable of meeting all the terms of the language agreement, he will fail to obey. Patricia Smith in her last column for *The Boston Globe* said she fabricated people in her columns in an attempt to "create the desired impact or to slam home a salient point" (Smith, 1998; Columnist's Farewell, 1998, p.7). Failure or disobedience leads to guilt and creates the need for redemption.

Victimage and Mortification

There are two primary means for relieving our guilt using symbolic action: victimage and mortification. The "two principal means of purification are mortification and victimage and the end result in both is redemption, or the alleviation of guilt" (Rueckert, 1963, p.131). Victimage is the process in which guilt is transferred to vessel(s) outside of the rhetor. In newspaper corrections and apologies, this is achieved by blaming someone else for the mistake in the newspaper. Maybe the information the newspaper got was not correct. Mortification is the process in which we make ourselves suffer for our sin (Burke, 1961, p. 206-207). Newspapers suffer mortification when they admit their sins and punish themselves financially or morally.

Victimage can be either self-inflicted (suicide) or from others (homicide). Burke explains the two kinds of victimage by listing some of the meanings of which the negative idea of death may have and the various ways in which death functions as a mode of purification. In homicidal victimage, there are two types of victims; the polluted agent who is sacrificed because he is polluted and the unpolluted agent who is

sacrificed because he is unpolluted (Burke, 1966, p.435).

Rueckert says the essential difference between victimage and mortification is that the first "always directly involves some other person, place or thing, always calls for a ritualistic transference of pollution to the chose vessel (whether person or thing)" (1963, p. 146). In mortification, however, nothing outside of the person involved need to be polluted or destroyed in order for the purification to take place. Mortification or self-blame involves suffering through our sins by "self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice or self-imposed denials and restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991. p.197).

In victimage, humans purge themselves by transferring the guilt to an outside agent or agents who are made to suffer instead (Mackey-Kalis & Hahn, 1994. p.3). Burke says "the guilt intrinsic to hierarchical order calls correspondingly for redemption through victimage" (1965. p.284). The victim becomes the scapegoat or the carrier of the sin and becomes the

one who should be punished or made to suffer. By transferring this guilt, the scapegoat is symbolically or actually killed: "Redemption needs Redeemer (which is to say, a Victim!)/Order/Through Guilt/To Victimage/ (hence: Cult of the Kill" (Burke, 1961, p.5).

Both modes of purification are made possible because linguistic negatives, says Rueckert, who notes that "both are ways by which man can negate negatives in order to produce positives; and finally both may be used for constructive and destructive purposes. With language, the negative, victimage and mortification, man builds his moral universe and touches every aspect of man's moral life, which for Burke means "every kind of experience possible to man" (Rueckert, 1963, p.149).

The redemption can also be found in a change of identity, a new perspective, a different view on life, or a feeling of moving toward a goal or better life in general (Carter, 1996 and Christiansen & Hanson, 1996).

Of the two methods of providing relief from guilt, victimage, Burke says, is preferred rather than mortification because "if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel or cause outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an

enemy within. And the greater one's internal inadequacies the greater the amount of evils one can load up on the back of the enemy" (Burke, 1957, p.174).

Further, Burke notes that by defining themselves in opposition to the scapegoat, humans form communities. Through shared participation in the alienation of the other, humans create identification among themselves: "Is possible that rituals of victimage are the natural means for affirming the principle of social cohesion above the principle of social division" (1965, p. 286). He also notes that "is it not a terrifying fact that you can never get people together except when they have a goat in common? That's a terrifying thing that I begin to see as the damnation of the human race. That's how they have to operate; they get congregation by segregation'" (Aaron, 1966 p. 499).

Once humans achieve redemption through either victimage or mortification, Burke explains, humans unify and find consubstantiation with all humanity that hierarchy defies. "We cannot deny that consubstantiatiality is established by common involvement in a killing" (Burke, 1969, p. 265). Thus a

significant motive "for human symbolizing is guilt-relief or redemption from sins in order to achieve the identification or consubstantiation with all humanity that hierarchy defies" (Mackey-Kalis & Hahn, 1994. p.4). Thus victimage or scapegoating offers both release from guilt and identification with humanity.

Burke, however, notes the limits of scapegoat rhetoric and seems to prefer rhetorical strategies born of comedic rather than tragic mode (Christiansen & Hanson, 1996). In the *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke says humans use major poetic forms such as comedy and satire when they are faced with "anguish, injustice and death" (Burke, 1937, p.3). He proposes replacing "the present political stress upon men in rival international situations" with "logological reaffirmation of the foibles and quandaries that all men (in their role as symbol-using animals) have in common" (Burke, 1961, p.5). Sometimes when guilt is relieved, the problem may still be there, Burke notes that scapegoating is a never-ending cycle where guilt is "processed" rather than resolved" (1961. p.236). "Thus the process of pollution-purification-redemption is the drama of the self in quest, the process of

building and find the true self. It represents our attempts to discover and maintain our identities so that we can act purposefully, feel at home in the world, and move toward the perfection we seek. It's a life-long process of growth and change" (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, p.197).

It's a process that newspapers should go through in order to maintain credibility with their audience, the readers.

Summary

The selection of Kenneth Burke's theory of redemption for the analysis of apologies and corrections in newspaper offers another perspective on one of America's greatest theorists. Newspapers, whose work depends on the language, should especially benefit from Burke's inspiring work.

Burke's work on guilt redemption offers a method of cleansing of 'sins' or offenses since the system of hierarchy rooted in language makes it impossible to attain perfection. He offers victimage and mortification as the primary means for relieving our guilt. Victimage is the process in which guilt is transferred to another vessel, organization or person.

Mortification is the process in which those in errors admit their sins and suffer for those sins. The redemption from the guilt _ whether through victimage or mortification _ is found in a change of identity, new perspective, different view or moving to a better goal. For newspapers, redemption can lead to more trust from readers and an increase in credibility.

CHAPTER 4

NEWSPAPER CREDIBILITY AT STAKE

Newspapers value credibility. Their images as newspapers depend on credibility, how credible readers and advertisers perceive them. Paterno (1998) says newspapers are quick to publish explanations when they publish controversial stories or pictures, like showing a convicted murderer's obscene gesture to the press or stories about the shooting of schoolchildren. "Some editors believe explaining decisions restores press credibility" (1998, pp24).

Examples of newspapers who have published explanations about controversial stories or pictures include *The Boston Globe* which ran stories about former mayor and gubernatorial hopeful Raymond Flynn's drinking habits, and *The Washington Post* which ignored its practice by relying on just one anonymous source in stories about President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky.

The New York Times too proclaimed the death of one more journalistic rule that states that news organizations withhold the names of young people

charged with crimes. In anticipation of public outcry, newspapers are quick to give explanations about controversies. For example, when *Globe* ran the story on Flynn's drinking habits, it also published a story explaining the decision. The *Post* too explained its new stance on anonymous sources in a March 15 column by Managing Editor Robert G. Kaiser:

We realize that we strain relations with readers when we ask them, as we did in this case and many others during the past seven weeks, to trust us and our unidentified sources. But we are left in this position once we decide that our first obligation to readers is to give them as good and timely information as we can. And that is our decision, almost always. Informing the readers comes first (Kaiser, 1998, p. C01).

The *Chicago Sun-Times* published a similar explanation when it put the news of an Oregon boy's schoolyard shooting spree on page two instead of the front page. The newspaper told its readers that giving the story more prominence might harm or frighten vulnerable children. Here's how it explained its decision to readers:

Our report of Thursday's school shooting in Springfield, Oregon, appears on pages two and three because we are concerned that front page treatment could have harmed or frightened vulnerable children. We seldom flinch at reporting bad news, believing that people must be told what happens, no matter how wicked or horrible.

But we do not wish to encourage any unstable teenager to think of shooting as a way out of adolescent torments. And we do not wish to alarm smaller children.

Following the series of school shootings nationwide, we see a danger that prominent reports of each successive incident could be contributing to the phenomenon.

If anything so terrible were to occur so close to home, we would have to report on it fully on page one. Our readers would expect it.

With the Oregon tragedy, however, we trust that readers, particularly parents, will appreciate that we consider the story no less important because we present it less prominently.

Some newspapers publish regular columns explaining not just controversial decisions but basic journalistic practices. The need to explain news decisions more thoroughly to the public won praise for the *San Jose Mercury News*. The newspaper once published a photograph of a convicted killer gesturing obscenely toward clicking cameras, with an explanation of why the paper decided to run it.

The paper received about 1,200 responses to the photo, two-to-one in favor of publication of the explanation. The *San Francisco Chronicle* which also ran the photo, but without explaining the decision; received about 130 calls, all critical (Bishop, 1997).

Still some newspapers don't want to appear to be too defensive in explaining decisions concerning

stories. Sometimes editors face resistance from staff members who feel explanations are a form of opinion and have no place in the news pages (Paterno, 1998). Explanations, the dissenters say, should be published by the ombudsman or on the editorial page. Other newspapers have tried incorporating explanations into outlines or stories. *The New York Times*, during the Clinton-Lewinsky saga, published "Trust Me: A Media Guide," in which it sorted out rumors, innuendoes and gossip from facts.

While the controversial or sensational stories may also harm a newspaper's credibility, it's the errors and mistakes that pose the greatest challenges to newspapers. With public trust at its lowest ebb, newspapers have sought answers in credibility studies, forums, seminars, discussions and projects last year in an attempt to find ways to bolster public confidence in journalists (Dunagin, 1997; Howell, 1999; Jaben, 1999 and Ketter, 1996).

In another attempt to win back readers' trust, the American Society of Newspaper Editors recently launched one of the most comprehensive surveys of media credibility this decade, called the Journalism

Credibility Project (Seaton, 1999; Tinsley, 1998 and Shearer, 1998).

A time to say sorry

The consensus of studies and forums is that, apart from explaining news decisions, newspapers must admit errors and apologize when necessary to bolster credibility (Snowden, 1994; Stein, 1997; Stephen, 1996 and Shepard 1998). Editors should admit mistakes and make corrections to enhance the credibility of their news organizations. Since mistakes in the news business are inevitable, it is crucial for all newspapers to correct themselves and let the public know about it (O'Brien, 1998; Shepard, 1998; Perrone, 1996).

Although there is a pervasive apprehension that admitting imperfection might give the appearance that a news organization is unreliable, that attitude is shifting (Go Ahead, 1995). More newspapers are putting corrections in prominent positions. Instead of being apprehensive about admitting errors, more organizations are using corrections to enhance their reputation for accuracy and fairness (\$10,000 apology, 1994; ABC News, 1996 and Busterna, 1988).

As competition rises and deadlines become tighter, newspapers are being produced under a lot of stress, making mistakes inevitable. Newspapers can't afford to believe they are infallible and so it is important to admit they make mistakes of all kinds every day (Croteau, 1997; Foreman, 1999; Demers, 1992; Garman, 1998).

This study revealed that the *Democrat and Chronicle* and *The New York* keep record of how errors occur and try to identify problems that may lead to recurrences. But other studies have shown that not too many papers have a system in place to keep track of the volume and nature of their errors (Paterno, 1998, Shepard, 1998).

A survey of 164 libel plaintiffs found that most of the people who sued newspapers or television stations wouldn't have done so if the news outlet had taken the complaint seriously and ran a correction or retraction if one were warranted. His study showed that when the mistake appeared in the story, most of the complainants did not go to a lawyer. They, instead, went to the news organization to complain, seeking a correction, a retraction or an apology and it is only

after they are rebuffed that they decided to pursue legal redress (Elam, Winakur & Chandra, 1997).

Apart from promoting credibility, corrections and apologies can help avert lawsuits (Tumulty, 1996; Wolfe, 1990).

Therefore, it is clear that corrections are key to newspaper survival. And more editors are learning that what really irritates readers more than the error itself is the refusal by the newspapers to admit making the mistake.

As long as there are newspapers, there will be errors. Yes, errors are the "vile beasts" of journalism that need to be slew.

A place for correction

But where should the corrections be placed? On the front page or on another page inside or on a similar page, as was the error? Arrangement of newspaper space influences the significance of a story (Silverblatt, 1995; Reisner, 1992). The editors put their best stories on front page because it is the page that the readers are likely to see first. It's the page that is visible when the newspaper is being sold either at a

newsstand or at a newspaper rack. Even on the front page itself, the placement of stories affects the perception of news content. For example, the lead story or the top story is placed at the top of the page, thus according it greater importance than the stories at the bottom.

In the *Enquirer* apology to Chiquita banana company (discussed later), the newspaper was required, as part of the agreement to publish the apology on top of front page (An apology to Chiquita, 1998, p. A1).

Silverblatt (1995) notes that "Readers often regard the composition of a newspaper as a collection of separate stories. However editors often consider the relationship between stories when laying out the stories" (p.155). This means that the editors draw connections between stories and events. For example on the day that a House committee approved impeachment inquiry against President Bill Clinton, the *Democrat and Chronicle* linked it to the election campaign of Chuck Schumer, a member of that committee who was running for the New York Senate seat. The newspaper, by linking the stories, interpreted the significance of Schumer's election. If he wins, the newspaper

explained, he would be a part of a Senate that would serve as the jury for the impeachment trial. This is the interpretative role of the press, helping the community understand how national decisions affect them (Silverblatt, 1995).

Several prominent newspapers have used front-page apologies. For example in 1996, the *Detroit Free Press* apologized on the front page for misquoting former Congresswoman Barbara-Rose Collins. The *Detroit Free Press* issued a public apology to Barbara-Rose Collins for misquoting her in the paper's July 17, 1996, edition. The paper had quoted her as saying "I hate" the white race, when she in fact she had said "I love the individuals, but I don't like the race." "We want to apologize for a serious mistake: We misquoted U.S. Rep. Barbara-Rose Collins in the July 17 Free Press," Executive Editor Robert G. McGruder said in a letter to readers (Apology, 1996, p. 1A).

The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* needed to print a front-page retraction when its editor neglected to verify information provided by a single anonymous source. The *Democrat-Gazette* reported that Whitewater independent counsel Kenneth Starr had conducted "mock

trials" of President Clinton and Hilary Rodham Clinton and had acquitted them. Starr's office stated it had not conducted any trials (Robertson, 1997). Also, the *Northwest Arkansas Times* issued a front-page public apology to former Fayetteville Mayoral candidate Dan Coody for irresponsible journalism (Giobbe, 1996). (See also, Bain, 1991; Giles, 1991.)

Summary

Credibility is cardinal to newspapers. Concern over news media's loss of credibility is forcing newspapers to adopt new strategies in rebuilding public trust and confidence. The encouraging news is that newspapers themselves acknowledge that there is a problem and are getting motivated to do something about it. From explaining controversial decisions and stories, to outright apologizing, newspapers are confronting accuracy, bias and sensationalism issues.

The discouraging factor is that there does not seem to be a consistent way of fighting credibility, especially in apologies and corrections. Since self-examination precedes change, it is not far-fetched to hope that newspapers will soon adopt a consistent way of handling corrections.

CHAPTER 5

TWO UNIQUE APOLOGIES

The most sacred page for newspapers is the front page. It is the most visible page, and hence only the best of the newspaper stories are placed on the front page. It is the page that carries the most important story of the day. Newspaper editors hold special meetings every day just to decide on what to put on the front page. That is why putting an apology on the front page is about as degrading an act to the newspaper as it can do. That is why the two apologies analyzed in this paper are unique. The first apology is from the *Cincinnati Enquirer* while the other is from the *Gallatin News Examiner*.

Cincinnati Enquirer case.

On June 28, 1998, The *Cincinnati Enquirer* made a front-page apology to the Chiquita Brands International Inc., retracting a series of newspaper stories that questioned the company's business practices. In this large and most unusual settlement by a news organization, the newspaper also agreed to pay Chiquita Brands International Inc. more than \$10 million to avoid being sued.

The articles, which appeared in an 18-page special section on May 3, were partially based on 2,000 internal voice mails that were believed to have been obtained from "a high-ranking Chiquita executive." After initially defending its yearlong investigation of Chiquita, the newspaper, in the apology, said it was now convinced that the voice mails had been stolen from Chiquita and renounced the articles.

Tracking the problem

To better understand how the newspaper came to this decision, there is a need for some background information. When the series "Chiquita Secrets Revealed" ran May 3, 1998, *Enquirer* Editor Lawrence K. Beaupre included a note in which he said records used in the stories "included more than 2,000 copies of taped voice mail messages" provided by a high Chiquita official who was one of several executives with authority over the voice-mail system. But in its apology, signed by Beaupre and publisher Harry M. Whipple, the *Enquirer* said there was no one at Chiquita with authority to provide such confidential information. Reporter Mike Gallagher "lied to us repeatedly over a period of nearly a year," the

publisher told the newspaper's managers in a memo. "His deception was massive" (Balu & Freedman, 1998).

Since Gallagher has refused to comment on the case pending the resolution of his criminal and civil charges he is facing in the case, it is unclear precisely how he got the tapes. Whether he got them from some source - within or without Chiquita, high or low - or made them himself by tapping into the company's voice-mail system, was not yet known at the time of this study.

What is known through media reports is that in October 1997, more than six months before publication of the controversial series, Gallagher told *Enquirer* Editor Beaupre that he had tapped into Chiquita's voice-mail system. Gallagher is said to have explained to Beaupre and at least one other editor that his intention was to verify the authenticity of voice-mail messages he was receiving from a source inside Chiquita.

Beaupre reprimanded him, telling him never to use this method of verification again.

While Beaupre may have been sufficiently concerned about Gallagher's accessing Chiquita voice mail to

report it to the newspaper's lawyers, the editor didn't see the transgression as significant enough to halt the Chiquita reporting project, since Gallagher was a trusted reporter. Beaupre also had a long-standing relationship with Gallagher. When he became editor at *Cincinnati Enquirer* in 1993, Beaupre hired Gallagher from Gannett Suburban Newspapers in Westchester County, N.Y., where Beaupre had hired him once before, while serving as editor there.

After doing a series of investigative work, Gallagher, 40, began investigating how Cincinnati companies were doing overseas and this eventually evolved into a focus on Chiquita, the world's second-largest banana company. Gallagher teamed up with Cameron McWhirter, 34, another investigative reporter who once worked at the Gannett Westchester papers. The pair traveled to the sites of banana plantations in Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama and two Caribbean islands. In August 1997 they went to Honduras, where Gallagher interviewed Chiquita officials.

Chiquita was alerted and put a law firm on the case. The lawyers wrote to Beaupre in August that henceforth they would field all questions from the

reporters and transmit Chiquita's responses. Beaupre is said to have said Chiquita would get a fair opportunity to respond to any questions that may be raised. Though most of the reporters' questions focused on topics such as Chiquita's labor, tax-payment and pesticide practices, on Oct. 7 one question struck the lawyers as peculiarly specific, says the *Wall Street Journal*. "And by November, Gallagher and McWhirter were unleashing a volley of new and far more specific questions, evidently based on some kind of leak. People in the Chiquita camp say that the questions, while extremely detailed, seemed to lack context" (Balu & Freedman, 1998).

In late November, Chiquita learned that Gallagher had a Chiquita voice-mail message, which revealed that some documents from critics intended for Honduran Embassy officials were being channeled to Chiquita lawyers. By late December, Chiquita was on red alert. In a letter that month to *Enquirer* lawyers, Chiquita's lawyers warned that, besides seeking redress for any defamation that might occur in the article, Chiquita would take legal steps if reporters improperly obtained

information or induced others to do so for them (Horstan & Peale, 1998).

The *Enquirer's* lawyers responded that there was nothing wrong with people providing confidential information to reporters and asserted that the *Enquirer* was operating within the scope of normal newsgathering. But the use of private voice-mail messages had triggered soul-searching among *Enquirer* editors on the project, who expressed concern about using them even if they had been legally and ethically obtained, according to the *Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. Several other media reports say lawyers and top newspaper officials reviewed the stories on Chiquita as the series neared completion.

In April, some top Chiquita officials, according to media reports, found that that something was wrong with their voice-mail system. On more than one occasion, they had tried to retrieve their messages when they were out of the office, only to get a busy signal. It seems that someone was tapping into their messages.

By late Friday May 1, Chiquita's telecommunications experts had concluded that someone

had broken into the voice mail of several other Chiquita officials.

On May 3, two days later, the *Enquirer* ran its series, with the editor's note citing the more than 2,000 taped voice messages. This came as a surprise to Chiquita, according to people in the Chiquita camp. They say that before publication, the *Enquirer* had never told either Chiquita officials or lawyers that the reporters had Chiquita voice-mail messages. Nor, they say, had the newspaper told the Chiquita individuals involved that their messages were being used.

Chiquita unleashed a barrage of news releases assailing the series for conveying a "false and highly inaccurate image" of the company. It challenged the paper's claim to have gotten tapes from a high executive with authority over voice mail, saying no such person existed.

Two weeks later, Chiquita lawyers wrote to *Enquirer* lawyers that Chiquita had reason to believe newspaper personnel had participated in an improper entry into the company's voice-mail system (Balu & Freedman, 1998).

According to *Wall Street Journal*, Chiquita's telecom technicians determined that on April 29, in less than 12 minutes, 19 confidential voice mails were electronically eavesdropped on. After additional time, the technicians were able to reconstruct the origins of some of the more recent calls coming in. Chiquita officials asked people whose voice mails were infiltrated whether they had called in for their messages from the locations identified. They said no. The Chiquita side doesn't provide any evidence that Gallagher himself dialed into the system. However, people in both the Chiquita and Gannett camps indicate that at least some calls to the voice-mail system were made from pay phones near the reporter's house (Balu & Freedman, 1998; Horstman & Peale, 1998).

There was panic at the *Enquirer*, and Beaupre confronted Gallagher and the editor demanded tapes Gallagher said he had made of conversations with the Chiquita source providing access to voice messages. Gallagher is said to have said he destroyed them at the behest of *Enquirer* lawyers.

On June 1, a special prosecutor in Hamilton County, Ohio, began to investigate whether voice mails

or other documents had been improperly obtained and disseminated. The Federal Bureau of Investigation also began looking into this.

By mid-June, the newspaper was in discussions with Chiquita to avert a lawsuit.

On June 26, the *Enquirer* fired Gallagher and he was escorted out of the building. The newspaper did not take any action against the other reporter, McWhirter, who remains on its staff.

Two days later, on June 28, the *Enquirer* carried a front-page apology, which ran for three consecutive days.

The *Enquirer* apology

On Sunday, June 28, when 355,000 readers picked up their newspapers, lead story was "An apology to Chiquita."

The apology said it was now evident that lead reporter Mike Gallagher had been involved in the theft of information from Chiquita. The *Enquirer* said it had become convinced that "representations, accusations and conclusions" about Chiquita in the series "are untrue and created a false and misleading impression of

Chiquita's business practices." The *Enquirer* said, "the facts now indicate that an *Enquirer* employee was involved in the theft of this information in violation of the law '' (An apology to Chiquita, p. A1).

The newspaper said that as part of the settlement with Chiquita, it was continuing an internal investigation of the articles to determine if other reporters are guilty of wrongdoing. Hamilton County, which includes Cincinnati, appointed a special prosecutor to investigate the case and later charged Gallagher.¹

Whipple declined to discuss what material in the articles the newspaper believes to be factual or wrong.

¹At the time of writing this thesis, the reporter was awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty to intercepting voice mail from the Chiquita banana company. Gallagher could get up to two years in prison and a \$7,500 fine at sentencing. He pleaded guilty to felony charges, admitting that he tapped into the electronic communications system of Chiquita Brands International Inc.

Instead, Whipple and Beaupre focused their six-paragraph apology on the actions of the lead reporter, Gallagher.

"The end product, our section, has been tainted by the unethical and illegal means that an individual used to gather the voice mail. Breaking the law, violating any of the common journalistic standards, lying to one's employer, certainly has no place at the *Enquirer*. As a result, we were unable to stand behind information gathered in violation of those basic principles.

"The voice mail tapes were gathered improperly, in violation of the standards and practices of this newspaper," apology said.

While the newspaper admitted creating a "a false and misleading impression of Chiquita's business practices" in Central America, the *Enquirer* laid the blame for those transgressions solely on the series' lead investigative reporter. The *Enquirer* stated that Gallagher had said he had received copies of the voice mail messages from a high-ranking Chiquita official with authority over the company's voice mail system.

"The *Enquirer* has now become convinced that the above representations, accusations and conclusions are," the apology stated.

"Information provided to the *Enquirer* makes it clear that not only was there never a person at Chiquita with authority to provide privileged, confidential and proprietary information but that facts now indicate that an *Enquirer* employee was involved in the theft of this information in violation of the law. The employee involved, the lead reporter Mike Gallagher, has retained counsel and will not comment on his news gathering techniques."

The apology further said that the *Enquirer* renounced the Chiquita series, that the stories had been withdrawn from its Internet Web.

"We apologize to Chiquita Brands International Inc. for this unethical and unlawful conduct and for the untrue conclusions in the Chiquita series of articles," the statement concludes.

Analysis of Enquirer apology

Although the apology appears to be a good example of mortification, the newspaper didn't fully accept responsibility for the transgression. Long before the

apology was issued, the newspaper was trying other image restoration strategies.

The *Enquirer* first tried the denial strategy by denying that it had done anything wrong in gathering information about Chiquita. But this strategy was bound to fail because eventually Chiquita would come up with information proving that a wrong _ theft of phone messages _ had been perpetuated against the company.

The newspaper then attempted to evade responsibility, agreeing to go ahead with the investigation of Chiquita business even when the reporter, Gallagher, had indicated that he had tried to access the Chiquita voice mail system. Gallagher's editor reprimanded him but was not sufficiently concerned about Gallagher's accessing Chiquita voice mail to report it to the newspaper's lawyers. Nor did the editor see the offense as significant enough to halt the Chiquita reporting project.

Later in the apology, the newspaper claimed defeasibility, stating that the editors did not have enough information or control over Gallagher's reporting methods, the important elements of the situation(Schonbach, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981;

Semin & Manstead, 1983). "Despite assurances to his editors prior to publication that he obtained his information in an ethical and lawful manner, we can no longer trust his word and have taken disciplinary action against him for violations of *Enquirer* standards," the apology stated.

By explaining that the reporter had gone against "standards" at the newspaper, the *Enquirer* was attempting the third image restoration strategy, by reducing the offensiveness (Benoit, 1997). The newspaper tried to show the positive characteristics it has and the positive acts it had done in the past.

The *Enquirer* then tried to minimize the offensiveness of the wrongful act by attacking its accusers, the Chiquita company, using a battery of lawyers to explain that it was Chiquita's unethical business practices that prompted the investigation and the story.

Finally, the *Enquirer* hoped to reduce the offensiveness of the act by compensation, reimbursing the victim and by doing so, help mitigate the negative feeling arising from the act (Schonbach, 1980). The newspaper agreed to pay in excess of \$10 million in

exchange for settlement of claims against it by Chiquita.

The fourth image restoration strategy, the *Enquirer* tried was an offer to do corrective action through which it could repair the problem, which (Benoit, 1997) says, includes restoring the state of affairs existing before the offensive. The *Enquirer* said it had taken "disciplinary action" against and that it "will continue to investigate whether others involved in these articles engaged in similar conduct." The newspaper emphasized that it had fired Gallagher and was looking at disciplining the others involved.

The *Enquirer* also agreed to publish an apology to Chiquita and its employees prominently on the front page of the newspaper for three days and that it would post the apology on its Web site.

The corrective action included the fifth and more important image restoration strategy for newspapers — mortification. The *Enquirer* confessed and begged for forgiveness: "The *Enquirer* deeply regrets that these unauthorized actions have hurt the integrity of the newspaper and the trust of our readers. We will take all necessary steps to restore that trust."

This attempt to expunge guilt, however, was more of scapegoating than mortification.

In the six-paragraph apology, the newspaper heaped the blame on the reporter without addressing the issue of whether the allegations leveled against Chiquita were true or false. Both the editor and publisher insisted that the end product was tainted because the newsgathering techniques were not only immoral but criminal as well.

By putting the blame on the scapegoat, the reporter, the newspaper transferred its guilt to another vessel. Although the *Enquirer* offered to pay \$10 million it did not suffer for the guilt or its sin. This is because mortification or self-blame involves suffering through the sins by "self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice or self-imposed denials and restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991. p.197).

Instead, the reporter became the scapegoat or the carrier of the sin. He was fired from the company and physically escorted out of the building. He became the one to be punished or made to suffer. By transferring

this guilt, the reporter was symbolically killed:
"Redemption needs Redeemer (which is to say, a
Victim!)/Order/Through Guilt/To Victimage/ (hence: Cult
of the Kill" (Burke, 1961, p.5).

Later, I shall discuss whether this redemption
was achieved but I now look at the other front-page
apology.

The News Examiner case

Unlike the Cincinnati retraction, the front-page
apology by the *Gallatin News Examiner* was a classic
example of mortification.

On Feb. 20, 1997, a prominent sports writer, Nick
DeLeonibus, wrote a story about the high school soccer
team. As a joke to his sports editor, Kris Freeman, he
inserted a fake quote from a soccer coach quoting him
as saying one of the players "sucks donkey dicks and
doesn't wipe the shit off before practice. We will like
to keep him at sweeper position so his sperm breath
will stop people from penetrating to the goal. Speaking
of penetrating, he prefers tall, red-bearded guys"
("Inexperience faces," p. B1).

DeLeonibus later said he thought the editor would catch the fake quote. But Freeman never read the story and it was published.

The story infuriated readers in the small conservative town of Gallatin in Tennessee so much that they flooded the newspaper offices with literally hundreds of telephone calls to complain about the story.

The readers were "indignant and outraged" at the appearing of the offending language in what was perceived to be a family newspaper. But was even more outrageous was, as the newspaper would later say, the fact that the words attributed to the coach "most certainly were not true" and that the coach did not "think, much less say them" ("Our deepest apologies," p. A1).

Using mortification strategy, *The News Examiner* on Feb. 24, 1997 ran a rare front-page apology. The apology, which was signed by both Publisher David Atkins and Editor Steve Rogers, indicated that it was attempting to atone for the "terrible mistake" in the sports story. In the apology, the newspaper indicated

that no one at the paper other than the writer knew of the contents of the offending paragraph.

"The writer never intended for the words to appear in print. The words were a result of sad, misguided joke by the writer gone seriously awry." The apology went on to say the comments about the player "most certainly are not true," and that the coach "would not think them, much less say them."

Further, the newspaper said, "As hollow as words may seem, we are truly sorry. No one was more offended by the fact that this completely inappropriate material was ever thought, much less printed on our pages" ("Our deepest apologies," p. A1).

To show how much the newspaper regretted the mistake, the editor and the publisher explained how efforts were made to retrieve every newspaper from the newsstands once the error was discovered. "Newspaper personnel cut the offending paragraph from newspapers which could be obtained. If total distribution could have stopped, it would have been," the newspaper explained.

The apology also stated that the player, the coach, and the administration of the high school were

given personal apologies by 9 a.m., the morning the story was published. The writer of the offending article, DeLeonibus, was quickly dismissed. Three other staff members who would have caught the error were disciplined.

Noting that the newspaper had received hundreds of calls from "indignant and outraged" readers, the editors vowed to try and make sure "such a mistake can never happen again."

"We must again regain the trust in the community, It is a burden we fully understand and one we gladly accept," the apology concluded.

Analysis of Examiner apology

By stating in the first paragraph of the apology that "The *News Examiner* offers its deepest apologies for the terrible mistake," the newspaper accepted full responsibility for the error and did not attempt to minimize the impact of the story.

The newspaper also indicated that "Words can not fully express our sorrow. We take responsibility. Again, we offer deepest apologies to the player and his

family, the coach and his family, the school and the entire community."

By accepting responsibility and acknowledging the sufferings of the victims, the newspaper offered what could be "considered a textbook example of mortification" (Benoit & Brinson, 1990, p. 82; Gottfried, 1993).

Yet in using mortification, the *News Examiner* also found a scapegoat: the writer who was fired. "The writer was quickly dismissed," the newspaper indicated in the apology. The newspaper insisted that no one other than the writer knew of contents of the offending paragraph. "Had it known the contents of the paragraph, the newspaper certainly would not have allowed the words to be printed" ("Our deepest apologies," p. A1). Yet, the newspaper said three other staff members were disciplined for the offence. These must have known about the words or should have known about the offending paragraph.

Evidently, the writer became a "vessel of unwanted evils," and was driven from the newspaper so that he can carry the evils away (Burke, 1957, 39-40). By this action, at least temporarily, the newspaper guilt was

relieved. The writer, before becoming the scapegoat, was once part of the group. He had been "profoundly consubstantial with those who, looking upon [him] as a chosen vessel, ritualistically cleanse themselves by loading the burden of their own inequities upon [him]" (Burke, 1945, p. 406). The writer had to become different from the group in order for the newspaper to alienate him from its own "inequities." Burke calls this process "the dialectic of the scapegoat" (1945, p.406).

While the two newspapers both used victimage and mortification in their apologies, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* was based more on victimage while the *News Examiner* leaned more toward mortification. Victimage is often preferred rather than mortification because "if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel or cause outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within. And the greater one's internal inadequacies the greater the amount of evils one can load up on the back of the enemy" (Burke, 1957, p.174).

By defining themselves in opposition to the scapegoats, the reporters, the two newspapers formed a

union with the aggrieved parties, in this case Chiquita and the community. Through shared participation in the alienation of the reporters, the newspapers created identification among themselves. "Is possible that rituals of victimage are the natural means for affirming the principle of social cohesion above the principle of social division," says Burke (1965, p. 286). He also notes that "is it not a terrifying fact that you can never get people together except when they have a goat in common? ... That's how they have to operate; they get congregation by segregation'" (Aaron, 1966 p. 499).

Apologies accepted?

Most experts were on media ethics were not surprised by the newspapers' decisions. "This is just another indication of the heightened concern about credibility and ethical standards at news organizations. This is a very forceful move by a news organization to clarify what it clearly sees as a major ethical lapse," said Bill Kovach, a former editor with *The New York Times* and *The Atlanta Journal* and Constitution, who is now curator of journalism fellowships at Harvard University (Nolan, 1998).

Chiquita's management said it accepted the *Enquirer's* apology and was pleased the newspaper had disavowed the articles and the manner in which they were prepared. "As we have said all along, the articles were highly inaccurate and conveyed a false and unfair impression about our company, our associates and the way we do business," Chiquita said in its statement (Chiquita accepts apology, 1998).

The settlement alone ranks among the highest ever paid by a news organization. But it is also unusual because Chiquita had not yet taken any legal action against the *Enquirer* (Biagi, 1998; Sanford, 1998).

"There have been settlements in substantial amounts after someone has lost a lawsuit," said Floyd Abrams, the well-known First Amendment lawyer, "but I can't think of a situation in which a publication has been obliged to pay a figure on the order of \$10 million in circumstances in which there was never litigation." But by saying that information was stolen from Chiquita, Abrams added, the *Enquirer* was on weak legal ground. "A great deal of aggressive newsgathering may be protected by the First Amendment but stealing isn't," he said (Chiquita accepts apology, 1998).

In the *News Examiner's* case, the newspaper in July last year agreed to pay the high school soccer player \$828,721 rather than appeal the jury award in a libel case over the made-up quote printed in one of its newspapers. In April, jurors awarded \$800,000 in punitive and compensatory damages to Garrett Dixon Jr., who played soccer for Gallatin High School. Rufus Lassiter, Dixon's former coach and now the school's assistant principal, had already been paid \$150,000 in compensatory damages.

Summary

When it is time for newspapers to say sorry, finding the right words seems to be difficult. For organizations that deal with words, newspapers seem to be at loss to explain their own errors. The two cases in this chapter show how daunting that task is for newspapers. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* which was forced to retract a series of stories about Chiquita Bananas tried several methods of image restoration before finally admitting its sin and paying for it _ literally and otherwise. In its apology, the *Enquirer* chose to use victimage, piling the blame on the scapegoat, the reporter who was the lead investigator in the series.

The other case involving the *News Examiner* can be described as a textbook version of the mortification. Although its sin (attributing a false, salacious quotation to a high school coach) was mostly the fault of the reporter, the *News Examiner* accepted full responsibility. Its front-page apology shows how sorry the newspaper was and outlined the efforts the newspaper undertook to correct the error, like trying to retrieve the offensive newspapers. Still in both cases, mortification served as the alternative strategy.

CHAPTER 6

DAILY CORRECTIONS

It is easier to come up with rhetoric explanations in single incident cases like those in Cincinnati and Gallatin. But do newspapers handle daily corrections? This study revealed that newspapers do go through the same redemption process although not as evident as in single incidences. Still both the *Democrat and Chronicle*, and the *New York Times*, the papers that I studied, indicated that they look at each correction they run as a single incident that requires as much attention as a front-page correction.

Both newspapers generally acknowledge daily errors with short, printed corrections. In this study, I looked at the types, the wording of the corrections, the timeliness and thoroughness of the corrections.

Quest for credibility

For the *Democrat and Chronicle*, the quest to build credibility started on June 30 1997 when the media landscape in Rochester changed. The *Times Union* closed down, making the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* the only daily newspaper in the area. On the same day, the *Democrat and Chronicle* printed its first edition off

the presses of a new \$65 million printing plant. Tom Callinan, the editor of the newspaper told readers, "It's a day that has been years in the making and signals the beginning of a new era in your daily newspaper." What was of immediate impact, as Callinan noted, was "the color we've added to several pages of news and advertising. Our photo staff recently converted to 100 percent digital photography, making the *Democrat and Chronicle* an industry leader in that realm" (Callinan, 1997, p. 6A).

Callinan urged the readers to be proud that "your hometown newspaper is published in a manner appropriate for the photography and imaging capital of the world." But beyond color and clear reproduction, several other areas of the newspapers faced change. The *Democrat and Chronicle* introduced among other things:

- A separate classified advertising section and added local, business and sports news.
- A design intended to provide more news, with quick-reading bits of information layered with in-depth coverage of issues of local, national and international importance.

- More "coping" news (health, families, relationships, shopping, home improvement) in features; more places-to-go and things-to-do in features and a redesigned Weekend section on Thursdays.
- A new columnist, Mark Hare, in the Local section three days a week and more local views from the community on the editorial pages.
- More business news, including personal finance, technology and small business features.
- Enhanced sports coverage, including a high school page, golf page and pages for those interested in community sports, participant sports and action in the outdoors.

"Perhaps the most significant change in today's newspaper appears in two inches of type at the top of this page," Callinan noted. "In redesigning our editorial page, we found a place to display the familiar but too often forgotten First Amendment to our nation's Constitution." The newspaper vowed a commitment to fair and factual reporting of Rochester news that has kept "our business viable and this community strong for nearly 165 years" and pledged to "honor that responsibility" (Callinan, 1997, p. 6A).

New correction policy

A part of honoring that responsibility was accountability. The *Democrat and Chronicle* implemented a new correction policy on April 27, 1998. In memo to the Corrections/Accuracy Committee, News Editor Stan Wischnowski, said the policy dictates that all corrections should appear only on Page 2A. He further instructed all the editors to meet with their staffs and "let them know we're taking this very seriously. We want to build accountability, credibility and better understanding. But above all we want to eliminate mistakes" (News Editor's Note, 1998, April 27).

According to the new policy, each committee member (or a designated staff member) would find out each day if any corrections were needed. After corrections are found, they are sent to PAGE1A queue (directory) and a list is compiled daily and sent to the Managing Editor, who would be the person who signs off on them.

"Please create a file folder (or electronic slug) to track the number of corrections and clarifications that your department has. I'd like to set up a system for monitoring how we're doing with consistency in writing them, frequency and the types of mistakes that

we're making, " the memo from the news editor said. He, however, urged the editors to remember that more corrections aren't necessarily a bad thing. "It means we're becoming more accountable and taking steps to 'get it right'" (News Editor's Note, 1998, November 6).

Putting the corrections on one page did not necessarily eliminate the mistakes in the newspaper. Six months after the policy went into effect, the staff were informed that while the newspaper made it easier for readers to find corrections, and was also more aggressive in correcting the mistakes in a timely fashion, three themes are apparent. Some departments have been more aggressive than others in reporting corrections, some sections seem to have outstanding fact-checking methods in place and "we seem to be making more errors than last year " (Editor's Note, 1999, January 21).

The breakdown of the 182 corrections that the newspaper run in the six months of instituting the policy were: A section: 28; B section: 54; Our Town : 12; Business: 14; Sports: 16; Features: 47; Opinion: 7; and special sections: 4.

Editors at the *Democrat and Chronicle* see corrections as an important learning tool, helping to identify reporters and editors who persistently make errors. Too many corrections in one department can be a warning sign of internal problems that might have gone unnoticed if corrections were not catalogued.

. In trying to cut down on errors, The *Democrat and Chronicle* news desk periodically organizes what is known as "Fact-Checking 101" session. Usually four editors lecture at these sessions. At session in January, the news editor addressed the renewed push for accuracy, by introducing a four-part newsroom-wide program, stressing audits on accuracy, grammar, workmanship and credibility.

The copy desk chief talked about the need to use primary sources as the main emphasis, cautioning against the overuse of the Internet, the newspaper's archive system and other forms of secondary sources. The copy desk chief also offered a "10 Commandments for Fact-checking List" of dos and don'ts.

At both the *New York Times* and the *Democrat and Chronicle*, the electronic archive systems allow corrections or retractions to be linked to original

stories. This is important because editors and reporters use the archive system as a source for background information and for researching earlier stories.

The editors in various departments at the *Democrat and Chronicle* are required to file weekly reports on the corrections and the information is kept on what is known as accuracy reports. For example, the features editor filed this with note with the weekly report:

We went over the January list and found that all were mistakes on press releases. We doublecheck those for stories and for FYI. But not for lists. We'll have to talk about whether we need to check all press releases (Accuracy Alert, 1999).

The managing editor's reply was:

Obviously the answer is yes, if there are mistakes that are getting into lists. Mistakes in lists aren't any less important than mistakes in stories. So if we're going to use information from press releases anywhere in the paper, we need to check the information (and, like you said, check it after we type it into the system) (Accuracy Alert, 1999).

The editors in charge of each department are required to provide an explanation of how the error occurred and how it could have been prevented. If the mistake originate within another department, both departments must explain. For example, the *Democrat and Chronicle* misidentified a prominent business leader in

a photo caption on Page 1A. The explanation from the copy desk chief was this:

The mistake originated with Photo and was not caught by us, although we almost did _ (copy editor) was suspicious of it, asked me about it, but I thought he was asking about something else, and he claimed the pressure of time (late story) prevented him from checking further. What I think we could do is perhaps publicize the Ourway LOCAL NAMES file in the Clarion for those who have forgotten about it (Accuracy Alert, 1999).

The photo editor also filed an explanation:

(The photographer) could have advertised the change and been more vocal about the fix she made to the pre-published photograph. However, she did tell her boss. She took the right steps and I do not believe the entire weight of the error rests with her or any general approach the desk perceives of photographers. Photographers are double-checking their work and making an effort (Accuracy Alert, 1999).

The photo editor, however, also requested that any research/report into how a photo error got into the paper include a conversation with the photographer and/or editor. The photo editor also fired off a memo to photo department staff informing them that "the errors in recent newspapers are too high to tolerate. Everyone is highlighting accuracy as a major cause in 1999. Improving systems and awareness is a priority. We should all be concerned " (Accuracy Alert, 1999).

Writing corrections

No matter how well a system a newspaper has in place to check errors, it is impossible not to make mistakes in the fast paced newspaper industry. With deadlines getting tight and competition getting fierce, newspapers are likely to make mistakes (Bridges & Bridges, 1998). It is how well the corrections are phrased that can help soothe the sting of the error.

In determining how best to write a correction, it is better to put them in categories: newsgathering process, editing process, display process (headlines, captions), syndicate/outside suppliers, simple error and unavoidable (e.g., printed concert time changes).

In the period under study, November 1998 to February 1998, the study found that:

- 860 corrections appeared in the two newspapers during the four-month period.
- 14 percent of the errors were spelling errors.
- 33 percent of the corrections appeared in the paper the next day.
- 20 percent of the corrections appeared more than seven days after the error.
- 11 percent of the errors were in captions.
- 10 percent of the errors were in phone numbers.

- 2 percent of the errors involved dates.
- 19 percent of the errors were of names.

(For more on the breakdown of the errors see tables below.)

Although most of the corrections in both newspapers appear to deal with inconsequential mistakes, such as minor misspellings, it is cardinal that all the mistakes are corrected because journalism is about getting stories right.

The *New York Times* specifies where and by whom the mistakes are made as a way editors can identify holes in procedures and often the *Times* give the cause of the error, such as an editing or reporting mistake, in the correction.

The *Democrat and Chronicle* does not generally mention who is responsible for the error because it is usually of no interest to the readers, according to the editors (News Editor's Note, 1998, April 27). Some reporters, however, have insisted that an error caused by an editor should be indicated thus so as not to harm the relationship the reporter may have cultivated with the sources.

The *Democrat and Chronicle* does not repeat the error in the correction. It only mentions the corrected version. The *Times* indicates what the error was and then says what the correct version was. The *Democrat and Chronicle* has no consistent way of writing the corrections. Some corrections will start by starting what the corrected version is before mentioning that there was an error. For example, the *Democrat and Chronicle* run this correction on December 29:

"Singer Rick Nelson was killed in a plane crash on Dec. 31, 1985. A photo caption on Page 2A Sunday had the incorrect date."

The *New York Times* seems to have a formula to its corrections. The corrections either start by saying "Due to an editing error..." or "An article on..." or "A picture on..." or "A headline on..." misstated or misidentified or incorrectly referred to or was wrong.

Headlines pose the biggest challenge for correction writers and here are examples of how the headline errors are handled by the *New York Times*:

"An obituary headline yesterday about the painter Francisco Sainz characterized his style incorrectly" (November 4).

"An obituary headline on Sunday about Vladimir Dokoudovsky, a ballet dancer and influential teacher, misstated his involvement with American Ballet Theater" (December 8).

" A headline on Saturday about the bombing of the headquarters of Osama bin Laden, the suspected organizer of the attacks on American embassies in Africa, referred incompletely to the Clinton Administration's objectives" (November 17).

The *Democrat and Chronicle* takes a more direct approach in correcting headline errors as shown in these examples:

"A headline on Page 1B of yesterday's editions about the investigation of the fraternity-house fire in Geneseo was incorrect" (February 29).

"A headline on some editions of Page 3B yesterday should have said that Macedon was likely to pass its budget" (November 14).

"A headline on Page 4B yesterday gave the incorrect county for the town of Montezuma. It is in Cayuga County" (February 4).

Some mistakes are easy to correct: a misspelled name, an inaccurate title, an incorrect date, the wrong political party affiliation. But there's another kind of error that is more complicated and more difficult to address. It's when the context of the story is wrong, or an important fact that could change the focus isn't included, or the tone is inappropriate. This is when a simple correction is not sufficient. In the four-month study, the two papers did not offer a correction that seems to address this problem. This may be an indication that the two newspapers did not account such problems or that those corrections are handled elsewhere in the newspaper, maybe with a new story that takes into consideration that type of problem.

Nevertheless, the *New York Times* uses "Editors' Note" to "amplify articles or rectify what the editors consider significant lapses of fairness, balance or perspective." The *Times* has printed an average of 25 Editors' Notes annually during the last five years (Paterno, 1996).

At the *Democrat and Chronicle*, Editor Tom Callinan, writes a weekly column explaining certain

things that would not have been adequately done in page 2A corrections.

Mortification or Victimage

It is, however, even hard harder to define errors as mortification or victimage. The new "Corrections and Clarifications" corner at the *Democrat and Chronicle* is far from striking a uniform way of assigning blame. Compared to the *New York Times'* all-revealing mortification corrections (that not only mention the error but take the blame for it), the *Democrat and Chronicle* corrections appear haphazard but are in fact masterpieces of subtlety in victimage.

While the *New York Times* preambles the corrections with phrases like "Because of an editing error," the *Democrat and Chronicle* has a wry editorial voice, as in this correction:

Balloon-a-gram is a registered trademark. In no way was it related to a robbery involving a suspect dressed as a clown in a story published yesterday on Page 1B. In the robbery, the suspect was armed with a handgun and a fistful of balloons (November 10).

And while the *New York Times* would say "a front-page picture caption in some copies yesterday about the agreement to hold early elections in Israel reversed

the identifications of the men shown with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu," (December 5), the *Democrat and Chronicle* would phrase the correction like this: "Tom Mooney of the Greater Rochester Metro Chamber of Commerce was misidentified in a caption on Page 1A of yesterday's *Democrat and Chronicle*" (February 7).

In some corrections, the *New York Times* seems to appeal to particular readers as in this correction: "A picture caption yesterday with an article about the possible financial cost of the Middle East plan to the United States departed from the preferred rendering of the Hebrew name of a leader of the Jewish settler movement" (November 20).

The *Democrat and Chronicle* can't seem to take blame, sometimes phrasing the correction in a manner that makes someone else wrong. In one correction, the *Democrat and Chronicle* inadvertently put the blame on the *New York Times*:

The New York Times crossword puzzle and solution that ran in yesterday's Living section were incorrect. The correct Saturday puzzle, along with the correct solution to Friday's puzzle, will run tomorrow on Page 6C. The solution to the Saturday

puzzle will run tomorrow in its usual spot on Page 5C (November 5).

The Rochester newspaper neglected to mention that its editors had put in the incorrect puzzle and not that the *New York Times* had an incorrect puzzle.

Corrections may be a new exercise in conspicuous accountability for the *Democrat and Chronicle*, but the newspaper needs to either agree that it made a mistake instead of publishing wish-washy corrections such as this one:

A story on Page 1B in Tuesday's paper about Mary Ramerman contained a statement that may have been in error. Sister Patricia Schoelles, president of St. Bernard's Institute, denied Tuesday that any of the institute's faculty members advised Corpus Christi Church that Ramerman could raise the chalice during Mass. Also, Ramerman is the mother of three children (November 5).

Either the story had an error or it did not.

Either Ramerman has three children or does not.

Still, the corrections in the both newspapers demonstrate that the newspapers are fallible and willing to be told so by readers.

Although not all newspapers can match the sanctimony of the *New York Times'* daily penance, it is not necessary to be as terse, impersonal, and picky as the *Times* which corrects everything. It is because of

this that sometimes the *New York Times* ends up correcting a correction:

The Making Books column on Thursday, about works published as nonfiction that include fictional scenes, and a correction in this space on Monday, misspelled the name of the author of "The Last Brother," about Senator Edward M. Kennedy (November 18).

Despite the fact that *The New York Times* ran at least two corrections on each of the four months studied, it did not seem to lose its touch of credibility with the readers. It seems to send out a clear message that there are unavoidable errors in a technology-smart product that is produced at high speed. The *Democrat and Chronicle*, on the other hand, claims that its new policy is to correct all errors as soon as possible. Yet it fails to run corrections on some days, holding them until the next day.

Thus the message in *The New York Times* is that 'we are sorry for the errors that we made in this newspaper and please forgive us, for we are infallible.' This, in essence, is true mortification done in small 100-word corrections daily. For the *Democrat and Chronicle*, the message seems to be 'there were errors in our

newspapers. It wasn't entirely our fault. The information we got was not right. So, please bear with us.' This is subtle victimage, refusing to accept full responsibility, but passing the buck to someone else, usually the scapegoat.

Despite the differing redemptive rhetoric, both newspapers are showing that they are belligerent in admitting mistakes and setting the record straight. Both newspapers put the corrections on the second page making it easier for readers to find them. Page A2 is a heavy traffic page because of contents list for *New York Times*, and because of lottery numbers for the *Democrat and Chronicle*. The *Democrat and Chronicle* goes further by including a phone number and a contact person for reporting errors and the information is published every day, whether a correction is run or not. With the ample correction space, both newspapers see admitting errors as a way of enhancing the reputation for accuracy and fairness. This helps build credibility with the readers who have indicated they welcome corrections (Examining our credibility, 1998; Bogart, 1992).

Uniform corrections

With newspapers displaying varying styles of making apologies and corrections, some advocates say a law is needed for corrections. Supporters of the Uniform Corrections Act are pushing for passage in several states in 1999.

"We are working and we are very optimistic. Like any legislation, it takes time to get things through " says Seaton (1999, p.1).

As president of ASNE, Seaton and ASNE leaders are pushing for the passage of the act in several states and have hired a lobbyist to help drum up support in several states. The legislation would protect newspapers from libel suits if they print corrections in a timely manner, supporters say. The goal, Strupp (1999) says, is to change the perception of corrections as an admission of guilt, a belief that often causes editors to hold off on printing them for fear that they may be used in future legal action.

The act first came forward in 1993 from the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, a group of legal experts appointed by state officials to study and create state laws with uniform standards. The commission adopted the act in late 1993,

and it received the American Bar Association's endorsement six months later. But since January 1995, when the legislation first went before several state lawmakers, only North Dakota has made it law. Strupp (1999) notes that Seaton and other supporters blame the poor record of approval on a lack of information for legislators and the failure of industry leaders to make it a priority.

"Specifically, the act would require that anyone seeking a correction should inform the newspaper, online service, or other media outlet of the alleged inaccuracy within three months of the date it was printed or broadcast. After receiving the request, the news outlet would have 45 days to investigate and broadcast or print a correction," (Strupp, 1999, p. 19). If a correction is printed within that time frame and reaches "substantially the same audience" as the original inaccurate report, the news outlet would be protected from loss-of-reputation or punitive damages, which often carry the largest monetary awards.

The act was recently introduced in the New York state legislature and is expected to be presented to state lawmakers in New Mexico later this spring.

While the proposal has brought widespread support from news organizations such as Afro-American Newspapers, Gannett Co. Inc., and *The Washington Post*, it has some detractors. Critics, such as the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, worry that the law may push editors to print corrections too quickly.

"One of the components of credibility is standing by a story that you believe to be true, even in the face of opposition," says Jane Kirtley, the committee's executive director and a former reporter. "The idea that you can make a lawsuit go away by printing a retraction is troubling" (Strupp, 1999, p. 19).

Summary

While it is not easy for newspapers to use mortification or victimage effectively in front-page apologies, it is tougher to do so in the daily corrections. The two newspapers studied in this chapter — *The New York Times* and the *Democrat and Chronicle* — both have systems in place for handling the errors but have differing way of writing corrections. *The New York Times's* corrections appear in a consistent manner, identifying the error, assigning blame and then explaining the error. The *Democrat and Chronicle* does

not identify the error or assign blame. The correction just indicates the corrected version. This inconsistency has forced some media advocates to push for a law for uniform corrections. Although some groups are against this move, most media giants are supporting the cause.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The unmistakable truth is that mistakes will always be in newspapers but it is how newspapers handle the corrections and apologies that hurt credibility. The placing and wording of corrections can help atone for newspaper sins. When newspapers publish controversial stories, there is a need to explain such decisions to the readers. When errors are found, they must be corrected and placed on high-traffic pages. And when the mistake is too significant to bury on a correction page, newspapers must use the front page to apology.

In this thesis, I have shown that in order to restore image or credibility, a newspaper can use several strategies. Among them is the image restoration model which has five parts; denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Either of these strategies can be used alone or in combination with others. Mortification is the preferred method for guilt redemption when the organization or individual is completely responsible for the error or mistake.

By using Kenneth Burke's theory on guilt redemption, I have shown that guilt redemption is necessary in order to cleanse the sins in newspapers. The hierarchal system rooted in the human language makes it impossible to attain perfection and hence the need for redemption. Burke offers victimage and mortification as the primary means for relieving guilt. Victimage is the process in which guilt is transferred to another vessel, organization or person. Mortification is the process in which those in error admit their sins and suffer for those sins. The redemption from guilt _ whether through victimage or mortification _ is found in a change of identity, new perspective, different view or moving to a better goal. For newspapers, redemption can lead to more trust from readers and an increase in credibility.

Credibility is cardinal to newspapers. Concern over news media's loss of credibility is forcing newspapers to adopt new strategies in rebuilding public trust and confidence. The encouraging news is that newspapers themselves acknowledge there is a problem and are getting motivated to do something about it through apologies and corrections. The discouraging

factor is that there does not seem to be a consistent way of fighting credibility, especially in the way apologies and corrections are handled. Since self-examination precedes change, it is hoped that newspapers will soon use a consistent way of handling apologies and corrections.

And when it is time for newspapers to say sorry on the front page, newspapers seem to be at loss for words. The two cases in this thesis show how daunting that task is for newspapers. In the first, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* which was forced to retract a series of stories about Chiquita Bananas tried several methods of image restoration before finally settling on using victimage and piling the blame on the reporter. The other case involving the *News Examiner* was mostly a textbook version of the mortification. Although its sin (attributing a false, salacious quotation to a high school coach) was mostly the fault of the reporter, the *News Examiner* accepted full responsibility. Its front-page apology shows how sorry the newspaper was and outlined the efforts the newspaper undertook to correct the error.

It is even harder for newspapers to say sorry effectively in the daily corrections. The two other newspapers studied in this thesis – *The New York Times* and the *Democrat and Chronicle* have differing way of writing corrections. *The New York Times'* corrections appear to have a consistent manner, identifying the error, assigning the blame and then correcting the error. The *Democrat and Chronicle*, on the other hand, does not identify the error or assign blame but just prints the corrected version.

Allan M. Siegal, an assistant managing editor at the *New York Times*, offers the best way of knowing when to run a correction or an apology. He told a ASNE convention in April 1998 that corrections are needed "if it makes you feel bad the next day ... or it's pretty clear when we've done something that we would not do again" (Paterno, 1998. P. 27).

Using mortification in corrections is a proper rejoinder in maintaining credibility with readers. Like Burke notes, language has created a social system that has set unattainable standards. The result of this social system and hierarchy is the breaking of laws, never-ending guilt and the need for purgation and

redemption. In newspaper corrections and apologies, the need for a strong linguistic process cannot be overemphasized. Good rhetoric strategies can help a newspaper restore its image and maybe escape from contemporary follies. When newspapers achieve redemption through either victimage or mortification, all aggrieved parties are likely to unify and find consubstantiation that hierarchy defies. Still, someone, usually the scapegoat, suffers in order to attain consubstantiatiality.

Newspapers should take hope in knowing that readers have a great sense of credibility in newspapers that own up on errors and explain their errors whether it is in front-page apologies or corrections on page two.

Limitation, implications and future studies

This study is by no means exhaustive. Further studies need to be conducted from the reader's point of view. Looking at the corrections from the reader's perspective would be beneficial to newspapers even as they try to apologize or make corrections Another related study would be to look at how other news

organizations such as television and news stations handle their corrections.

Encouraging as it is that newspapers are doing self-examination, there is need to check on how technology is affecting credibility. Is the spread of media from traditional newspapers and broadcast networks into cable television and the Internet forcing newspapers to be more competitive and hence more prone to mistakes? Is the speed of news breaking on the Internet pumping up pressure to move stories faster _ and may mean stories aren't checked enough for accuracy? Is group ownership of newspapers and broadcast stations, and greater pressure for profits, bringing pressure to cut corners on reporting and editing? Is the quality of newspapers being lowered because there aren't as many reporters gathering news, and fewer people to edit?

Another key issue of credibility that newspapers need to confront is how race and ethnicity affect what stories newspapers cover and who is assigned to cover them. Do newspapers lose credibility when their news pages are not as diverse as the communities they cover?

Further research on these issues would prove useful to newspapers and the readers.

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Table 1. Number of errors

Newspaper	November	December	January	February	
New York	188	173	160	176	697
Rochester	39	30	49	45	163

Table 2. Type of errors

Error	Misstate	Misidentify	Incorrect	Misspell	Omit
NYT	295	121	157	94	30
D&C	12	15	109	23	4

Table 3. Where errors were found

Where	Article	Chart	Caption	Report	headline
NYT	499	27	88	66	17
D&C	138	3	8	6	8

Table 4. When the correction appeared

When	Yesterday	In 7 days	Over 7 days	Same day
NYT	190	251	164	92
D&C	95	42	9	15

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