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# Image Repair in NCAA Division I Athletics

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# IMAGE REPAIR IN NCAA DIVISION I ATHLETICS

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# APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATION

Master's Candidate, Joseph J. Martinelli, has successfully presented and made the required

modifications to the text of the master's project for the Master of Arts degree during this Spring 2019.

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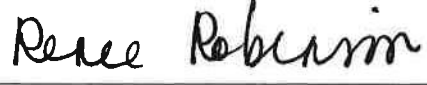
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**Dedication**

This Master's Project is dedicated to my advisor, Dr. Kristen Kohler, who believed in me and helped me to get to this point. My parents Joe and Lysa, who supported me on this journey, even with my constant requests for feedback and moments of self-doubt. Two amazing dogs, Hunter and Seton, who stayed by my side though countless hours of research and writing. The words of Seton Hall's alma mater state that "she will foster all your dreams". To the university that has become my second home, thank you and I will always be a proud Pirate.

## Abstract

NCAA Division I universities are constantly under a threat of image loss due to both internal and external factors. The purpose of this study was to examine past image repair campaigns executed after a crisis by the following NCAA Division I member universities: Ohio State University, Louisville University, and the University of Maryland. A problem-oriented case study was completed on the media coverage of these situations, which evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies chosen by each respective university. Results revealed the best practices for public relations practitioners to repair and maintain a positive image in the collegiate landscape.

*Key Words:* public relations, image repair, NCAA, Division I, athletics, Louisville University, Ohio State University, University of Maryland, problem-oriented case study, media

IMAGE REPAIR IN NCAA DIVISION I ATHLETICS

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

There are few areas that get attention in the United States like athletics. Consumers in the United States spent more than $100 billion dollars on sports in a one-year time span covering parts of 2016 through 2017 (O'Brien, 2017).  The journey to professional sports is a long one and a dream that many never reach. However, in the United States, that journey usually goes through a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institution.

Who is the NCAA and what purpose does it serve? The NCAA is a nonprofit, governing body for collegiate athletics, working to serve its mission to "integrate athletics into higher education" ("Frequently Asked Questions," n.d.). The NCAA highlights its priorities as falling under three areas: academics, well-being, and fairness (Opportunity, n.d.). The NCAA's focus on academics is to ensure that the student athletes they represent are set up for success after their career in sport. Fairness focuses on providing equal opportunities for student athletes attending college and ensuring integrity still exists in the game. Lastly, well-being is quoted as "working hard to protect them (athletes) physically and mentally, on the field and off" (Opportunity, n.d.).

The well-being that the NCAA is working to protect, is that of its member institutions' student athletes. According to the NCAA, only 2.5% of high school athletic participants will continue to compete at a NCAA Division I level ("Estimated Probability," n.d.).  Division I is considered at the top level of collegiate athletics, receiving the most funding from institutions (About NCAA Division I, n.d.). There are approximately 350 NCAA Division I member institutions, sponsoring over 6,000 different teams, making up a student athlete population of over 170,000 individuals (About NCAA Division I, n.d.).

A collegiate athletic department operates under the rules of the NCAA and is expected to carry out its mission on a micro level. Individual athletic departments are composed of athletic directors, who serve as a leader and report to both their respective university and the NCAA. Under the supervision of athletic directors is a support system for the athletic department and student athletes, covering administration, coaches, academic advisors, and medical support staff.

Financially, operation of a collegiate athletic department is not a small undertaking at the NCAA Division I level. Based on the most recent NCAA Division I financial report available, completed in 2016, the median net generated revenue across Division I FBS (top level of schools sponsoring football) institutions is a $14,407,000 loss (Faulks, 2017). With average expenses totaling over 71 million dollars and average total revenues around 68 million dollars, most schools operate at a loss when it comes to sponsoring athletics. Top revenue generating categories include ticket sales, cash contributions from alumni, and royalties/advertising/sponsorship (Faulks, 2017).

Unfortunately, there are times when the NCAA or its member institutions fail to follow through on the NCAA's goals of academics, well-being, or fairness. This can create quite the public relations crisis for the NCAA and its member institutions. The resulting crisis no matter where the blame falls, can have many consequences for the parties involved. Crisis, as stated by Jordan and Smith (2013) can have a profound impact and could "potentially jeopardize an organization's ability to survive and profit" (p. 2). Collegiate athletic departments are branches of a university, made up of university representatives, that can be held responsible for crisis related issues. It is important that public relations staff at the institutions be prepared for development of a response to the crisis and have a proper image repair campaign strategy ready for when a crisis presents itself.

## Statement of The Problem

Crisis related issues centered around collegiate athletic departments are taking a more profound focus in the national spotlight. The lens is shifting from just worrying about performance on the field, to all areas regarding the ethics and actions of the department, its personnel, and its athletes. The years 2017 and 2018 have both rocked the landscape of collegiate athletics. This presents itself as a difficult and interesting time for public relations practitioners operating in the field of collegiate athletics.

This study addresses the problems related to crisis in collegiate athletics by not how to eliminate crisis, but rather how universities and their public relations practitioners can repair their image after a crisis. Image repair discourse is becoming more and more a necessity for collegiate athletic departments and their public relations practitioners when inevitably faced with a crisis. Athletics are not immune to situations that may need some sort of response. Kruse (1981) identified four reasons a response is required in sports as being threats to team harmony, lack of seriousness, failure to preform, and violation of ethics. The last being the one to cause the biggest issue for NCAA Division I institutions.

Crises related to bribery, unreported domestic abuse, and threats to student athlete safety have received wide spread media attention. Ohio State University athletic department officials were accused of covering up reports of domestic abuse by department personnel (McMurphy, 2018). The University of Maryland was accused of allowing an unsafe environment for student athletes, resulting in the death of a student athlete (Dinich, Rittenberg, & VanHaaren, 2018). Numerous schools were accused with corruption related to violation of NCAA recruiting violations in the sport of college basketball (Sherman, 2018). Each of these crises, although

different in nature, all deeply affected the universities involved and required some sort of response.

Because the nature of revenue generating categories and the importance on collegiate athletic departments it is important that a negatively affected image because of a crisis, is repaired as soon as possible. Image repair is how an organization responds to a crisis in an attempt of ending or resuming normalcy (Benoit, 2014). Most of the revenue generating categories are comprised of stakeholders who chose to support an institution. A main goal of an image repair campaign should be to keep the athletic department in good relations with the revenue-generating stakeholders.

## Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this paper is to examine and determine the effectiveness and strategies used by athletic departments when responding to a crisis. William Benoit's (2014) image repair theory provides a framework for evaluation of methods used by athletic departments in their response to a crisis. Benoit (1997) states that "image is essential to organizations" (p. 177) and acknowledges that "there are differences in the repair efforts of individuals and companies" (p. 177). This study examines how image repair efforts are used in the field of collegiate athletics, across the three different types of crisis that have affected NCAA institutions listed above.

This study serves to answer two research questions related to image repair in collegiate athletics. (a) According to image repair strategies, how should a university or athletic department respond after a crisis? (b) What actions or strategies are the most effective and currently used for collegiate athletic departments working to repair an image after a crisis? These questions directly address the statement of the problem, focusing on the repair of image after crisis. Each question

serves to further knowledge surrounding image repair methodology of NCAA Division I institutions.

Through examination of these cases and comparison of the effectiveness of the strategies used, a guiding framework is created. This artifact acting as a guide to be used in times of crisis response by a university, was then distributed to six collegiate athletic department personnel working in positions that would be involved in the decision process for responding to a crisis. Evaluation of the artifact allowed for current conventions of the field to be applied and the artifact to be assessed by those it was designed to help serve. In the selection of cases that are different in nature it allows for the creation of a guide that can be used when faced with a variety of crisis types.

### Benefit to Collegiate Athletics

Although much research into image repair strategies and effectiveness has been completed previously for individuals and corporations, this paper will further advance understanding of image repair strategies for the collegiate athletic department and their public relations efforts. This will build off prior research done to judge effectiveness of image repair campaigns, by collegiate institutions such as the University of New Mexico (Compton, 2012) and Duke University (Fortunato, 2008).

Prior research, covered in greater depth in the following chapter, shows that Benoit's (2014) image repair strategies can be effectively applied to the field of athletics as seen in the cases stated in the previous paragraph. However, little research has been applied to image repair done by NCAA collegiate institutions. With the amount of media coverage NCAA institutions receive when faced with a crisis and the increased costs of operating a collegiate athletic department, the need to repair image is extremely necessary to keep revenue coming in. This

paper benefits collegiate athletic departments by providing deeper understanding into how to repair an image when a crisis does occur, limiting loss and reducing negative attention. Although research is built upon NCAA Division I institutions, application can be wide spread for athletic departments of any level, including high school or professional organizations.

Without a positive image to all stakeholders of a NCAA collegiate athletic department, it is a difficult journey to maintain competitiveness on the field.  However, this study aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice regarding image repair for NCAA institutions. This is accomplished through in-depth analysis of cases calling for image repair on the NCAA Division I level, as well as the creation of an artifact, found in Appendix B, that will help guide those working in message strategies. The next chapter examines prior research and application of theory related to image repair.

## CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to gain insight into the proper response strategies for a collegiate athletic department first requires a review of literature to gain insight into the theory related to image repair and past research into successful apology and image repair campaigns.  Responses to a crisis in the collegiate athletics industry greatly impact the long-term effects felt by a department, or university. Responses to a crisis need to consider the many stakeholders involved in a situation. The presentation of issues in media, current issues deemed important, and how to restore a positive image are all key issues to consider when constructing response messages. The review of literature offers valuable insight into the theory behind the decisions and actions that should be taken by a department in the development of a plan to respond to crisis.

### Selection of Sources

Sources were selected for this study after consultation and review of the Encyclopedia of Public Relations (2013) for information related to image repair theory. After reviewing the Encyclopedia of Public Relations key researchers of Ware and Linkugel, Kruse, and Benoit were identified. Key terms identified were "image repair", "theory", and "communication".  Moving forward searches contained those key words as well as any mention to Benoit.

Collection of sources began with compiling peer-reviewed articles utilizing the Seton Hall University Library search function. Only peer-reviewed articles were selected for inclusion with an emphasis placed on works published in the last 10 years. There were two books also selected for inclusion in this document, one being Benoit (2014) and Blaney, Lippert, and Smith (2012).  References and journals of publication of selected works that contained relevant relation to the theory were searched for additional resources. This helped in developing connections

between different researchers and gain insight into the direction of research being conducted on the theory of image repair.

## Apologia

Ware and Linkugel (1973) state that "an attack upon a person's character, upon his worth as a human being, does seem to demand a direct response" (p. 274). This response is known as an apology. Kruse (1981) furthered research in apologia by applying it to team sport. According to Kruse (1981) "sport has social and psychological significance" (p. 270), thus placing an "emotional import for spectators" (p. 271). It is due to these factors that sports take an important role in society and when there are wrong doings an apology is deemed necessary.

Kruse (1981) works to identify four reasons or situations that apology is required in sport. The first reason outlined by Kruse (1981) are threats to team harmony, which could lead to poor team performance. The second reason is when an individual fails to take the sport seriously or reduces their role. The third reason is when an individual is not performing their best for some circumstance either external or internal. Lastly, the fourth reason requiring an apology is for when there is a violation of ethics, either in the sports world, situations such as cheating, or in society, situations such as abuse. Kruse (1981) highlights two issues revealed by violations of ethics. Violations of ethics can show a lack of good character or how emphasis on winning causes behaviors or actions that violate societies ethical standards.

## Image Repair

William Benoit is considered the leading researcher in image repair strategies. Benoit's 2014 work titled, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*, is an update to his original 1995 work which provides a model for analyzing responses to an image crisis. Benoit (2014) states "threats to one's image, which usually arise from persuasive

messages that attack, criticize, or express suspicion and thereby prompt attempts at image repair" (p. 1). Benoit (2014) outlines four reasons that a threat to one's image may arise. First being that there may be an attack due to competition for resources. Second, one may fail to meet their obligations due to uncontrollable circumstances. Third, people are not always perfect and may commit actions that are wrong. Lastly, different priorities conflict with those goals.

Benoit (2014) states that "image repair messages focus on one particular goal in discourse: repairing one's reputation" (p. 20). The overall goal to a response in a crisis is to try to amend the negative consequences from a crisis and to repair the image of the organization. Benoit (2014) points out that there must be some form of "perceived guilt" present to require an image repair. Without any feelings of wrong doing then image repair is unnecessary. However, the feelings of blame, do influence the actions taken when creating an image repair message (Benoit, 2014).

## Categories of Image Repair Strategies

Benoit (2014) outlines five strategies of response methods. These strategies are broad and some also contain subcategories. Benoit uses the theory of image repair to focus on message types rather than defining the types of crisis situations (Benoit, 1997). The focus on messages covers the reactive measures taken to repair an image after a crisis. Benoit (2014) outlines the five categories as denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Following these strategies does not automatically assume that one is accepting the blame as seen in the first two categories of denial and evasion of responsibility.

**Denial**

Denial simply means that an organization or individual is not recognizing any responsibility or wrongdoings for the crisis in question. The goal of a denial is to effectively

absolve an organization or individual of any involvement or liability for the crisis.  Denial can also allow an organization to respond to an issue by allowing them to provide explanations or by pointing out lack of evidence (Benoit, 2014).

Denial also allows for the blame to be shifted onto someone else. By shifting the blame, it answers the question presented of who is responsible for the actions. Benoit (2014) argues that shifting the blame will make the apology more effective for two reasons. It both will set a new target for the publics anger and will still provide a target for responsibility. Shifting the blame would require naming another individual as responsible acting as an escapist to the negative attention being received.

**Evasion of Responsibility**

Evasion of responsibility comes into play when one cannot deny responsibility for a crisis. With evasion of responsibility partial blame for the crisis is acknowledged in the hopes of mitigating the consequences. Evasion of responsibility is presented by Benoit with having four subcategories.  The four subcategories for evasion of responsibility are: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions (Benoit, 2014). Provocation admits wrong doing, due to being forced to act by another individual. This would be done to hopefully have the public feel the actions were justified and force blame on the provoking individual (Benoit, 2014).

Defeasibility argues that, "lack of information about or control over important factors" (Benoit, 2014, p. 23) caused the inability to avoid the crisis from occurring, thus releasing liability for the crisis.  Accident argues that, the cause of the crisis was just an error and out of one's control.  Benoit's (2014) reasoning for accident is that, responsibility can only be held for factors that are able to be controlled.  Lastly, good intentions argue that the crisis is only the result of something that was done with good intentions. According to Benoit (2014), "people

who do bad while trying to do good are usually not blamed as much as those who intend to do bad" (p. 24).

**Reducing Offensiveness**

Reducing offensiveness is a strategy with six subcategories. Reducing offensiveness accepts responsibility while minimizing negativity felt towards the organization (Benoit, 2014). According to Benoit, reducing offensiveness is done in an "attempt to reduce the unfavorable feelings toward the actor by increasing the audience's esteem for the actor or by decreasing their negative feelings about the act (p. 26). The six ways described by Benoit to reducing offensiveness are bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking one's accuser, and compensation.

Bolstering involves showing the positive qualities of an organization. This can be accomplished through actions taken, either currently or in the past, to either remind or change the publics opinion of the organization positively (Benoit, 2014). Minimization attempts to minimize or reduce the perceived negativity of the crisis by showing that the crisis is not as bad as it seems. Differentiation works to compare the crisis to other actions and portray the actions in a different perspective.

The next reduction of offensiveness strategy described by Benoit is transcendence. Transcendence serves to reframe the crisis in a different context, painting it as a positive. Attacking the accuser also serves as a method for reducing offensiveness. Attacking an accuser serves to reduce the credibility of an attacker or stating that they deserved the actions that they are accusing of. This is done to have the accusations diminish in value, reducing negativity towards the organization. Lastly, compensation serves to repair an image, through the exchange of goods or services, to make up for the negative actions that may have occurred (Benoit, 2014).

**Corrective Action**

Corrective action usually but not necessarily requires the admission of guilt by an organization. Through corrective action, an organization works to make changes to prevent the same crisis from happening again and/or creating a plan to rectify the crisis (Benoit, 2014).

**Mortification**

Mortification is essentially admission of guilt and making an apology for any wrong doing. This is done as a plea for forgiveness with the hope that it is accepted by the public. Benoit (2014) points out mortification can be vague and not actually apologizing for the crisis directly.

## Impression Management and Interpretation

Impression management plays an important role when it comes to construction of messaging for an organization, but especially becomes essential when done in times of threat to image. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2009), "impression refers to the image that a person displays during interaction" (p. 506). This image that is displayed by a person or organization can alter or influence how they are viewed. The idea behind impression management goes back to Edward Jones and his ideas of self-presentation and strategic self-presentation (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, p. 507). Self-presentation simply is an ideology behind reasoning for strategic messages during interactions, with the purpose of guiding others to form a view of the person or organization. In application to Benoit's image repair theory self-presentation is done to present an organization in a manner that will repair and negate the negative attributes that has caused the original damage to the image.

Advancing the field of impression management occurred through the work of Erving Goffman through his work on situated social identity. Goffman rationalized that "the organizing

principle of all social interaction is the coordinated management of social identity, or face"
(Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, p. 507). Corrective facework is the process of working to repair poor
perception through apology, explanation, or corrective action. Goffman likened facework to the
art of acting, stating that there is similarity to that of message senders serving as actors in a play
and the message receivers serving as the audience (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, p. 508).
Preparation and a plan like in acting needs to occur before and throughout social interactions in
order to have successful social interactions.

Impression management research shows that there are four metagoals present when
dealing with social identities. Although all four are important the last plays a major role in the
context of this work. This is the meta goal of "restoring impression integrity", successful
accomplishment of this goal requires isolation of the cause of face loss (Littlejohn and Foss,
2009, p. 509). This is accomplished using restoration strategies such as image repair theories
presented by Benoit. Impression and the management of perception serve as guiding framework
for judging effectiveness of an image repair campaign.

**Image Repair in Sports**

Athletes and athletic institutions thrive on the public for success. In the current media
landscape, there is a new threat facing an athlete or institution more and more often, requiring a
response of some form to repair the image. Luckily, current research has progressed in looking at
image repair strategies in sport related contexts. *Repairing the Athlete's Image: Studies in Sports
Image Restoration* by Blaney, Lippert, and Smith (2012), directly focuses on sports and image
repair by presenting twenty case studies covering a variety of crisis in sports.

Highlighted here is past research applying Benoit's (2014) theory of image repair theory
in sports, to deepen understanding of tactics used previously in image repair campaigns and their

effectiveness. The image repair research previously done serves as a foundation to base research for this study. Due to the individuals involved and their involvement in athletics it allows for translation to collegiate athletics, as universities can be faced with indiscretions of the same nature by their own athletes or staff.

**Elizabeth Lambert and The University of New Mexico**

One such case study found in the book covers the image repair tactics used by Elizabeth Lambert and the University of New Mexico. Elizabeth Lambert was a female soccer player for the Lobos accused of violent actions on the field in a game against Brigham Young University. The physical play in question brought much criticism from media and the public (Compton, 2012). Due to the large negative attention this received a response was deemed necessary after the attack of character of both the athlete and institution.

Compton (2012) found that the use of mortification, bolstering, and corrective action were present in Lamberts responses. The University of New Mexico was found to have used both bolstering and defeasibility in their response. Compton (2012) does state how the University of New Mexico faced a tough time in crafting a response as they both wanted to appear tough in delivering a punishment but also show the support of the student athlete. Compton (2012) mentions the missed opportunity of using provocation as a defense for Lamberts actions. Provocation could have justified a more aggressive style of play due to being aggressed by others and shift the blame.

**Duke University Lacrosse**

Fortunato (2008) looks at Duke University's response and image repair campaign after members of their men's lacrosse team were charged with rape and sexual assault. Duke first used mortification by apologizing for the actions and took responsibility for allowing the actions to

occur. Duke also used reduction of offensiveness and corrective action in their response. Through reduction of offensiveness Duke attempted to show the good aspects of the university and that the actions of the lacrosse team do not portray the entire campus climate (Fortunato, 2008).

Fortunato (2008) highlights some best practices done by Duke University in their image repair process. First, Duke worked to send separate messages to important stakeholders. This helped to keep all segments informed and to maintain relationships, something important, not only in the success of college athletics, but as pointed out by Fortunato (2008) also important in "restoring or maintaining its positive reputation" (Fortunato, p. 121). Duke University also used their corrective action strategy in a highly effective way with the creation of an investigation of student-athlete culture. Fortunato (2008) states that this "not only addressed the situation at Duke, put also provided the university an opportunity to position itself as a national leader in confronting these issues" (p. 121). By doing this it shows a strong commitment to the corrective action and the impact it could have as a strategy.

## Conclusion

As society continues to place greater emphasis on sport and ethics the risk only grows for a situation to occur that will require some form of image repair. Focusing purely on the collegiate level and image repair for an entire institution, more analysis needs to be completed to judge effectiveness of an image repair strategy. Once this analysis is completed a plan of action can be created for how to improve image repair campaigns at the collegiate level.

The literature review shows both successful and unsuccessful implementations of image repair campaigns applied to the theory developed by Benoit. It explains and shows what tactics are successful and ways to apply them in the sports landscape. As research grows in the ideology

of image repair in athletics, the tool box for creating a success full image repair campaign only grows, as researchers have a deeper understanding of strategies and tactics that have been proven successful and unsuccessful in the past. The research contained in this literature review only cements the importance of understanding the strategies and methods used previously to help build an effective image repair campaign. Without this foundational understanding of theory, implementation, and perceived effectiveness, this study could not successfully create a guide for a collegiate athletics institutional image repair campaign.

This review of literature focusing on image repair campaigns used in athletics provides a depth of knowledge of prior research to help guide in the creation of the research methods and questions for this study. The next section, Chapter III, will present the research problem and questions, method for data collection, and analysis that is applied in this study.

## CHAPTER III

## RESARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine past image repair campaigns executed by NCAA Division I member universities after a crisis, judging effectiveness of strategies, in order to develop a list of best practices and suggested course of action for image repair after a crisis. In order to achieve the goal of developing the list of best practices and to judge the effectiveness of strategies previously used by NCAA Division I member institutions, qualitative research needed to be completed on the subject. Research is defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) as "inquiring into or investigating something in a systematic manner" (p. 3). The qualitative method of a problem-oriented case study was developed and used to address the research questions for this study.

### Research Questions

This study was guided by two main research questions:

1. According to image repair strategies, how should a university or athletic department respond after a crisis?

2. What actions or strategies are the most effective and currently used for collegiate athletic departments working to repair an image after a crisis?

The use of a problem-oriented case study is appropriate as the method of this research to answer the research questions above. In qualitative research "words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 18). Qualitative instead of quantitative methods were chosen since descriptions and analysis of documents is more beneficial to this study than statistics. The use of a problem-

oriented case study is most effective for this style of study as it allows the evaluation of strategies used by universities when responding to the crisis and to judge the effectiveness of the strategy, based on reaction and tone found in media coverage, both before and after the response from the university. The selection of problem-oriented case study takes into account prior research methods and conventions of the field found in the literature review section of the paper.

## Population and Sample

The population for this case study was strategically chosen to represent three recent and different types of crisis requiring an image repair campaign affecting NCAA Division I member institutions. The three universities and their respective cases are: Ohio State University, in relation to the accusations of covering up reports of domestic abuse by department personnel; Louisville University, in the involvement in the FBI corruption scandal and termination of Rick Pitino; University of Maryland, following allegations of a toxic culture in the football program following the death of a student athlete during a team practice. All three crises allowed for a comprehensive coverage of responses for different types of crisis. Having varying types of crisis and the responses by universities making an image repair campaign, allowed for a more all-inclusive creation of a list of best practices.

Data for the case study was taken from media coverage on the national level. The reason for the selection of national media coverage accounts for the possible presence of bias from local coverage. The exclusion of local media was also made due to the fact of local media coverages use of national AP content and what would lead to a result of repetitive data. Articles were selected from a week-long period from both when the crisis is first covered by media and after the universities response to said crisis or after their investigations were completed.

Population for the case study is a limitation of this research. Due to it being infeasible to analyze every type of crisis, parameters were set to limit the study to just three recent, but different, crises. This was done to provide a broader scope of possible situations requiring an image repair but does not account for all possibilities.

The sample for the validation of the artifact creation of a list of best practices consisted of collegiate athletic department personnel working in positions that would be involved in the decision process for responding to a crisis. The population for validation of data remained anonymous in order to reduce apprehension in providing feedback related to crisis and recommendations of the artifact.

## Data Collection and Instrument

A problem-oriented case study was used to determine effectiveness of the image repair campaign by each university. The researcher selected a problem-oriented case study for the ability to analyze effectiveness of image repair responses in depth. This was done to analyze real life situation that needed solving. A problem-oriented case study allowed for equal evaluation across all three universities due to variables being controlled such as using similar sources for each media outlet.

The problem-oriented case study evaluated the reaction and feelings of media articles to judge effect of image repair on the national level. Articles were obtained from general internet searches through Google following the initial coverage of the incident and post formal and final response by the university and the actions they decided to take. The New York Times, The Washington Post, and ESPN.com were selected as national sources to maintain consistency across all three cases. The selection of The New York Times, The Washington Post, and ESPN.com was due to their respected standing as national media sources, with ESPN being

selected due to its dedicated and committed coverage of athletics on a national level. Selecting national sources with credibility upholds reliability and control for this study.

## Data Analysis

The intent of this study was to analyze recent cases of a NCAA Division I university that underwent an image repair campaign to see what methods and strategies were used. This was done to gain an understanding into what strategies are deemed successful or not in changing tone or feeling, positively towards the university after their image repair messages. Responses from the universities were applied to the theory developed by the researcher Benoit. This data serves a real-world application of Benoit's (2014) theory in the field of college athletics.

"Data analysis is a complex procedure that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 202). A coding sheet was used to determine the strategy of the image repair campaign used by the university. This coding sheet was based on the response strategies outlined by Benoit's (2014) theory related to image repair. Press releases from the universities were used to verify that the coverage of their response found in the media articles accurately depicted their response.

A coding sheet was also used to keep track of media portrayal of the university both pre and post response. This coding sheet was organized in categories judging the placement of blame, perception of the university, mention of athletic success, and support of others. The coding sheet also contained a category to determine positive or negative stance of the article based on criticism towards the university.

Articles were first coded to determine the type of image repair strategies used under Benoit's (2014) theory. Articles were then coded to determine overall reception of messaging.

The coding sheet and its results are found in Appendix A of this study. This data was then analyzed critically to determine effectiveness in messaging and potential reasoning for strategies as well as the interpretation and effect on perception of the university.

Data presentation was done in a narrative format in order to summarize the findings. Comparisons were then made between the three cases to check for similarities in strategy choices and application success. Coding from the first coverage of the crisis and coding of the response allowed for the researcher to judge the short-term focus of initial coverage and effective evaluation of long-term impact of the response strategies taken by the university.

Each of the university's crises were then applied to each strategy of Benoit's (2014) theory in order to analyze and determine the pros verse cons of each method on a case by case basis for the crisis and determining the public most effected by the response. Doing this allows for a deeper analysis of potential application of image repair theory in the situation of NCAA Division I athletics.

Results from the problem-oriented case study were used to develop an artifact (Appendix B) outlining a list of best practices, based on Benoit's (2014) image repair theory, for professionals working to craft image repair messages after a crisis at a NCAA member institution. This list was created based on perception of success from the strategies used by the universities in each analyzed case, as well as the examination theoretical application of strategies not used by each university from the problem-oriented case study. This artifact also outlines the publics that would be most effectively targeted by each strategy to impact the maximum change towards image repair and reclamation of positive perception.

This artifact serving as a guide to be used in times of crisis response by a university, was then distributed to collegiate athletic department personnel working in positions that would be

involved in the decision process for responding to a crisis. Evaluation of the artifact allowed for current conventions of the field to be applied and the artifact to be assessed by those it was designed to help serve. Requests for validation of the artifact as well as the responses received are contained in Appendix C and D. Validation and revisions were made based on feedback to aid in completion of a beneficial and functioning guide to help decision making when faced with crisis. The results that influenced the creation of this artifact are presented in depth in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER IV**

**FINDINGS**

In the following chapter the image repair strategies of Ohio State University, Louisville University, and the University of Maryland are presented along with the coverage of each crisis in national media. The data was collected and organized case by case, first looking at the actions and response strategies at the beginning and then near the end of the crisis, usually following a statement and actions post investigation, followed by media coverage at both the start and after the university's response. Findings showed significant differences in the handling of each situation by each respective university which is why each university is presented individually before being summarized at the end of the chapter.

Table 1

*Strategies Used by Ohio State, Louisville University, & the University of Maryland*

| University | Denial | Evasion of Responsibility | Reducing Offense | Corrective Action | Mortification | Timeline |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ohio State** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | 1 Month |
| **Louisville** | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | Two Weeks |
| **Maryland** | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Three Months* |
| *From first article to formal response, five months from the death of Jordan McNair. | | | | | | |

**Ohio State University**

Ohio State University's Department of Athletics realized that there was a growing crisis on their hands at the beginning of August 2018. Just the previous week, head coach Urban Meyer came to the decision to fire assistant coach Zach Smith, for what was at the time stated as a "very tough call" (Urban Meyer, 2018). Zach Smith was a long-time assistant under Urban Meyer who was terminated due to a protection order preventing him from contacting of his ex-wife (Urban

Meyer, 2018). What should have been an open and shut issue turned into a crisis rocking Ohio State University when it came to light that previous actions of the now fired assistant coach were known by individuals inside of the athletic department for years, who failed to take appropriate measures (Ohio State, 2018). This crisis was also heightened in coverage for what appeared to be a pattern for Ohio State University after "earlier in the summer, more than 100 former students came forward with allegations that a former team doctor had molested them years ago" (Fitzsimmons & Tracy, 2018) and resulted in lawsuits against the university.

**Image Repair Strategies of Ohio State University**

Table 2

*Strategies Used by Ohio State University at Beginning and End of Crisis*

| University: Ohio State | Denial | Evasion of Responsibility | Reducing Offense | Corrective Action | Mortification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Actions: Beginning of Crisis** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes (temporary action) | Yes |
| **Actions: End of Crisis** | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |

**Action at beginning of crisis.**

Urban Meyer took the early actions of both denial and evasion of responsibility in the crisis. Meyer denied any wrongdoing or knowledge of prior incidents of domestic violence by Smith. Meyer also used the strategy of evasion of responsibility, specifically defeasibility, when stating that there was no knowledge of Smith's actions in 2015 or knowledge of any domestic related issues while at Ohio State University. These early actions and statements occurred on July 24th around the time that Smith was fired (Urban Meyer, 2018). Meyer used the action of mortification on August 4, 2018, when apologizing for the previous comments about knowledge

of the situation. Meyer apologized for stating that he had no knowledge of incidents at Ohio State, although he did not make an admission of guilt for any other wrong doings (Murphy, 2018b). Meyer also used this time to use the strategy of reducing offensiveness through bolstering of prior actions and following proper protocols.

On August 1, 2018, Ohio State took the first steps into the crisis by placing both football head coach Urban Meyer and athletic director Gene Smith on paid administrative leave (Hobson, 2018a). An early form of corrective action occurred with the launch of a university investigation into the knowledge and subsequent actions or lack thereof, by both coach Urban Meyer and athletic director Gene Smith.

**Actions at the end of crisis.**

After completion of the internal investigation Ohio State University used corrective action in suspending both Urban Meyer and athletic director Gene Smith. This use of corrective action did not have an admission of guilt but instead was done as a method to ensure better reporting in the future. For example the suspension was not a result of covering up any behaviors but rather not acting " forcefully enough in the face of repeated signs of misconduct by the former receivers coach" and waiting to "inform the school's compliance department about accusations made against former assistant coach Zach Smith in 2015 and instead awaited the conclusion of a law enforcement investigation that ultimately produced no criminal charges" (Hobson and Culpepper, 2018).

Meyer again used the actions of mortification and evasion of responsibility after receiving his suspension. In his statement after receiving his suspension Meyer apologized to all involved. Meyers apology included phrases such as "I wish I had done more", "I followed my heart, not my head", and "I'm sorry we're in this situation" (Bella, 2018). Meyer used evasion of

responsibility and the method of defeasibility by stating that "I wish I had known" & "I wish I was told more things" (Bella, 2018). Meyer also used mortification again two days after his original apology, this time directly to Zach Smith's ex-wife and all victims of domestic abuse. In this same statement Meyer again used reduction of offensiveness and bolstering in talking about his respect for women and rules for his program at Ohio State related to the treatment of women (Murphy, 2018c).

**Coverage in the Media**

This crisis took a profound spotlight in the media during the month of August 2018. In total fourteen articles were examined looking at how the media covered the crisis at Ohio State University.  Main coverage of the crisis began in the first few days of August and lasted until the end of a university investigation at the end of August. Coverage focused on actions of Ohio State Head Coach Urban Meyer and whether he knew of previous misconduct of then assistant coach Zach Smith, or if any actions were taken to cover up his knowing of misconduct. Most coverage focused on a 2015 incident involving Smith and his ex-wife questioning "exactly when he learned of the 2015 incident, when he reported it and which protocols he followed" (Tracy, 2018b). Articles focused on the knowledge of Meyer and the disclosure of information with the Ohio State University Athletic Department. This became the focus of the investigation due to Meyer denying knowledge of 2015 incidents involving Smith, stating "I was never told about anything" (Ohio State, 2018) at the time his termination.

The focal point of most articles early in the crisis was on Urban Meyer rather than the university or athletic department, Meyer was the person directly perceived as responsible by the media for the crisis, with some articles also placing blame onto athletic director Gene Smith. The university was not perceived in either a positive or negative light by most media articles until

after their formal response and investigation. Ohio States response and action resulted in more negative perception in media coverage following the release of their report into the crisis.

Coverage of the university was deemed more negative in articles by both The Washington Post and The New York Times compared to that of ESPN which took a more neutral stance in its articles. Looking at the media coverage and the mention of success of both coach Meyer and Ohio State University yielded some interesting findings. Of the fourteen articles examined, six mentioned prior success of the university. More importantly, five of these mentions came from articles by both The Washington Post and The New York Times who also took a more negative approach in coverage compared to ESPN.

### Louisville University

The crisis analyzed at Louisville University began middle of September 2017. Adidas, a major sponsor of collegiate and youth basketball, was found to be in the middle of a misconduct case that spanned across the country. Federal prosecutors launched an investigation charging ten individuals, four being NCAA Division I assistant coaches with bribery fraud and corruption (Hobson & Bonesteel, 2017). Rick Pitino, head men's basketball coach and Louisville University found themselves in the middle of this scandal. Pitino, who was a coach for the successful Louisville Basketball program for over 16 years was one of the coaches named in the investigation. Pitino's tenure at Louisville has not been without prior scandal. He has been involved previously with a scandal in recruiting at Louisville from 2010 to 2014.

**Image Repair Strategies of Louisville University**

Table 3

*Strategies Used by Louisville University at Beginning and End of Crisis*

| University: Louisville University | Denial | Evasion of Responsibility | Reducing Offense | Corrective Action | Mortification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Actions: Beginning of Crisis** | No | No | No | Yes (temporary action) | Yes |
| **Actions: End of Crisis** | No | No | No | Yes | No |

**Actions at beginning of crisis.**

Louisville responded immediately to the crisis through corrective action. Corrective Action was carried out with the suspension of both head coach Rick Pitino and athletic director Tom Jurich. Louisville also removed the player suspected of being illegally recruited from all team activities. Although there was no formal admission of guilt by the university it can be perceived by the actions taken by the university, that there was fault and the allegations were true. Louisville University also pledged to cooperate fully with law enforcement and NCAA officials investigating, another form of corrective action (Hobson & Bonesteel, 2017). These actions all took place on September 27, 2017, just a day after the recruiting allegations came to light.

**Actions at the end of crisis.**

Nineteen days after issuing the suspension of coach Rick Pitino, Louisville University voted to fire Pitino (Allen, 2017). This was followed with the firing of athletic director Tom Jurich and saw the dismissal of two assistant coaches (Borzello, 2017). These firings served as a finalization of corrective action measures set in motion at the start of the latest scandal. The last

piece of action for Louisville University in relation to the scandal came on November 22, 2017

when Louisville issued a statement about the player at the center of the scandal, Brian Bowen.

Louisville again used corrective action and disallowed Bowen from practicing or playing for

Louisville at any point but allowed him to keep his scholarship and contact other institutions

about transferring (Bonesteel, 2017). This statement capped off the repair strategies of Louisville

regarding the recruiting scandal.

**Coverage in the Media**

The FBI investigation into collegiate basketball recruiting was covered widely in media

and as of this papers publication still is garnering media attention. Coverage specific to

Louisville University and their involvement focused on coach Rick Pitino and what actions

Louisville University would take in response. All coverage mentioned prior successes of

Louisville University Basketball and the career of Rick Pitino. Pitino's complicated past with

violations were also a major focal point in the coverage of this crisis. Pitino was portrayed

negatively in media coverage and deemed a responsible party in most coverage of the crisis.

Louisville University received either neutral or positive coverage in most articles dealing

with their response. Due to the actions being quickly taken Louisville University did not receive

negative coverage in the handling of this individual crisis although there were still negative

aspects due to previous violations, including after the NCAA vacated basketball records and a

2013 National Championship, which occurred in February 2018 (Bogage & Stubbs, 2018).

Louisville also would receive coverage throughout the following year due to Pitino filing a

breach of contract lawsuit against the university

**University of Maryland**

The University of Maryland crisis began in August of 2018 but was set in motion due to the events that occurred on the 29th of May. On May 29, 2018 Maryland offensive lineman Jordan McNair collapsed during a football workout and died two weeks later (Dinich, 2018). The crisis developed after an August 2018 ESPN report questioned the circumstances around McNair's passing as well as the culture of the University of Maryland football program (Dinich, Rittenberg, & VanHaaren, 2018). This report led to a second investigation into the culture of the football program, in addition to the already ongoing investigation into McNair's death.

**Image Repair Strategies of The University of Maryland**

Table 4

*Strategies Used by The University of Maryland at Beginning and End of Crisis*

| University: University of Maryland | Denial | Evasion of Responsibility | Reducing Offense | Corrective Action | Mortification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Actions: Beginning of Crisis** | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| **Actions: End of Crisis** | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| **Follow Up Actions** | No | No | No | Yes | No |

**Actions at beginning of crisis.**

The University of Maryland took several actions at the beginning of the crisis, specifically following the report issued by ESPN which raised concerns over the culture of the University of Maryland football program and coach DJ Durkin. The University of Maryland used an early form of corrective action by placing head coach DJ Durkin and strength and

conditioning coach Rick Court on administrative leave while also announcing an investigation into the team's culture.

On August 14, 2018, just three days after placing both coaches on administrative leave the University of Maryland followed up with more forms of corrective action. This time putting two athletic trainers on administrative leave and the team's strength and conditioning coach, largely viewed as being responsible for the crisis, parted ways with the program. The university also used mortification to apologize and take responsibility for the passing of Jordan McNair, while also using denial to address the reported timeline of McNair's death. At the same time when addressing the accusations of coaching issues, denial and corrective action were also used to address the crisis. Denial specifically shifting the blame was used to address claims that coaching played a part in McNair's passing, alleging instead it was a result of the training staff. This was accomplished with statements such as "The athletic training staff, not the coaching staff — they basically misdiagnosed the situation" (Longman, 2018). Steps toward corrective action was done in adjusting the training of staff and how the athletic department practices in warm weather.

**Actions at the end of crisis.**

After receiving the completed report on the circumstances around the death of Jordan McNair, the University of Maryland did not make use of any new repair strategies, instead the University of Maryland used corrective action as previously outlined to address procedures around athletic training.

The University of Maryland waited until the completion of the second investigation into the culture of the team and coach before taking further action. After completion of the second investigation the University of Maryland reinstated head coach DJ Durkin and the board

recommended reinstatement of two athletic trainers. Corrective action was taken at this point to address issues with the function of the athletic department found in the report. This was accomplished through statements stating plans to "implement a new culture in football that emphasizes the well-being of the student-athletes and their success" (Dinich & Rittenberg, 2018). Plans for corrective action included creation of a monitoring group that would report to the university's board of regents.  Mortification was employed through multiple statements both accepting and acknowledging responsibility for dysfunction in the athletic department as well as a lack of oversight. Reducing offensiveness was done through bolstering statements highlighting how changes and openness to changes have already occurred. The president of the University of Maryland also announced his resignation at this time.

**Amendment to decisions.**

Just one day following the reinstatement of head coach DJ Durkin the University of Maryland used corrective action again, this time firing head coach DJ Durkin. This use of corrective action was taken to make amends to the decision of reinstatement made the previous day. This was followed the next day by resignation of the chairman for the University of Maryland Board of Regents. This resignation was a form of corrective action and accomplished without accepting responsibility. This was shown through statements such as "I understand that reasonable people could come to other conclusions. And even among our board, some did" (Tracy, 2018c), which acknowledged disagreement without stating that they made the wrong decision.

**Coverage in the Media**

Following the initial August 10, 2018, ESPN report, coverage in the media was widespread, dominating local and national headlines. Main coverage occurred throughout the

crisis including past the final response of the University of Maryland and the reinstatement of coach DJ Durkin. Throughout the coverage of this crisis media coverage was almost all negative towards both the individuals involved and the university. Of the sixteen articles analyzed all were negative apart from one article which came after the follow up decision of firing coach Durkin. Success was not mentioned in the majority of the crisis coverage. The exception of this came in coverage completed The New York Times, mentioning athletic success in four of their articles.

The focal point at the beginning of the crisis was found to be centered on the circumstances surrounding Jordan McNair's death, as well as the possible existence of a toxic culture created by the coaching staff. Focus on the department and university were present at the beginning but transitioned throughout the crisis placing a higher focus onto the university leadership and issues that possibly existed there. This transition to focusing on the leadership of the department and university was not aided by the mixed messages and lack of full support of all message senders when the formal response was made. The response as well as the time it took to make received negative coverage throughout the media's coverage of the crisis.

## Similarities, Differences, and Success

All three cases although different in nature did feature some of the same strategy uses when responding to each crisis. A temporary form of corrective action was used by each university, this was accomplished through placing individuals involved on administrative leave. In addition, the corrective action of performing an investigation in to the crisis was employed in the respective crises of Ohio State University and the University of Maryland. Investigations and administrative leave served as a tool to allow the university to take time to gather all relevant information into the crisis before taking a permanent action in response. Administrative leave

does not equal a placement of blame or admission of guilt as evidenced through the initial actions taken by the University of Maryland or the findings for Ohio State University.

One of the key differences between the three cases is that in the time between the beginning of the crisis and that of the formal response. This was also found to play a role in the impact of positive or negative media earned by the university throughout the crisis. The University of Louisville took the shortest time when handling the crisis. This resulted in a shorter period of media coverage and lack of negative coverage at the end of the crisis. In comparison the University of Maryland took the longest time and received the most negative media coverage, in addition to a larger volume of coverage.

Perception of success was determined by the amount of negative media coverage following the formal response by the university. It was found that negative media coverage was more likely to occur from both The Washington Post and The New York Times. Both the University of Maryland and Ohio State University are considered unsuccessful in the action that they took in response of their respective crisis. Articles post response were predominantly negative in addressing the responses of the universities or individuals involved. Both cases called for a stronger response by the university. Articles surrounding the crisis at Ohio State called for a stronger punishment for Urban Meyer. Criticism of Meyer's strategy of denial early in the crisis also hurt the success of their final actions. Articles dealing with the crisis at the University of Maryland deemed the response time, final actions, and friction of those involved with messaging as failures made by the university when dealing with the crisis. Louisville University, with respect to their strategies and handling of the crisis was deemed a success. Success of their strategies is credited to the swift and decisive actions taken by the university.

The findings outlined in this chapter was instrumental to the outcome of this study. Analysis of the articles and the coding sheet found in Appendix A, played a role in the results of the study. The analysis of these findings to directly influenced the creation of an artifact, found in Appendix B of this document. This artifact serves as a guide to help those working in message creation positions at NCAA institutions. Findings from this chapter, as well as results, limitations, and summary of this study are outlined in the next chapter of the study.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION

Chapter five contains a summary of this master's project, including a discussion of result and analysis of findings. This chapter relates the findings from Chapter IV to show the impact and implications of Benoit's image repair theory, as found in Chapter II, to the public relations field, specifically in relation with NCAA Division I collegiate athletics. This chapter also dives into the strengths and limitations found after completion of the study, before proving the recommendations based on the findings, for public relations officials working in the field of collegiate athletics.

### Methods and Procedures

This study set out to examine prior image repair campaigns executed by NCAA Division I member institutions, in relation to the strategies outlined by Benoit's (2014) image repair discourse, to determine the most effective course of action and strategies to use when responding to a crisis. This was done to create and artifact to help guide public relations practitioners when responding to a crisis in collegiate athletics. The findings outlined in Chapter IV of this study directed by the two research questions outlined in Chapter III directly influenced the creation of the artifact, contained in Appendix B of this study. This artifact was then sent out to professionals in the field at NCAA universities (Appendix C). This was done to provide validation and feedback to the created artifact. Responses from those in the field is found in Appendix D.

Through the execution of a problem-oriented case study, data was collected and analyzed from three different NCAA Division I institutions during their response to an image related crisis. Articles were collected from three different national news sources, ESPN.com, The New

York Times, and The Washington Post. These articles were collected during a week-long period at the beginning of each respective crisis and then after the universities response to said crisis or after their investigations were completed. After collection of articles, they were then coded to the following categories; placement of blame, positive/negative stance of the article, perception of the university, mention of athletic success, and support of others. Articles were also coded to determine what image repair strategies each response contained. The categories chosen for use in this study were based on conventions of the field and prior research found in Chapter II.

## Major Findings

Looking back at the work of Ware and Linkugel (1973), it is stated that "an attack upon a person's character, upon his worth as a human being, does seem to demand a direct response" (p. 274). In the instance of all three cases in this study an attack against the university, it's athletic department, or members of their teams and staff does in fact take place. In the situation of Ohio State University there is an attack against the ethical values and failure of actions of coach Meyer and the athletic department, in the case of Louisville University it occurs with the violation of rules for coach Pitino and the Cardinal basketball program, and with University of Maryland the attack is against the culture surrounding the Terrapin football program and safety of its student athletes.

Due to the fact there is damage to the athletic department or universities image, a strong image repair campaign becomes necessary, with the goal of improving negative consequences and returning image to the same or better status than it was before the crisis occurred. Looking at the research questions in this study there are some clear answers that can be found from both Chapter II and Chapter IV. When looking at the first research question, asking how a university should respond after a crisis based on the image repair strategies, the case study and comparison

to the information found in Chapter Two showed a variety of methods can be successful. Corrective action is seen as a valuable strategy in most situations, even if there was no admittance of wrong doing by the university.

Based on the research in Chapter IV, this was seen in the case of Louisville University. Corrective action in terms of when an athletic department or its members are at fault of violating NCAA rules was an action taken by Louisville University and was effective in repairing image of the basketball program. This removed the cloud that would have otherwise overshadowed the athletic department if it had left the members associated with the violations in place. This action in effect placed blame on those individuals and cleanly isolated and separated the overall department and university from the individuals who caused loss of face.

Corrective action also played a role in the other two cases. Whenever there is some sort of perceived correction of the problem in question, this helps show that actions are being actively taken to ensure no further wrongdoing occurs. In comparison Ohio State University, although with the termination of coach Zach Smith, still faced the cloud of being connected in failure to report domestic assault and take proper disciplinary actions. The lack of a strong enough form of corrective action, a minor suspension of both head coach Urban Meyer and athletic director Gene Smith, was a neutral response that was weak in isolating or correcting the cause of loss of face. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2009), the goal of "restoring impression integrity" (p. 509) is only successfully accomplished after isolation of the cause of loss of face. Corrective action can serve to isolate the cause of loss of face and help restore impression integrity.

Temporary forms of corrective action also proved to be beneficial ways to help in the process of image repair. The temporary corrective actions of both placing implicated members on administrative leave or launching an investigation as was done by the universities in this

study serve as a great way to either prevent further wrong doing or allow time to create a plan for rectification without outright admitting guilt. Benoit (2014) outlines that corrective action does not necessarily require any admission of guilt. However, it does allow for the university to buy time through an investigation to determine further action. Corrective action does aid in the act of minimization of perceived negativity, as it shows that the university is working towards making strides in prevention of the crisis occurring again.

To a lesser extent mortification is a successful strategy if a strong enough form of corrective action takes place in tandem to the apology. Otherwise, the effect will not be to the same extent, as evidenced in the case of the University of Maryland. Even though there was an apology made by the University of Maryland, there was not a strong enough form of corrective action, resulting in a failed image repair and continued negative attention. For this reason, mortification should not be used alone as a strategy but rather paired with some form of corrective action that meets the same or greater severity than the crisis. An apology does not always need to be met with an acceptance of blame as evidenced with Ohio State. In Ohio State's instance, apology was for the situation and not for any actual wrongdoing. However, failure to make an apology to all affected groups can result in negative response and should considered before action is taken.

Denial should only be used if there is in fact no basis to allegations, cause with image loss against the athletic department, or an effective enough target to shift the blame onto. It was employed at first by Urban Meyer at Ohio State and would have been an effective strategy if it wasn't shortly proven that Meyer lied in his denying knowledge of allegations (Ohio State, 2018). Due to the risk of damaging an image to an even greater extent, it is important to be sure

of no responsibility from any individual in the department before making any statements of denial.

The second research question addresses the conventions and current practices seen by the sample and presumably other NCAA Division 1 institutions, that are the most effective when working to repair an image after a crisis. The study showed some actions that were not thought of at the beginning of research. Launching an independent investigation into the crisis was a strategy seen with both Ohio State University and the University of Maryland. Another strategy that was shown to be effective is that of placing individuals involved with the crisis that are members of the athletic department on a temporary leave or suspension. Actions involving crisis in collegiate athletics was shown to involve both the department and overall university leaders (e.g. Board of Regents). The time it takes for a university to formally respond and conclude all proceedings in a crisis directly impacts the success of an image repair plan. The findings in Chapter Four showed that taking too long to develop a formal response has a negative impact in media coverage for a university, prolonging the media coverage of the crisis and amount of negative messaging.

Keeping all parties involved and on the same page in terms of messaging and decision making is seen as essential for the success of an image repair campaign. This lack of continuity is seen as a factor in determining success and is shown through the differences in success between all three universities in this study. When there are mixed messages being sent or a later back tracking of previous messages, repair strategy success is undermined by lack consistency or trust in the messages being sent. This was found to have weakened both Ohio States early messages and the University of Maryland's formal response. Ohio State University had been unprepared in crafting of their messages and strategies multiple times in their crisis which only

increased negative media coverage. When they first employed the strategy of denial of knowledge in an Urban Meyer press conference and then backtracked showed that they were not prepared in their message strategies. The same happened at the end of the crisis when Meyer only employed mortification in his apology for the situation and not to the victim. Only after there was some negative response to ignoring the mentioning of Smith's ex-wife, the victim in the situation, did Meyer finally make an apology to her (Murphy, 2018c). The University of Maryland had similar problems in their strategy since there was disagreement seen between the two decision makers, the university board of regents and the university president (Svrluga, 2018b).

## Recommendations

Results found throughout the problem-oriented case study showed that there was some similarity in response strategies between the three universities chosen. Primed with this information this case study provided a key method to determine the effects of image repair theory in collegiate athletics. Based on the body of work found between both Chapter Two and Chapter Four, guidelines for the successful implementation of an image repair campaign are created. These recommendations are comprehensive, covering all aspects involved in the decision and message making process, from beginning to end.

It is important at the beginning of every instance where an attack on the athletic departments image occurs work is done to determine where the image loss is coming from. An athletic department should work to answer a few key questions related to the cause of the image loss. They need to figure out if the cause of the image loss is coming from external or internal factors. Doing so will also allow the athletic department to determine who is deemed responsible in the situation, either student athlete, coach, or department staff. Determining who is responsible

for the cause will greatly help in preparing a response. It is important to also take some steps early on to ensure the success of image repair strategies. These steps include designating a main point of contact for all messages, making sure all pertinent staff and athletes are aware of the early message and strategies that will be used, and avoiding making any permanent actions or strong stances early on without having all facts gathered.

Early on four of Benoit's (2014) response strategies are deemed useful and potentially successful methods of response, if certain criteria are met. Denial of any wrong doing is recommended only when there is absolute certainty of no wrongdoing. This can be accomplished through shifting the blame or pointing out lack of evidence. Corrective action is recommended early on through temporary measures such as launching an investigation and placing involved players or coaches on leave or suspension. Mortification should be used if it becomes clear that there is responsibility for the image loss at the beginning. Statements apologizing for responsibility involved and making claims that they will be rectified, are great ways to buy back good will as well as time to develop a plan to make amends for the crisis. Reducing offensiveness through reminders of positive prior actions and or reframing the perspective serve as recommended methods to help in the image repair campaign early on.

Once all facts have been collected either post formal investigations or through discussions with those involved, a more permanent image repair strategy needs to take place. It is essential that before making any announcements or decisions, all parties involved are onboard and aware of actions of statements that are going to be made. This will help show solidarity and full support by the athletic department and university, reducing doubt by the message receivers. If absolutely no responsibility is found than denial is an appropriate form of response if aided by providing proof of the lack of responsibility. This denial can be to partial aspects of the image

loss or combined with corrective actions to buy back good will. Corrective action is a recommended strategy even without admittance of guilt. Corrective action is recommended through methods such as announcing new policies, trainings, or oversight. In addition, punishment such as suspension of games or termination are appropriate ways to show correction of the original issue. It is important to remember that severity related to suspension or termination are equal to the severity of the issue.

Reducing offensiveness is recommended when there is responsibility found in the situation. Compensation is an effective method of reducing offensiveness and is recommended when there is some form of loss or victim. Mortification is recommended when guilt is clearly found through actions of the athletic department or its members. All apologies should make sure that they are complete and mention all involved groups. Apologies are always recommended in situations involving misconduct towards an individual or group, ethical violations, and situations where there is failure to protect athletes or department members. Mortifications is recommended to be paired with corrective action to allow for the most effective method of repairing image.

Following these actions at both the beginning and end of an image repair campaign and acting in conjunction with all applicable NCAA and university guidelines will provide the greatest opportunity for image to be repaired. These strategies are not independent of each other and can or should be used concurrently. It is essential for a universities athletic department to be prepared with this information when faced with a loss of image. It is also important that universities remember to adjust practices in response depending on the sport and amount of coverage that will be received, each crisis is case by case. Failure to execute a successful image repair campaign can result in a damaging amount of negative media attention, loss of support, and potentially loss of revenue.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without its limitations. There are many factors that an effect the success of an image repair campaign for an organization. Due to this the sample size focusing on only three individual institutional crises could be expanded in further research. All three cases involved crisis related to actions of staff members involved with each institution. Although the type of crisis was different with each institution a limitation is that this study doesn't cover the impact of image repair strategies for all possibilities of crisis types. Another limitation is that as societies values change so does the factors of what could determine a crisis. Although this study purposely chose three recent crises in collegiate athletics, this could become a factor in determining the future validity of the artifact. Further research could delve into crisis related to the actions of NCAA Division I athletes that occur both on and off the field and the response strategies of the institution. That study could also look for the factor of success or impact of the individual athlete. Although it is not entirely a limitation of this study, it is worth noting that articles from news sources that are not sport specific media, were found to have a more negative stance, affecting the impact of determining success of response strategies. Further research can move from focusing on impact in media and compare that to the impact on fans, students, faculty, alumni, or community members at each university facing a crisis. Doing so would provide a greater chance to test validity of the artifacts impact on the publics and stakeholders associated within collegiate athletics. Further research is recommended to take place looking at the most effective forms of response for low level or media covered programs such as non-revenue generating sports or the Division II or III level. Looking at responses on less covered levels will help with determining the intensity of an image repair campaign when faced with a crisis at a lesser covered level.

**Conclusions**

The results showed the importance of an image repair campaign in the field of collegiate athletics, as well as choosing the correct strategies for each respective campaign. There results also showed how there is no one size fits all method for image repair in collegiate athletics. Due to the popularity of sport, emotional buy-in from spectators, and sense of community collegiate athletics provides to its stakeholders, fans, and community members (both collegiate community and geographical area) the ability to correct negative perception is critical.

With the amount of importance sports plays on society, increasing media coverage of aspects other than on field performance, and recent increase in scandals or crisis in sports, there is a need to be as prepared as possible for when a crisis occurs. This study served to examine how the current media landscape reacts to crisis in collegiate athletics and the effectiveness of image repair strategies applied by NCAA Division I institutions. Knowing the proper response to take and knowing the effects of image repair strategies, will only help those working in roles in charge of public relations and decision strategies for NCAA institutions be prepared when working with their organization on responses to a crisis.

This study helps to further the decision-making process of not only those working in public relation roles for NCAA Division I institutions, but also any organization in the athletic landscape. It took prior research completed on image repair theory, having had a primary focus on the individual, and applied it instead onto the organization. The results and findings then directly influenced the creation of an artifact, serving as a guide for public relation practitioners to use in the decision-making process. This guide is influenced by the perception of prior recent response strategies in the national media landscape. With this guide public relation practitioners

working at NCAA Division I institutions now have another resource at their disposal to guide

their decisions in response to a crisis.

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## Appendix A – Data Collection List

| School | Source | Date of Article | Author | Title | Placement of Blame | Positive/ Negative | Perception of the University In Article | Mention of Success | Denial | Evasion of Responsibility | Reducing Offense | Corrective Action | Mortification | Other Actions | Support of Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| OSU | ESPN | 7/24/2019 | Dan Murphy | Urban Meyer: Decision to fire assistant Zach Smith was 'very tough call' | None | Neutral | Neutral | None | Not knowing of Allegations | Defeasibility | | | | Firing of Offender | |
| OSU | ESPN | 8/2/2018 | ESPN | Ohio State puts Urban Meyer on administrative leave | On Coaching Staff | Negative | Negative | None | | | | Yes Investigation | | University Investigation / Paid Leave | |
| OSU | ESPN | 8/4/2018 | ESPN | Urban Meyer says he didn't handle Zach Smith questions correctly | Coaching Staff | Neutral | Neutral | None | | Defeasibility - Not prepared with information | | | | Yes - for error in comments | Released a statement |
| OSU | ESPN | 8/23/2018 | Dan Murphy | Ohio State suspends coach Urban Meyer, AD Gene Smith | AD/ Coach | Neutral | Neutral | Yes | | | | Suspension of HC & AD | Yes - By HC | | Big Ten |
| OSU | ESPN | 8/25/2018 | Dan Murphy | Ohio State's Urban Meyer issues apology to Courtney Smith | Coach | | | None | | | | | Apology to Accuser / not admission of guilt | | |
| OSU | WP | 8/1/2018 | Will Hobson | Ohio State puts Urban Meyer on leave amid investigation into assistant's alleged domestic abuse | Coach | Neutral | Neutral | Yes | | | | Yes Investigation | | University Investigation / Paid Leave | |
| OSU | WP | 8/4/2018 | Will Hobson | At Ohio State, football practice opens amid unanswered questions and uncertain future | Coach / AD | Negative | Negative | None | | | | | | | |
| OSU | WP | 8/22/2018 | Will Hobson / Chuck Culpepper | Ohio State suspends Urban Meyer for three games over handling of domestic abuse claims | | Neutral | Neutral | Yes | | | | Suspension of HC & AD | Apology for Situation | Suspension | Yes Fans |
| OSU | WP | 8/23/2018 | Timothy Bella | Urban Meyer apologizes to 'Buckeye nation' but not to domestic abuse victim | Coach | Negative | Negative | Yes | | Defeasibility - Wish he new more | | | Apology to buckeye nation | | |
| OSU | WP | 8/30/2018 | Sally Jenkins | Urban Meyer still has his job, but Ohio State documents show what he deserves | Coach / University | Negative | Negative | None | | | | | | | |
| OSU | NYT | 8/1/2018 | Marc Tracy | Urban Meyer Placed on Paid Leave at Ohio State Following New Allegations | Coach | Negative | Negative | Yes | Denial of Knowing Incident | | | Yes Investigation | | University Investigation / Paid Leave | |
| OSU | NYT | 8/3/2018 | Marc Tracy | Urban Meyer Says He Followed Protocols on Abuse Claim, Contradicting Earlier Denial | Coach | | | None | | | Bolstering Of prior actions | | | | |
| OSU | NYT | 8/29/2018 | Emma Fitzsimmons / Marc Tracy | After Urban Meyer Suspension, Some at Ohio State See a Culture of Sports Above All | Coach/ University | Negative | Negative | Yes | | | | | | | No Students |
| Louisville | ESPN | 9/27/2017 | Ian O'Connor | Rick Pitino couldn't avoid trouble forever | Coach | | | Yes | | | | Unpaid Leave of Coach & AD | | Unpaid Leave | |
| Louisville | ESPN | 10/16/2017 | Jeff Borzello | Louisville votes to terminate Rick Pitino's contract 'with just cause' | Coach | Neutral | Positive | Yes | | | | Firing Of Coach & two assistant coaches, and AD | | | Pitino loss Adidas contract |
| Louisville | WP | 9/28/2017 | Matt Bonesteel | Rick Pitino began his career under suspicion. It'll end there, too. | Coach | Neutral | Positive | Yes | | | | Withholding Alleged player from team activities | Acknowledged investigation | Unpaid Leave | |
| Louisville | WP | 10/16/2017 | Scott Allen | Rick Pitino officially fired by Louisville amid federal corruption probe | Coach | Neutral | | | | | | Firing Of Coach & two assistant coaches, and AD | | | |
| Louisville | NYT | 9/26/2017 | Marc Tracy | N.C.A.A. Coaches, Adidas Executive Face Charges; Pitino's Program Implicated | University | Neutral | | | | | | | Acknowledged investigation | | |
| Louisville | NYT | 9/27/2017 | Mark Tracy | Rick Pitino Is Out at Louisville Amid F.B.I. Investigation | Coach | Neutral | | Yes | | | | Unpaid Leave of Coach & AD | | | |
| U of M | ESPN | 8/10/2018 | Dinich, Rittenberg, & VanHaaren | The inside story of a toxic culture at Maryland football | Coach & Team Leadership | Negative | Negative | None | | | | | | Acknowledged report, looking into it | |
| U of M | ESPN | 9/22/2018 | Heather Dinich | Report finds Terps failed to properly diagnose, treat Jordan McNair | University | Negative | Negative | None | | | | New Policy for treatment of players | | | |
| U of M | ESPN | 8/31/2018 | Heather Dinich & Adam Rittenberg | DJ Durkin returns to Terrapins with board of regents' backing | University | Negative | Negative | none | | | | More Oversight and guidance to football coach | Accepting responsibility | | |
| U of M | ESPN | 11/1/2018 | ESPN | Maryland fires football coach DJ Durkin day after his reinstatement | University | Neutral | Positive | none | | | | Firing of HC | | | |
| U of M | WP | 8/14/2018 | Barry Svrluga | A football player died, and all of the University of Maryland is diminished | University | Negative | Negative | None | Shifting the Blame - from coaching to training staff | Defeasibility- AD states when he took over in July | | Strength Coach Resigned, Investigation into culture - already had ongoing one into death | Yes - Accepts legal & moral responsibility | | |
| U of M | WP | 8/14/2018 | Rick Maese, Jesse Dougherty, & Emily Giambalvo | Maryland says football staff made mistakes treating player before his death, apologizes to family | University | Negative | | None | Denial of reported timeline surrounding death. | | | Department members placed on administrative leave. New treatment safeguards. Review into football program | Apology to Family Acknowledge Failures in treatment | | |
| U of M | WP | 9/24/2018 | Rick Maese & Roman Stubbs | U-Md. releases report on Jordan McNair, laying out timeline that led to player's death | University | Negative | Negative | None | | | | Implemented new policies based on report | acknowledge responsibility | released report into death / no decision on training staff | |

| School | Outlet | Date | Author | Headline | Target | Tone | Tone | Responsibility | Defense | | | Corrective Action | Acknowledge | Reinstated/Fired | Stakeholder |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| U of M | WP | 10/30/2018 | Roman Stubbs, Emily Giambalvo, & Sarah Larimer | DJ Durkin returns to the Maryland football team, and three players walk out of his first meeting | University | Negative | Negative | None | | | | More Oversight and guidance to football coach | | Reinstated HC | |
| U of M | WP | 10/30/2018 | Barry Svrluga | Maryland ought to be ashamed | University | Negative | Negative | None | | | | | | Reinstated HC | No - U President / area politicians / players |
| U of M | WP | 10/31/2018 | Rick Maese & Nick Anderson | DJ Durkin, Maryland part ways following outcry over coach's reinstatement | University | Negative | Negative | None | | | | Firing Of Coach | | | |
| U of M | NYT | 8/11/2018 | Billy Witz | Maryland Suspends Football Coach D.J. Durkin After Report of Abuse | Coach/ Athletic Department | Negative | | None | | | | Four members placed on administrative leave. New treatment safeguards. Review into football program | | | |
| U of M | NYT | 8/14/2018 | Jere Longman | D.J. Durkin's Program Under Scrutiny as Maryland Parts Ways With Strength Coach | University | Negative | | Yes | shifting the blame to training staff, not coaching staff | | | Fired strength Coach | acknowledge responsibility | | other coaches |
| U of M | NYT | 10/30/2018 | Marc Tracy | After Maryland Player's Death, Coach and Athletic Director Keep Their Jobs | University | Negative | Negative | Yes | Denial of any toxic culture / Shifting blame to lack of proper oversight | | | | | Reinstated HC/ AD | No - U President / area politicians / players |
| U of M | NYT | 10/31/2018 | Marc Tracy | D.J. Durkin Is Fired by Maryland a Day After Being Reinstated | University | Negative | Negative | Yes | | | | Fired Head Coach | | | |
| U of M | NYT | 11/2/2018 | Marc Tracy & Erica Green | University of Maryland Chaos Is Rooted in Lofty Sports Goals | University | Negative | Negative | Yes | | | | | | | |

| Table Color Key | |
|---|---|
| Early Articles | |
| End Articles | |
| Amendment | |

**Appendix B – Image Repair Artifact**

# Response Guidelines for Attacks on Image

## Important First Steps

Determine where the image loss is coming from.
- External or Internal cause?
- Who is immediately deemed responsible?
  - Player/Coach/Staff/Department?
- Impacted parties involved?
- All parties or areas affected by situation?

Early actions to help
- Designate main person responsible for messages to public.
- Make all pertinent staff and athletes aware of early messages and strategies.
- Avoid any permanent actions without all facts.

## Best Early Strategies

### Denial

Only if sure that there is no basis to claims of department involvement at root of image loss.
- Early on can be used to shift blame onto another person or organization.
- Can also point out lack of evidence (although if more comes out later this can backfire).

### Corrective Action

Steps early on in corrective action can help buy time for the athletic department to gather all the facts surrounding the situation.
- Launching an investigation.
- Placing Players/Staff involved on leave or suspension.

This separates from athletic department only temporarily, until all information is gathered and a formal decision can be made.

### Mortification

If it is known early on that the department or its members are at fault, the best move is to admit guilt and make a plea for forgiveness.
- Allows for time to be bought by acknowledging involvement in situation vaguely without stating exactly what was done wrong.
- e.g. We are sorry for the involvement in this matter and the negative attention it has brought to our university. We are gathering all facts in order to rectify the situation.

### Reducing Offensiveness

Early on reminders and bolstering of prior actions taken in related contexts by the department.
- Helps remind public of good the department does.
  - e.g. If it is an incident related to off field actions of players – reminder of student athlete character or leadership development shows a commitment to growth of individuals.
- Changing perspective of situation early on can help minimize negativity.
  - e.g. Altercation between coaches or players / comments made in press conference, can be changed to they were only acting to support of and standing up for their teammates. Although still not acceptable, it changes negative situation from aggressive player to an overly supportive teammate.

## Best Ending Strategies

### Denial

Only if **NO** responsibility was found can a complete denial of involvement be used.

- Denial can be an effective strategy as long as the department is able to prove without a doubt any involvement.
- Partial denial of aspects related to situation can be used if able to provide proof supporting the area of denial.

### Corrective Action

Even if there is no admittance of guilt corrective action is an easy way to help repair image.

- e.g. Announcing new polices, trainings, oversight as a safe guard.

In most instances there will need to be some sort of punitive action towards members involved.

- e.g. Suspension of games or termination.

Remember: punishment must be appropriate to severity of actions.

- To weak and this will result in pushback and more negative attention.
- To strong and it could result in lawsuits for wrongful termination.
- Must be based on fact and reason.

### Reducing Offensiveness

When responsibility is found there are several effective ways to change negative feelings.

- Compensation can be used anytime there is responsibility found resulting in some form of a loss or victim. Doesn't have to be directly to victim in crisis.
    - e.g. Donation to issue related cause or counseling for victims.
- Minimization can be used carefully to try and show the crisis isn't as bad.
    - e.g. Show how the incident is just isolated to one individual or team and not does not represent the entire athletic department.

### Mortification

Certain situations will require an apology to be made, an apology alone will not be an effective strategy in most situations.

- When making an apology make sure all perceived victims are mentioned in the statement.

Situations almost always requiring a direct apology:

- Misconduct towards an individual or group.
    - e.g. Harassment of players or staff.
- Ethical Violations
- Failure to protect athletes or department members.
- Apologies are also an easy way to win back fan support, as it shows that value is still placed onto them.
- Apologies are best paired with corrective action.

### Remember

- Make sure all parties are aware of and onboard with actions that are taken before making any announcements.
- Follow the chain of command at your university.
- Ensure all actions comply with both University & NCAA regulations.

Joseph Martinelli 2019

**Appendix C – Artifact Validation Request Email**

Good Afternoon,

My name is Joseph Martinelli and I am currently finishing my master's degree in public relations from Seton Hall University. My master's thesis is on the topic of image repair strategies in NCAA Division I athletics. Part of my master's thesis is an artifact that serves as a guide for athletic administration communication professionals for help when faced with a threat of image loss. This guide is based on prior research of Benoit's image repair strategies and a case-study of three recent crises affecting NCAA Division I programs in the last two years.

I am reaching out today in the hopes that you could review my guide to image repair strategies for NCAA institutions, attached as a PDF, and answer the questions below. This will help me make any additions or edits to the guide, as well as ensure that it has validity to the current practices of NCAA athletic departments. This should take no more than 5 minutes of your time and will greatly help me with completing an accurate and comprehensive master's project. All responses will be kept confidential and not be published with any names or university identifiers, unless permission is given.

Questions:

A.) Does this document display similarities to the actions of your institution when faced with threats of image loss?

B.) What are some other actions that you or your institution recommend taking?

C.) Would this document be useful to those working in collegiate athletics when faced with a threat of image loss?

D.) Are there any other recommendations or comments about this document or protocols for responding to threats of image loss?

Thank you in advance for helping me with this task.

Best,

Joseph Martinelli

**Appendix D – Artifact Feedback**

Questions:

A.) Does this document display similarities to the actions of your institution when faced with threats of image loss?

Respondent A:

"Yes, this document has similarities to what we would do when faced with image loss."

Respondent B:

"It is similar to how we handle situations you describe. When I've been involved in these types of situations in the past we consulted with the University's Office of Communications as well as other administrators. Together we put formulated a plan of action and much of what you have in your document is discussed all the while doing what is best for the University."

Respondent C:

"Yes, it does display similarities to actions. While not all threats are created equal, the general philosophy established here is consistent with how we generally proceed."

B.) What are some other actions that you or your institution recommend taking?

Respondent A:

"It is important to remember that not every threat of image loss should be treated equally. In collegiate sports, some sports receive more attention than others and I feel that the strategies should adapt to the particular sport/situation. If an image loss can be contained to a one-day story, then it is better to say very little publicly. If the image loss is in a sport that receives a tremendous amount of attention and/or is a story that the media will follow for a lengthy period, then steps such as corrective action, mortification

and reducing offensiveness can be applied. Also, denial in the best early strategies is very tricky and best to be avoided. As you pointed out, without having 100 percent of the evidence, denials can backfire. We never put ourselves in a situation where we say one thing and the opposite can be proven."

Respondent B:

"I believe you touched upon most if not all the issues that we would be considering. Each case may bring something unique which have to be looked at however the overall goal is to do what is in the best interest of the University in my case."

Respondent C:

"Where I think we've been more effective here than other recent institutions I've been a part of, we work hand in hand with our campus in any major issue. Sounds pretty basic but it's less common in major athletics than you would think. I would directly with my counterpart and the Chancellor to understand our rationale, steps and have any necessary dialogue that might alter our approach."

C.) Would this document be useful to those working in collegiate athletics when faced with a threat of image loss?

Respondent A:

"Yes, this document would be helpful."

Respondent B:

"This document would be very useful as a guideline when dealing with threats of image loss. It is very informative with well thought out options that thoroughly explains all sides giving you the proper tools to formulate a solid plan."

Respondent C:

"I do think it would be helpful. There are some organizations that operate with a proactive PR-oriented approach and the overall reputation management of a university. There are some organizations that still treat PR as an SID/stat-driven function and miss the greater opportunity to enhance reputation management."

D.) Are there any other recommendations or comments about this document or protocols for responding to threats of image loss?

Respondent A:

"If this is geared towards collegiate athletics, it would be helpful to include that you must consider that with any action taken, ensure it complies with NCAA rules and regulations as well as University rules & regulations (i.e. student privacy laws)."

Respondent B:

"The only thing I can think of is perhaps listing a "Chain of Command" which can be used as a guideline depending on the type of company you are dealing with. For example, who would be involved. In my case, it would be the Director of Athletics, Vice President of Student Development who oversees athletics along with Office of Communications, University Counsel (if necessary), etc. Something like that would be a good guideline."

Respondent C:

"Think through all relevant parties that may be impacted or who may offer a varying perspective that helps you reach the best outcome. While it's best to have one public-facing voice for an organization, that voice can be achieved as the culmination of a variety subject matter experts who help reach the best ultimate outcome."