

**Sorry Excuse for an Entertainer:
The Proliferation of Public Apologies by Celebrities**

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To my parents, who have supported me in every way possible,
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CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

In a widely printed Associated Press article, Noveck (2006) declared 2006 “the year of celebrity apologies.” “Rarely,” Noveck noted, “have there been so many prominent public apologies coming so close together” (para. 3). Indeed, the year did see the public mea culpa of everyone from actor Mel Gibson to Florida congressman Mark Foley and even Pope Benedict XVI, all expressing regret for personal transgressions. Yet the magnitude of apologies in 2006 is no simple fluke; “the year of celebrity apologies” is characteristic of a continuing trend toward a greater propensity of public figures to apologize. The age of public relations has brought with it a greater understanding of the value of image and reputation. It is no longer only corporations that heed the advice of PR practitioners. Instead, public figures of all kinds have been forced to adopt image repair techniques like those detailed by Benoit (1995, 1997a, 1997b) in times of crisis or scandal.

This new awareness of image and widespread use of the apology to protect reputation coincides with another interesting cultural fact. More than ever before, entertainers have become the objects of American public interest. Information about singers, actors, and models is no longer relegated to entertainment news shows like “Entertainment Tonight” and “Access Hollywood,” though programs of this genre continue to proliferate. Instead, details of the latest celebrity scandal infiltrate the evening news, small town newspapers, and esteemed periodicals like The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Time. Magazines like People and US Weekly, well-respected publications only a decade ago, are now beginning to look and read more

like Star and The National Inquirer. Scandal is news like never before--and the apology has become a favorite strategy in diffusing scandal. Meanwhile, the celebrities whose activities are so vigorously reported are becoming powerful human brands, carrying significant clout within their respective industries and reaping huge sums by lending their “star power” to consumer products and services as endorsers. In many cases, dozens of people from managers to agents and publicists depend on these celebrities for their livelihoods. Such entertainers are beginning to look more and more like CEOs of small but very profitable companies. Never has it been so important for celebrities to protect their image.

To date, there has been a modest amount of scholarship on the subject of apology. This scholarship has come from three fields--public relations, sociology, and psychology. Public relations scholars have focused primarily on apology as a form of crisis management, one of many strategic options available for rhetors attempting to mitigate damage to their image. Those in the field of sociology have examined the role of apology in maintaining the social order, clarifying group norms, and reaffirming membership in a group after personal transgressions that threaten that membership. Literature in the field of psychology, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the healing power of apology in interpersonal relationships. The purpose of this thesis is to synthesize this work and develop a theoretical framework to evaluate the public apology with consideration given to apology’s benefits for the offender, the victim, and society.

Rational for the Study

In 1995, British actor Hugh Grant’s career was beginning to take off. His film, “Four Weddings and a Funeral” had made an impressive run at the box office and his performance had

garnered him a great deal of critical praise. Among the accolades his performance had earned him, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association awarded him the Golden Globe for “Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture--Musical or Comedy.” The New York Times similarly lauded Grant’s performance, saying he turned it into “a career-making role” (Maslin, 1994). Grant, who had worked as an actor for over a decade in the United Kingdom, was primed to be Hollywood’s next major male romantic lead.

In late June, however, just weeks before his newest film, “Nine Months,” was to premier, a public relations disaster threatened Grant’s position as a leading man--and, indeed, his very career. After police found him engaging with a prostitute in his white BMW, Grant was charged with lewd conduct in public. The press coverage was intense. His mug shot was widely circulated, numerous national newspapers reported the story, and the incident became fodder for tabloid magazines (Benoit, 1997).

The promotional blitz for “Nine Months” was just about to begin. Instead of canceling already-scheduled talk show appearances, Grant turned his media tour into an apologetic campaign. On “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno,” Grant admitted that he had “done an abominable thing” (“Nine,” 1995, para. 2) and on Larry King Live he reiterated the sentiment saying, “I don’t have excuses. I don’t have, ah, anything more to say except I’m very sorry” (qtd. in Benoit, 1997a, p. 257). He consistently discussed the incident and expressed remorse during his other appearances on “The Today Show” and “Live with Regis and Kathie Lee” as well (Benoit, 1997a).

The results were impressive. “Nine Months,” Grant’s first “big-budget, big-studio film with perks” (“Nine,” 1995, para. 6), grossed over \$65 million in domestic box office receipts and went on to be one of 1995’s top motion pictures (Benoit, 1997a). His leading man status

cemented, Grant has continued to have a prolific career as an actor, most successfully in his roles as the romantic lead.

Immediately after his media tour, Grant was praised in the press for his willingness to apologize. At the time, veteran New York publicist Howard Rubinstein commented that the behavior was unusual for celebrities. “Most stars go into seclusion and don’t talk and get angry and attack the media. He did the reverse. He apologized right away, he went on every talk show possible, he apologized to his girlfriend, and the public applauded him,” said Rubinstein (qtd. in “Spin,” 1995, para. 5). Grossberger (1995) also spoke highly of Grant’s efforts. “[H]e is so good, he should found the Hugh Grant School of Apologetic Behavior and give apology lessons. This is what the modern world desperately needs, especially America, where many people seem to have lost all sense of shame” (p. 30).

The praise Grant garnered for his apologetic campaign demonstrates just how much has changed in the past decade. Eleven years later, 2006 was coined “The Year of Celebrity Apologies” as the public saw apologies from an unprecedented number of non-political public figures (Noveck, 2006).

Public apologies have, historically, been rare (Hoffman, 2007; Lazare, 2004; Mills, 2001). In the past, public figures have been guided by the oft-quoted words of Benjamin Disraeli “Never complain, never explain” or the maxim of folk hero John Wayne in his classic Western “She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,” “Never apologize. It’s a sign of weakness.” Public apologies have long been avoided across the board for a number of reasons. In the business world, attorneys have warned their clients against making apologies in fear of opening the door to lawsuits (Gibson, 2003; Tyler, 1997); Politicians, epitomized by President Nixon during the Watergate scandal, have been more willing to go down with the ship than apologize for their

transgressions, as doing so can seem like surrender (Mills, 2001); and before Grant, entertainers were more likely to retreat into seclusion until scandal faded from public memory (“Spin,” 1995). While the reasons varied, the response to calls for apology has almost always the same: silence.

At the time it was published in the early nineties, Tavuchis’ (1991) *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* was the only book to provide a broad perspective on the field of apology (Lazare, 2004), and little scholarly work on apology was available in any discipline (Tavuchis, 1991). Tavuchis suggested at the time that though Westerners were typically reluctant to apologize, it was hard to state whether or not Americans showed a greater or lesser willingness to apologize than in the past. According to Lazare (2004), however, a cultural shift was imminent. The number of articles in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* that contained the word “apology” or “apologize” from 1998 to 2002 was nearly double that of the previous five year period. At the same time, a market emerged for “how-to” books on apology and similar articles began appearing in magazines like *Family Circle*. These books and articles seized upon the power of apology to maintain and restore interpersonal relationships.

Public figures of all sorts began to show a greater propensity to apologize. Religious groups in the United States and abroad apologized for historic abuses of power and for harm done in their names (Mills, 2001). Governments similarly expressed contrition for historic misdeeds, such as the Holocaust and the American institution of slavery. U.S. businesses also apologized like never before in the mid to late nineties, with corporations such as Intel, Coors, United Airlines, and Ford and Bridgestone/Firestone publicly acknowledging their failures and offering penance. This new trend is widely recognized (Gray, 2007; Hoffman, 2007; Kellerman, 2006; Lazare, 2004; Mills, 2001; Quindlen, 2007). Mills (2001) and Kellerman (2006) have

even gone as far as to assert that we've entered into a new global apology culture. The question remains: Why?

Lazare (2004) suggests several reasons for the growing importance of apology. One explanation Lazare proposes has to do with the rapid globalization of the world and the increase in relevant technologies. This particular explanation is among the more common in apology literature (Downey, 1993; Mills, 2001). As never before, we are connected through the Internet, telephone, fax, television, and other technology to others both close to us and across the world. The result is that we are living in a "global village." According to Lazare, this has two important implications. First, our increasing connectedness means the sheer number of interpersonal interactions we enjoy has increased. As such, the opportunities for conflict are greater and apology becomes an invaluable way of resolving those interpersonal conflicts. Second, because of the nature of our global communications, the possibility of secret behaviors diminishes. This is especially consequential for public figures, whose misdeeds can be uncovered and publicized with ever greater speed and ease. When a personal transgression is committed, newswires, television, and the Internet, which is quickly becoming the most important source of news in the United States, can communicate the event almost-instantaneously to the public. Through technology, the world has become smaller and it has become harder for public figures to hide from their mistakes.

A second explanation for the growing importance of apology is a global cultural shift that has occurred as a result of World War II and the subsequent Cold War. Both Lazare (2004) and Mills (2001) have pointed to an increased attention to morality and justice following World War II. Mills suggests, "the new culture of apology reflects the emergence of a post-cold war era in which public discourse has increasingly taken on the ethics and informality of private discourse

and produced a different set of expectations than we are used to. In this post-cold war, feelings and the display of caring have become, as much as policy, and inseparable part of winning politics” (p. 114). According to Lazare, this shift has arisen out of necessity. With the devastating potential of nuclear weapons, a relatively recent threat, never has so much rested on the state of national relations. It is clear that “we are attempting to change our behavior in order to survive” (p. 14). The prominence of questions of morality and justice has manifested itself in the proliferation of apologies issued by nations for past injustices, including President Clinton’s apology to Japanese Americans placed in internment camps during World War II and Tony Blair’s apology for Britain’s role in the potato famine. In this new era, acknowledging and accepting guilt for historical misdeeds has come to demonstrate political stability and strength, not weakness or shame.

Lazare (2004) also points to two additional explanations for the growing importance of apologies. One of these explanations is the dawn of the millennium, which many people saw as a chance to wipe the slate clean and begin anew through the use of apology. Another explanation is the recently-shifting balance of power among nations and groups. In the United States, women and African Americans were deprived of legal rights for over a century. Though both groups acquired legal rights long ago, they have long been denied true equality through structural boundaries such as racism, sexism, and the “glass ceiling.” As they’ve continued to make modest gains, however, both minorities are recently in a political and economic position to “remind others of inequalities--both past and present--and to declare that devaluing behavior is unacceptable and a new social contract must be negotiated. Apologies are a civilized way to redress these inequalities” (p. 16). Lazare suggests that women especially have impacted social norms with regard to apology. Women demonstrate a greater willingness to apologize and place

a greater value on the process. As they have entered positions of power, women have begun to assert greater influence on society's values. A change in the way we think about apology may have resulted.

A final explanation for the recent proliferation of apologies may revolve around the growing field of public relations. This explanation primarily concerns itself with public apologies. An increasing awareness of the value of image and reputation has led both corporations, political leaders, and other public figures to adopt strategies such as those detailed by Benoit (1994, 1997a, 1997b) and Coombs (1995, 1998, 2000, 2004). The voluntary acceptance of blame as a public relations strategy has been extremely successful, as the opening example of Hugh Grant indicates. Widespread use of apology by public figures may, however, have implications for interpersonal apology as well. In the mediated age, public figures have come to hold an important role in demonstrating acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. For example, media outrage over a public figure's use of hate speech affirms the taboo against such speech for the rest of society. If the public has perceived the proliferation of public apologies made in the interest of public relations, and with the press attention that public figures' apologies commonly garner, it would be difficult to argue that they have not, it seems likely that the public has also perceived the ability of apology to restore the reputation of individuals after personal transgressions.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis will be divided into five chapters as detailed below, with the first chapter serving as an introduction. The remaining chapters are:

Chapter II: The Study of Apology

This chapter will provide an overview of apology literature in the fields of public sociology, public relations, and psychology, drawing comparisons and pointing out similarities across the disciplines. These works will serve as a basis for the analytical framework that this thesis will propose for the evaluation of public apologies by celebrities.

Chapter III: The Curious Phenomenon of Celebrity Apology

Chapter Three will examine the unique relationship between celebrities and the public and suggest three reasons that this relationship may necessitate public apology. Having offered explanations for the phenomenon of celebrity public apology, distinctions will be made and parallels drawn between celebrities and other social actors that have primarily employed apology as a public relations tool. Finally, in light of all of these considerations, a model for evaluating celebrity apologies will be proposed.

Chapter IV: Applications of Apology Analysis Framework

This chapter will examine three recent, high-profile celebrity crises in which apology was a primary tool used to overcome reputational threat. Background will be given, public statements will be outlined, and apologetic discourse will be evaluated in light of the analytic framework proposed in the previous chapter.

Chapter V: Conclusion

CHAPTER TWO:

The Study of Apology

To date, there has been a modest amount of scholarship on the subject of apology, though this scholarship--like the apology in general--has been more common since the late nineties. While work has been done primarily in the interrelated fields of sociology, public relations, and psychology, scholars in each field have taken a different interest. Literature in the field of sociology has focused on apology's role in maintaining the social order, clarifying group norms, and reaffirming membership in a group after personal transgressions. Such work can be said to have society as its focus. Public relations scholars, in contrast, focus on the benefits apology can have for the rhetor, the offender. Work in this field has examined apology as a crisis management technique, one of many image repair strategies available to public figures and corporations when faced with a threat to their reputation. Scholarship in the field of psychology has yet another focus--the power of apology to mend interpersonal relationships. Psychologists have primarily concerned themselves with the benefit apology has for the offended party.

While each discipline has as its focus a different party, the suggestions offered do not seem to be at odds. This thesis will take as its goal the synthesis of apology research in hopes of developing a model for public apology that will be beneficial for all parties--society, the offender, and the offended.

The Sociological Perspective

Kenneth Burke, the father of contemporary rhetorical studies, laid the foundation for what I will call the sociological perspective on apology in his work during 1950's and 60's. While Burke did not address apology explicitly, his concept of the Rhetoric of Rebirth implied the necessity of the apology.

Burke (1966) defined man as “the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol misuing) animal” (p. 16). According to Burke (1950, 1966, 1970) man's symbol-using nature has important implications, as language leads to the concept of right and wrong behavior and allows for rules that guide the actions of individuals. Language also spurs the development of hierarchies based on value judgments that order society. The hierarchical nature of society necessitates “rebirth”; the need for a new identity becomes the primary function of rhetoric. As no one is able to successfully obey all the commandments and admonitions that the social order demands, all humans experience “pollution” or guilt. To rid himself of this guilt, a social actor must seek “purification” through the language system. Individuals may purge themselves of guilt, or pollution, through victimage or mortification. While victimage involves transferring guilt to another (a strategy commonly known as “scapegoating”), mortification involves absorbing guilt, suffering for those sins that cause guilt in an attempt to become a more perfect self. Once purified, one experiences “redemption,” a temporary stasis that represents symbolic rebirth.

Burke's concept of mortification implies the use of apology, which involves the recognition of wrongdoing, a degree of suffering, and forbearance. Indeed, the term

“mortification” has been adopted by public relations scholar Benoit (1994, 1997a, 1997b), who uses it to mean “confess and beg forgiveness” (1997a, p. 254).

Tavuchis’ (1991) account of apology echoes the Burkean idea of hierarchy, where social authorities define what constitutes a transgression. In his view, a transgression (i.e. violating one of the social order’s commandments or admonitions) poses a threat both to the individual and to the social order as a whole. After violating an established norm, an individual must reaffirm his allegiance to his society’s value system through apology or risk being recognized as deviant, placed permanently outside the moral community. Says Tavuchis, “apology expresses itself as the exigency of a painful re-membering, literally of being mindful again, of what we were and had as members and, at the same time, what we have jeopardized or lost by virtue of our offensive speech or action. And it is only by *personally* acknowledging ultimate responsibility, expressing genuine sorry and regret, pledging henceforth (implicitly or explicitly) to abide by the rules, that the offender simultaneously recalls and is re-called to that which binds” (p. 8).

Apologies, then, represent “a form of self-punishment that cuts deeply because we are obliged to retell, relive, and seek forgiveness for sorrowful events that have rendered our claims to membership in a moral community suspect or defeasible” (p. 8). In this respect, Tavuchis’ explanation of apology closely resembles Burke’s concept of mortification--self-punishment as the absorbing of guilt to place the individual back within the social order.

According to Tavuchis (1991), apology also has a role in clarifying group norms. “Our understanding of the meaning of stable social configurations is enhanced in the process of disturbance and deviation... Thus, in both intimate and impersonal settings, characteristics responses to violations of privileged moral standards and expectations can provide us with the critical occasion for delving into covert social agendas that buttress prevailing definitions of

order, predictability, and valid membership” (p. 12). Apology not only affirms the legitimacy of the violated rule but also demonstrates the relative offensiveness of violations. When a transgression is committed, the presence or absence of a “call” to apologize establishes which violations are “apologizable” and, thus, forgivable. In this respect, apology serves an important function not only for the violator, but also for the society as a whole.

Having considered all this, Tavuchis (1991) defines apology as follows: “Genuine apologies, from all that has been said, may be taken as the symbolic foci of secular remedial rituals that serve to recall and reaffirm allegiance to codes of behavior and belief whose integrity has been tested and challenged by transgression, whether knowingly or unwittingly. The apology thus speaks to an act that cannot be undone but that cannot go unnoticed without compromising the current and future relationships of the parties, the legitimacy of the violated rule, and the wider social web in which participants are enmeshed” (p. 13).

Apology as a speech act is characterized by Tavuchis (1991) as a three-phase process: naming the offense, a process of mutual identification; the apology itself, which communicates the appropriate emotions regarding the violation; and the response. During the response phase, the victim holds the offender’s fate in his hands, symbolically speaking. If the apology is accepted, the offender is allowed back into the moral community; if not, he becomes a deviant outsider. While these three phases are “the minimal analytical requirements for the production of an apology” (p. 23), significant differences exist in interpersonal apologies, what Tavuchis calls apologies “from One to One,” and public apologies, or apologies “from the One to the Many.” In interpersonal apologies, the emotions of regret and sorrow are central as “[i]n individuals who are unable or unwilling to express sorry and regret after knowing harming someone are ordinarily viewed as doubly deviant and subject to sanctions according to the dominant form of

discourse and social control” (p. 43). In public apologies, however, expression is central and sorrow is derivative. It is not the emotion that is important, but the performance, since the purpose of public apology is to “have it on the record.”

It is clear that this sociological approach shows little concern for the victim or the offender, aside from recognizing an innate need to reestablish membership in a moral community. No attention is given to the psychological or reputational needs of any individual. Instead, the concern of this approach is a greater understanding of how society’s norms and values are clarified and affirmed. The individual is merely instrumental in this approach.

The Public Relations Perspective

In contrast to the sociological perspective on apology, the public relations perspective concerns itself primarily with the benefits apology has for the offending rhetor. In particular, attention is paid to apology’s ability to repair the tarnished reputation of an individual or organization. Implicit in this perspective are assumptions regarding the need for shared values, though the process of reestablishing those values is not the focus of this research.

A growing body of literature in the field of public relations has grown around what has been called the “symbolic approach” to crisis communication, which emphasizes communication as a symbolic resource to protect an individual or organization’s image (Coombs, 1998). The fundamental assumptions behind the symbolic approach are, one, that crises threaten an organization or individual’s image, which crisis managers seek to protect and, two, that the crisis manager must consider the particulars of each crisis situation when determining how to best respond. The roots of this approach can be found in the rhetorical concept of *apologia*, though

apologia is not the same as apology; while apologia is a defense or account (Ware & Linkugel, 1973), apology involves the voluntary acceptance of blame. Still, the symbolic approach lends insights into the nature and uses of apology as a public relations tool.

Central to the symbolic approach is Benoit's (1994, 1997a, 1997b) theory of image repair strategies. In his theory, Benoit outlines those rhetorical options available to an individual or organization in the event of a persuasive "attack." The attack has two elements: first, that the accused is held responsible for an action and, second, that the action is considered offensive. In Benoit's view, "perceptions are more important than reality" (1997b, p. 178). Whether the accused is *actually* responsible is of little consequence, as is whether the act was *actually* offensive. If a salient audience perceives responsibility and offensiveness, an individual must respond.

The apology is one of fourteen rhetorical options that image repair theory provides for responding to a persuasive attack. In discussing apology, Benoit borrows Burke's term, "mortification." Benoit (1997a) claims that if the accused chooses to "confess and beg forgiveness" they may be forgiven if perceived to be sincere (p. 254). This apology "may include expressions of regret (for one's role in the offensive act, or for the consequences of the act, or both)" (Benoit & Drew, 1997, p. 156), though Benoit does not suggest this is an essential element. In no study does Benoit closely examine the nature of apology--or even the necessary ingredients--and the research seems unconcerned with the idea that all apologies are not equal.

Benoit & Drew (1997) do, however, establish that apology is among the most effective image repair strategies when available. In this study, Benoit asked respondents to assume a friend had done something offensive and to consider their reaction to each of the fourteen options provided by the image repair typology. Of the strategies, mortification was considered

the most appropriate and effective by respondents. Closely behind mortification was the strategy of “corrective action,” which often accompanies a sincere apology. These results are consistent with conclusions drawn by Lyon & Cameron (2004) who determined that apologetic responses by organizations have positive effects on audience attitudes.

Benoit’s theory of image repair strategies was elaborated upon by Coombs (1995, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2004), who outlines a set of what he called “crisis response strategies.” In his typology, Coombs expanded the “mortification” category to include three strategies, all of which attempt to win forgiveness for a crisis: remediation, repentance, and rectifications. Remediation offers compensation to victims, repentance requires that the accused asks for forgiveness, and rectification involves taking action to prevent future recurrences of the offensive act. Though Coombs breaks apart these mortification strategies in his typology, he would later note that it is unproductive to debate the exact number of strategies available as such a number would simply be the result of the “level of abstraction used by the researcher” (1998, p. 179).

In later works, Coombs (1998, 1999) developed what he called the “accommodative-defensive continuum,” which placed strategies according to the degree to which they accept or avoid responsibility for a crisis situation. The “full apology” and “corrective action” are considered by Coombs to be the most accommodative strategies. Coombs further posits that in crises where an audience perceives that an organization had “strong personal control” over the circumstances, such as a “transgression,” accommodative strategies--especially full apology--are the best responses available.

One further insight Coombs (2004) offers into the nature of public apology is that past crises have a significant impact on the threat a current crisis poses. The absence or presence of crises in an individual or organization’s history serves as an indicator of stability, as they suggest

a pattern of behavior. Coombs' study suggests that a history of crises has a strong intensifier effect on damage done to an individual or organization's reputation by a crisis. A history of crises, Coombs suggests, "should result in crisis managers selecting response strategies that accept greater responsibility and that demonstrate increased concern for victims' needs than would normally be used for a given crisis situation" (p. 187). In Coombs typology, there is no strategy more accommodative than the full apology. Lyon & Cameron (2004) also suggest that an apologetic strategy may also reinforce positive attitudes toward organizations with already good reputations.

Scholarly research by the likes of Benoit and Coombs is consistent with anecdotal and common sense evidence offered in support of apology in trade articles, which affirm with recent examples the ability of apology to win forgiveness and stimulate--or reinforce--goodwill, especially for companies with already-favorable. These articles also, however, demonstrate concern for the "realities" of apology, the potential costs and difficulties involved with offering public mea culpa. Kellerman (2006) suggests that "[l]eaders will publicly apologize if and when they calculate the costs of doing to be lower than the costs of not doing so" (p. 75). Often cited costs may include the threat of litigation, the possibility of strengthening associations between the company and the problem, or the fear of personal professional repercussions. Most literature, however, recognizes that such fears are frequently unwarranted and that "leaders are prone to overestimate the costs of apologies and underestimate the benefits" (Kellerman, 2006, p. 80). It has further been demonstrated that legal liability, the most frequently cited deterrent of corporate apology (see, for example, Tyler, 1997; and Gibson, 2003) is significantly less of a threat than once thought, as the goodwill created may deter lawsuits (Patel & Reinsch, 2003). In fact, it is

suggested that the refusal to accept responsibility where there is clear culpability may prove to be a greater legal liability than simply apologizing.

Not only have these trade articles suggested that the benefits of apology far outweigh the costs, they've also provided some fundamental considerations and guidelines for making an apology, most of which consist of boiled-down recommendations by experts in other fields. Quindlen (2007), for example, summarizes the four elements of an apology provided by sociolinguist Deborah Tannen: "admitting guilt, showing remorse, acknowledging damage and indicating how it will be repaired" (p. 56). Gray (2007) similarly cites Judy Eaton, assistant professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, who stresses that one must "admit wrongdoing, take full responsibility for your actions, show empathy for the hurt victim and promise not to do it again" (p. 62). Other simple guidelines offered by the likes of Croce (2005) and Weeks (2003) are consistent with these points. These criteria imply what some writers say explicitly: apologies must be genuine. Timeliness is also stressed in much of the trade literature. Most authors suggest that an apology that fulfills these simple criteria will be considered full or "good" and received favorably. Indeed, Kellerman (2006) notes, "There is no evidence of a good apology that has backfired" (p. 77).

Many trade articles have gone a step further, pointing out other important "do-s" and "don't-s" of apology. Weeks (2003) stresses the importance of clarity in apology to demonstrate understanding and recognition of the specific offense for which an apology is demanded to eliminate ambiguity as to what one is apologizing for. Others ("Art," 2005; France, 2002; Gray, 2007; Quindlen, 2007) have emphasized that apologies must be unequivocal and that what Lazare (2004) calls "pseudoapologies" ("I'm sorry but...", "I'm sorry if...", etc.) do little to generate goodwill and may, in fact, heighten resentment. Gray (2007) also suggests that "[m]ost

apologies go off the rails when the offender tries to either justify their actions or minimize the amount of damage they caused” (p. 62). This indicates that mixing apology and other strategies detailed by Benoit and Coombs is risky business. Such suggestions also echo more sophisticated work on apology in the field of psychology.

Both scholarly work in the field of crisis communication and public relations trade articles affirm the ability of apology to generate goodwill and stimulate forgiveness for organizations in crisis. While the concern of this literature is the benefit apology has for the rhetor, it is clear that audience psychology is implicit in suggestions for delivering a successful apology.

The Psychological Perspective

While, as noted above, the distinction between public relations literature and psychology literature is not always clear, work in the field of psychology tends to examine more nuanced aspects of apology, as closer attention is given to what requirements apology must fulfill to be accepted by and to heal the offended. In short, it is the healing quality of apology that is highlighted in psychology research and scholarship.

Darby & Schlenker (1982) suggest that the groundwork for evaluating apologies is laid in early childhood. In their study, they determined that children from kindergarten to seventh grade evaluated those who offered apologies for their transgressions more favorably. The presence of apology “resulted in the actor being blamed less, liked more, evaluated more positively, viewed as stronger and more genuinely sorry, and forgiven more” (p. 751), even among younger children. Elaborate apologies even minimized the amount of punishment that children

recommended for a transgressor. A propensity toward accepting apology and forgiving may, it seems, precede the ability to be serious critics of those apologies.

For adults, however, who are the intended recipients of most public apologies, more serious considerations must be made. Lazare (2004) studied over 1,000 apologies to examine the apology process and understand what makes an apology a success or failure. His sophisticated analysis of every aspect of the apology process has made him one of the most frequently cited psychologists in non-academic apology literature.

Lazare (2004) argues that in order to understand the nature of a successful apology, one must first understand how apologies heal. Any given apology satisfies at least one of several psychological needs of the offended. One purpose an apology may serve is the restoration of one's dignity or self-respect. This is normally an important need when the offense is insult or humiliation. When one has been humiliated, Lazare argues, they have lost power in a relationship. Through apology, the humiliation is transferred to the offender and the victim is able to regain face. Victims may also have a psychological need to see the offender suffer as a form of "retributive justice." Another common purpose of apology is reminiscent of one focus of the sociological perspective on apology: the reassurance of shared values, which closely relates to another need--the need to be assured of safety in one's relationships. Still others need assurance that the offenses were not the result of their own action, to know that the attack or humiliation was not their own fault. Finally, some victims wish to open a dialogue with their offender, an opportunity that a good apology provides. Understanding the specific needs of the injured party aids the apologist in making a successful apology because it is only when an apology heals that resentment is relinquished and goodwill is generated.

The parts of the apology process, as outlined by Lazare (2004), are remarkably similar to those cited in most non-academic business trade articles: acknowledgement of the offense, explanation, the demonstration of appropriate attitudes and behaviors, and of the offering of reparations. This is not surprising considering many of these articles draw from work in the field of psychology or interviews with psychologists and academics in the field. Lazare, however, examines each step with much more detail than is offered in the aforementioned works.

The first step in the apology process, acknowledging the offense, is, according to Lazare (2004), the most important. “The possibility of offering a meaningful apology may depend on how well [the offender grasps] the full nature of the offense from [the offended’s] perspective” (p. 76). In order to successfully acknowledge the offense, one must do four things. First, the apologist must correctly identify the parties involved--both those who are responsible for the offense and those to which the apology is owed. Nothing is gained if an apology is made to the wrong audience and one cannot apologize without acknowledging that they were responsible for the offense. Second, the apologist must describe the offense in adequate detail. Even if the offense seems obvious, one must explore what it has meant to the offended party. Clarity in these details assumes especial importance in public apologies where there are many different audiences who will interpret (or misinterpret) the apology. An apologist must third demonstrate recognition of the impact that an offending behavior has had on the victim, whether it has involved tangible losses or emotional harm. Finally, one must confirm that the offense was a violation of the social or moral agreement between the parties. There are, Lazare suggests, a multitude of ways an acknowledgement can fail. Apologies can, of course, fall short of fulfilling any of the four criteria above. They can also fail for other reasons, including use of the passive voice (as in Reagan’s infamous acknowledgement that “mistakes were made”), making the

offense conditional (as Nixon did when he said, “If some of my judgments were wrong...”), questioning whether the victim was hurt (e.g. “If you were offended...”), and minimizing the offense. It is clear that language must be chosen carefully when acknowledging the offense.

The second step Lazare (2004) identified in the apology process is the demonstration of proper attitudes and sentiments, such as remorse, shame, humility, and sincerity. The complementary attitudes of remorse and shame serve to reaffirm that both parties have shared values and also indicate forbearance, the promise not to repeat offending actions. Humility must also be present or an “apology” cannot restore the dignity of the victim and risks becoming an insult. While sincerity is helpful in gaining acceptance for an apology, Lazare suggests that it is not necessarily essential to fulfilling many of a victim’s psychological needs. This is especially the case with public apologies.

It is in Lazare’s (2004) recommendation that one offer an explanation, the third step in the apology process he identifies, that he breaks away from the suggestions commonly offered by those in the field of public relations. Lazare cites common expressions like “You owe me an explanation” as evidence that victims believe that an explanation is expected after an offense. Lazare believes that a good explanation is the only way to minimize the offensiveness of an action without creating resentment, the way the “minimization” strategy detailed by Benoit and Coombs may. An explanation may minimize the act’s offensiveness by pointing out that it was not intentional (and therefore not personal), it is not indicative of the “real self” of the offender, that the offensive act was no fault of the victim, and that the idiosyncrasies of the situation in which the offense took place makes it unlikely that it will occur again in the future. Lazare warns, however, that a bad or dishonest explanation may, instead, elevate an action’s

offensiveness. Further, it should be noted that an explanation and an excuse are not the same thing. To offer an excuse borders dangerously on apologia, an account, rather than apology.

The final step Lazare (2004) identifies in the apology process is the offering of reparations, which shows the victim that the offender takes the grievance seriously and wishes to repair the harm done. When making reparations is possible, they should be made. In instances where harm can be quantified (is in the case of broken property), appropriate reparations are easily determined. In this respect, the concept of reparations closely mirrors Benoit and Coombs' strategy of "corrective action." There are, however, many instances in which the harm cannot be quantified (as in the case of humiliation). In these cases reparations may be symbolic. In interpersonal apologies, the offender may offer to buy the victim a drink or take them to dinner. In public apologies, a donation may be made to a relevant charity.

The timing of apology also receives a great deal of attention from Lazare (2004). While interpersonal apologies for serious offenses may be suspect or rejected if delivered immediately, public apologies should be delivered with great haste, Lazare suggests. In cases where one party is clearly responsible, "the public will demand an unambiguous apology as soon as the offense becomes known. Any delays or 'hedging' will be met with suspicion and increasing pressure to 'come clean,' unlike the slowly developing process that can unfold with personal apologies or conflict in which blame is yet to be determined" (p. 178). Not only must public apologies be delivered immediately, they must also be done right the first time.

While Lazare (2004) is by no means the only psychologist who has contributed to what I have called the psychological approach, which examines the nature and requirements of apology in light of the benefits to the victim, his analysis is representative of the approach. Chapman & Thomas (2006), for instance, describe five aspects of apology--expressing regret, accepting

responsibility, making restitution, genuinely repenting, and requesting forgiveness. It is only in suggesting that one “requests forgiveness” that they diverge from Lazare’s recommendations, and it could certainly be argued that a request for forgiveness is implicit in apology. There are, it seems, few if any major points of controversy within the field of psychology as to what constitutes a good apology.

CHAPTER THREE:

The Curious Phenomenon of Celebrity Apology

Why Do Celebrities Apologize?

Celebrities are markedly different and have a dissimilar relationship with the public than most other figures who deliver public apologies. As Benoit (1997a) points out, the actions and decisions of entertainers rarely have a profound impact on the lives of their audience, unlike politicians who may make decisions that literally involve life or death, and corporations whose choices have significant ramifications for shareholders and customers alike. When one takes a step back from the United States' celebrity-obsessed culture, the idea of an entertainer making a televised public apology for a personal transgression may seem downright silly--but, indeed, such apologies are made and are called for by the public.

There are a number of explanations for the curious phenomenon of celebrity apology. First and most obvious is the public relations explanation. Actors, models and, to a lesser extent, recording artists must be able to enter new projects with a favorable or neutral reputation. Negative perceptions of actors can affect their ability to convincingly portray new characters; model's personal lives must not outshine the designer's garments or taint the reputation of the magazines they appear on the covers of; and musicians, who to some extent "play themselves" in their performances and on their albums, must not be portrayed by the media in a way that conflicts with the image they have cultivated. Furthermore, only the most successful, established entertainers can afford to be seen as a "loose cannons" or as difficult to work with within their

respective industry as new talent is always on the horizon. All of this implies a strong personal stake that entertainers have in maintaining and protecting their image.

In addition, though Benoit (1997) draws a distinction between entertainers and corporations, in recent years many celebrities have begun to look more like CEO's of a small company, often personally employing dozens and being tied to many more. Indeed Rein, Kotler, & Stoller (1997) conceptualize a "celebrity industry," which lies at the center of an industrial structure. In this model, there are eight sometimes overlapping sub-industries that produce and promote celebrities. First, the "entertainment industry" comprises all organizations involved in producing entertainment and entertainers from film studios to music halls, though Rein et al. distinguish between this industry and what they call the "communications industry," which incorporates media outlets such as magazines, newspapers, television, film, and radio. Both the entertainment and the communications industry are promoted through the "publicity industry," which includes publicists, PR firms, advertising agencies, and marketing research firms. All professionals who solicit or negotiate engagements for celebrity clients, such as agents, managers, and promoters, make up the "representation industry." The "appearance industry" includes make-up artists, plastic surgeons, designers, and stylists while professionals who help celebrities in developing their talents make up the "coaching industry." Finally, the "endorsement industry" includes souvenir, clothing, and other merchandise manufacturers while the "legal and business services industry" handles the licensing of image as well as contractual and investment advice. While this conceptualization of the "celebrity industry" is debatable, it demonstrates the sheer number of individuals whose livelihoods depend on, or are at least affected by, celebrities.

At the same time, celebrities can be considered “human brands” in themselves who align themselves with other corporations in promoting and endorsing products and services (Thomson, 2006). In the past two decades, as the public has developed a resistance to traditional advertising techniques, celebrities are being used more and more to endorse products (Rein et al, 1997). By lending their image to or claiming to use a product, celebrities can garner impressive payouts and strengthen product brands. This, however, depends upon the strength of a celebrity’s own reputation and image. As such, celebrities must protect their own image in order to guard not only their own profitability but also the interests of those brands they promote. Public relations has become an indispensable way for celebrities to serve both interests and, as has been aptly demonstrated in the scholarly work of Benoit and Coombs and through the anecdotal, common sense, and observational knowledge provided in trade articles, the apology is a powerful public relations tool.

A second explanation for the phenomenon of celebrity apology lies in the concept of the para-social relationship, which describes an imagined relationship between fan and celebrity that mirrors or may take the place of real relationships. When the concept first was developed by Horton & Wohl (1956), it implied a strong disturbed or even psychopathic fixation on famous individuals and characters. According to Turner (2004), however, the term “has been stripped of some of its pejorative overtones when applied to fandom or the consumption of celebrity” (p. 93). In this context, the para-social relationship is used to describe a type of intimacy constructed through mass media rather than through interpersonal interactions and is considered a common experience in our heavily mediated culture. Para-social relationships with celebrities provide a sense of belonging, recognition, and meaning. Imagined intimate relationships with celebrities have implications for their ability to lend equity to brands. Thompson (2006) has defined

“attachment” as “the intensity of a person’s target-specific emotional bond with a human brand” (p. 105) and suggests that the concept of attachment offers “significant potential” in their ability to act as endorsers (p. 104). Taking this into consideration, celebrities may make public apologies not only for public relations reasons but also for the same reason interpersonal apologies are made--to mend strained relationships, which to some audience members feels much like an interpersonal relationship anyway.

A final explanation for celebrity public apology deals with the sociological perspective on apology, which suggests that apology serves a purpose in clarifying group norms and identify what actions may be considered “transgressions.” According to Social Cognitive Theory, the process of learning which actions are encouraged or rewarded and which are discouraged and punished through individual trial and error is extremely inefficient (Baran, 2006). As a result, individuals observe the actions of others and the consequences of those actions in both interpersonal and mediated settings, adding to a “behavioral repertoire,” a set of behaviors and actions that are deemed acceptable. Recognizing that other actions are punished has “inhibitory effects,” causing individuals to avoid those actions. This may be a cause of the public calls for apology that many celebrities experience after committing even personal transgressions with few affected parties. Just as celebrities may be praised for humanitarian or philanthropic efforts, sending positive messages about such activities to the rest of society, they are punished for unbecoming conduct through the demand for apology. When an entertainer uses hate speech or otherwise offends a minority group, for example, leaders of that group may make the call for an apology in a conscious effort to demonstrate that such action is unacceptable. This also has implications for a celebrity’s image. If no apology is offered, interested groups may work to keep the transgression in the public eye, speaking out against the celebrity and tarnishing their image.

If the celebrity obliges, it sends a strong message to the rest of the public and the acceptance of the apology by the offended group may restore the celebrity to their original standing.

While there may be other explanations for the phenomenon of celebrity apology, those discussed here demonstrate the range of considerations. Celebrities may use apology voluntarily in self-interest as a public relations tool to protect their valuable image and to mend para-social relationships with fans. They may also apologize to protect others who benefit from their image or career. On the other hand, celebrities may not voluntarily apologize without the call from an offended group that wishes to identify their behavior as unacceptable and deviant. Of course, both motivations may also be present. In either case, however, it is clear that celebrities apologize with good reason.

Implications for Celebrity Apology

An understanding of the motivations behind celebrity apologies provides insight into those elements that lead to their success or failure. The implications of these new considerations must now be examined.

After examining the apologetic discourse of Hugh Grant, Benoit (1997a) asserted that it was easier for entertainers to apologize than for politicians or corporations. Benoit suggested that while politicians' decisions affect thousands or even millions of constituents and corporate officials' decisions may impact many customers, an entertainer's decision to apologize does not hold such serious consequences. In light of the above discussion of the "celebrity industry" this may need to be reconsidered. The decisions of entertainers affect not only their own careers but sometimes hundreds of others, albeit to lesser and varying extents. In the case of Hugh Grant's

apologetic campaign discussed in Chapter 2, the transgression came only weeks before the actor's next major motion picture was released. Had his film failed, it would have meant the loss of revenue to the film studio as well as personal career trouble. As human brands, a tarnished image may not only mean a loss of personal revenue in the opportunity to land endorsement deals but damage to those companies with which celebrities are already aligned. The decision of an entertainer to apologize--and the apology itself--is not to be taken lightly.

Instead of differentiating between entertainers and corporate CEO's as Benoit (1997a) has, I propose a new conceptualization: entertainers are the CEO's in control of their own "human brand" and who must remain in position even after weathering a crisis or scandal. While many corporate CEO's step down or are removed during or immediately after a crisis (either serving as a scapegoat or to symbolically wipe clean the slate), entertainers--as both spokesperson and product--do not have that option. In this respect, an effective apology may be even more important, as other options for stimulating a "new start" are limited.

The para-social interaction between celebrity and fan may also suggest the need for higher levels of sincerity than Travuchis (1991) and Lazare (2004) have generally considered necessary for public apology. Both scholars identify sincerity as an essential element in interpersonal apology but indicate that its place in public apology is less central. This suggestion rests on the assumption that offended parties wish to see public figures punished after transgressions to affirm the rules of society but do not have deeply personal needs that must be fulfilled. If, however, a transgression strains the perceived intimate relationship between audience and entertainer--and if celebrity apology has as a purpose the repairing of these relationships rather than simply the protection of image--then the sincerity communicated should mirror that used in interpersonal apology.

With these and other considerations in mind, the next chapter will propose a framework for evaluating celebrity apology.

A Model for Evaluating Celebrity Apologies

I have now established what previous scholarship in the fields of sociology, public relations, and psychology has suggested as the elements of successful interpersonal and public apologies as well as their reasons for doing so. I have also pointed out some idiosyncrasies of celebrity apologies, questioned previous assumptions, and suggested that in at least one respect they may be held to higher standards than other public apologies. Here I suggest a framework of eight questions for evaluating celebrity public apologies.

1. Initial Considerations: *What is the nature of the offense?*

Not all transgressions or mistakes are equally offensive. As Lazare (2004) notes, casual or small offenses (such as bumping into another person, mispronouncing a name, or cutting another driver off on the road) may require a brief “I’m sorry” or even a simple nonverbal gesture, rather than a long, carefully articulated mea culpa. However, when a public figure apologizes for a grave injustice or for a mistake of serious consequence, the apology is held to higher standards, expected to be comprehensive in scope, and presumed to incorporate some sort of appropriate reparations. The same is true of celebrity apologies--the extent to which harm or offense is done affects the expectations and standards to which the apology will be held. As such, the nature of the offense must be considered when evaluating an apology.

The above idea is suggested in Coombs (2004) Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Coombs theory suggests that crisis response decisions must be made in light of the idiosyncratic conditions of each crisis; no one response works equally well in all situations. Says Coombs, “as the reputational threat increases, the crisis manager should use response strategies that demonstrate acceptance of responsibility for the crisis and that address victim concerns” (p. 266). Coombs and others (Lyon & Cameron, 2004) have further demonstrated that reputational threat increases in the face of past crises. In determining the nature of the offense, we must then consider what, if any, major public problems a celebrity has had in the past that may impact perception and evaluation of their apologetic responses.

2. The Audience: *Does the apology show consideration for the right audiences?*

Of primary concern in considering various audiences is the recipient of the apology. Little is gained if a celebrity’s public apology addresses the wrong audience. The very nature of apology suggests that it must be directed toward the victim, not toward those who have the power to punish the apologist and not toward other third party audience with whom the apologist wishes to maintain relationships. A particularly salient example lies in boxer Mike Tyson’s apology following the notorious 1997 match in which he bit off a sizeable part of Evander Holyfield’s ear mid-match (Feour, 1997). In a press conference the two days later, Tyson apologized to his family, the Nevada State Athletic Commission, the judge responsible for his probation, and others but did not give significant mention to the actual victims--Holyfield and the home audience who had paid a premium to watch the match on pay-per-view (“Text,” 1997). Not only do apologies addressing the wrong audience fail to heal the offended parties, they also

make the apology transparent in its desire to repair reputation above all other considerations (Lazare, 2004). Further, if the offended parties are healed by and accept an apology, they are likely to allow the transgression to be forgotten instead of making active attempts to keep it in the headlines.

Not only must an apology address the right audience, it must consider others who will bear witness to it. One does oneself few favors when angering one audience in the process of apologizing to another. Further, the apology must not only be acceptable to lay audience members but also to those who will deconstruct and evaluate it more critically, including journalists, talking heads, and group leaders, who are often quoted or interviewed by members of the media for their reactions to apologies. While the audience of victims is primary, third parties are an essential consideration.

3. **The Offense:** *Does the apology acknowledge, accurately name, and accept responsibility for the offense?*

This is the first criterion that is almost universally recognized in apology literature among scholars and professionals alike. Even when it is not explicitly named as an element of a successful apology, the importance of acknowledging the offense is implied. No apology can begin if the offense is not acknowledged. The question inevitably arises: What is he or she apologizing *for*? Indeed, the necessity of acknowledging the offense is so fundamental to the process of apology, it is often unrecognized. On an interpersonal basis, we are conditioned to acknowledge our offenses as we apologize (“I’m sorry that I...”). Acknowledging the offense

demonstrates that the apologist has taken pains to understand what the offense meant to the victim, an understanding on which the meaning of an apology rests.

The process of acknowledging the offense is closely tied to accurately naming the offense. Naming the offense is essential to establishing a common ground between offender and victim. As has been repeatedly suggested, a key purpose of apology is the demonstration of shared values, the foundation of both group membership and interpersonal relationship. In order to reaffirm those values, the violated rule, norm, or understanding must be properly and clearly established. As Lazare (2004) points out, accurately naming the offense also helps to limit the possibility of conflicting or undesirable interpretations. By naming the offense, the apologist exerts control over the process. Examples of failure to accurately name an offense abound--and this shortcoming is frequently the reason these apologies are seen as wanting. When one expresses regret "for whatever I have done" or "for offending you" it demonstrates an inability (or perhaps an unwillingness) to see the offense from the victim's point of view and does not show that that the apologist values or even understands the broken rule or norm. As such, the victim may be understandably hesitant to allow the transgressor back into the moral community or into the relationship, as he or she may no longer feel safe on the basis of shared values.

Acknowledging and naming the offense are necessary precursors to accepting responsibility for the offense, the most important part of the "offense" criterion and one of the only non-negotiable elements of an apology. If a celebrity is to acknowledge the transgression and describe it in ample detail only to reject responsibility, he or she is doing anything but apologizing. If, however, a celebrity accepts responsibility without thoroughly naming the offense, it may be satisfying (albeit not completely) to some audience members. The acceptance of responsibility should be unequivocal--it should not be conditional (e.g. "I'm sorry *if* I

offended you,” “*If anyone was hurt, I’m sorry*”) nor should it aim to minimize the significance of the injury (though this may be done carefully and artfully through the explanation). Among the most ill-advised strategies for accepting responsibility is to explicitly or implicitly blame the victim (e.g. “I’m sorry, but if you hadn’t...”). Blaming the situation also marks an insufficient acceptance of responsibility. Having accepted responsibility for an offense that has been acknowledged and described, a celebrity may choose to offer an explanation.

4. The Explanation: *Does the apology include an acceptable explanation?*

This criterion is subject to some controversy. The offering of an explanation is not a criterion often recognized in public relations trade literature or psychological scholarship. Indeed, offering an explanation edges dangerously close to giving an account--which is apologia, not apology. Still, Lazare (2004) suggests that offering an explanation has clear benefits for the victim, including assurances that “(1) the grievance was not intentional and therefore not personal; (2) the behavior is not indicative of the ‘real self’ of the offender; (3) the victim is blameless; and (4) similar grievances are unlikely to recur because of the uniqueness of the circumstances” (p. 121). In addition, the offering of an explanation has benefits for the apologist. As suggested above, the explanation provides an opportunity to lessen the severity of the offense while avoiding minimization strategies, which may anger victims. In addition, an explanation may serve as another opportunity to exert control over the apology process, ending (or at least restricting) speculation as to why the offensive action took place. Still, the line is thin. Those apologists that offer an explanation should be mindful that an explanation is not an excuse. At the same time, they should allow the audience to forgive on the grounds of an acceptable

explanation; they should not use an explanation to forgive themselves. Further, the ideas of offering an explanation and accepting responsibility do not conflict; both can and must be done without diluting the other.

Both sides of the explanation debate have strong points in their favor. While in some cases an explanation *can* help an apology, there is also a certain dignity in apologizing with “no excuses” that Americans tend to respect. An apology without an explanation is not destined to fail--and the decision to offer an explanation comes with a significant risk of disaster if it borders on justification. As such, the “explanation” criterion will be kept in mind but not stringently applied.

5. The Sentiments: *Does the apology communicate the appropriate emotions and suggest forbearance?*

Unlike offering an explanation, the expression of appropriate sentiments of regret, remorse, shame, sincerity, and humility is a criterion that is almost always recognized in the study of apology. Apology is, by nature, a humbling act and to be “sorry” implies regret and remorse. If those sentiments are conspicuously absent an apology’s sincerity or genuineness will be questioned. In interpersonal apology where strong emotions are usually involved sincerity is essential. In public apology, however, some scholars have suggested that sincerity is not necessary. As discussed above, I believe that the para-social interaction between celebrity and fan necessitates higher standards of sincerity than are necessary in apologies made by politicians and corporations. I will proceed from that assumption.

Demonstrating emotions of regret, remorse, and shame also suggest forbearance, that one is resolved to avoid such actions in the future. This is, of course, essential to repairing a celebrity's image. If a celebrity has apologized for one particular transgression but the public believes that he or she will continue to act offensively, then reputation is not restored.

Recently, forbearance has frequently been demonstrated symbolically by celebrities through the voluntary admittance into rehabilitation (as "Grey's Anatomy" star Isaiah Washington did after a well-publicized incident of anti-gay language on set) and by meeting personally with the offended group's leaders (as Mel Gibson requested after launching an anti-Semitic tirade during a drunk driving arrest). While much of the public and the media have quickly become skeptical of such gestures, they can only add to the impression of forbearance when paired with other appropriate emotions that demonstrate sincerity.

6. Time, Place, & Manner: *Does the context of the apology demonstrate other proper considerations?*

An apology must be judged on more than the sum of the words spoken or even the sentiments expressed. Most apology literature recognizes the importance of an apology's timeliness. On an interpersonal basis, a prompt apology for a serious offense may raise questions of motive, whether the apologist has taken the necessary amount of time to understand what his or her offense has meant to the victim or if he or she simply wants to apologize for the sake of moving on. In the public sphere, the time frame with which an apology should take place is abridged. While a public apology for a serious offense should not take place immediately, as

public figures must still demonstrate that they understand what they are apologizing for, it should still take place in a timely manner, much more quickly than an interpersonal apology must.

The place in which the apology is offered is similarly important, as it communicates an attitude about the offense. A serious interpersonal apology delivered in the middle of a crowded bar will certainly be received differently than it would in a quiet, one-on-one setting. Public apologists must make similar considerations when choosing the forum for their apology and they must also consider whether or not they will reach the appropriate audience.

Apologists must also make other important decisions regarding how their apology will be delivered--will it be in a letter or press release, face to face or in a televised press conference, a prepared statement or pre-recorded as a video? All have benefits and disadvantages, but they are certainly not equal. An apology delivered through a letter or in a press release offers strong control over the statement but this advantage is more than outweighed in the lack of emotion expressed. It also implies an unwillingness to “face up” to the offense and may be regarded by some as a demonstration of cowardice. Face to face interpersonal apologies and live on-air apologies are generally preferable as they are more personal and allow the apologist to express the appropriate sentiments not only in their word choice but also nonverbally. However, in these cases the apologist must be well-prepared and demonstrate a level of comfort and confidence without being flip or arrogant. Prepared apologies in person or public apologies issued in a pre-recorded format may be a good compromise for some apologists, but even though the disadvantages of some other methods are lessened, so are the benefits.

7. **The Reparations:** *Does the apology provide reparations, if appropriate?*

The offering of reparations or restitution is another criterion frequently stressed among apology literature as it indicates that the apologist takes his or her action seriously and, as with the expression of appropriate emotions, suggests forbearance. In an interpersonal apology, reparations are frequently made when something whose value can be easily quantified is broken or damaged. In a public apology, however, this is not frequently the case. Most often, apologies are made for an offensive action or for speech that degrades or insults. In such situations, reparations must be symbolic. In celebrity apologies, a donation made to a relevant charity or another such gesture may be appropriate, but can also be met with a great deal of skepticism based on the belief that one cannot simply “throw money at the problem.” As such, non-monetary symbolic gestures are advisable.

At the same time, however, it could be argued that in cases where the offense was degradation or humiliation the apology *itself* serves as appropriate reparations, as the humbling nature of apology restores the offended party to a higher ground by humiliating the offender. Another valid concern is that symbolic reparations may be seen as hollow gestures if other elements of the apology (such as the acceptance of responsibility or the demonstration of appropriate emotions) are wanting. As such, this criterion will be acknowledged, like the criterion of “explanation,” as another consideration rather than a necessary and non-negotiable element.

8. **The Result:** *Does it heal both the offended and the reputation of the offender?*

While different disciplines have concerned themselves with apology's benefit for different parties--whether it is the apologist, the offended, or society as a whole--a good apology heals all. Indeed, apology as a public relations tool rarely works if it is not accepted by the offended party and, conversely, an apology that is fully accepted naturally has positive implications for the apologist's image. The healing of both the offended party and the reputation of the offender is, at a very basic level, apology's purpose. Its success in this criterion may be the most important factor in its evaluation.

While Lazare (2004) suggests that we instinctively know when an apology has been successful, we must have a better way for evaluating public apologies. When examining celebrity apologies, "the result" can be determined by examining the trajectory of the offender's post-apology career (though, as Benoit (1997) points out, it is difficult to attribute causality to the apology), by the media and the public's willingness to let the transgression fade from the headlines, and through public statements of offended party or their leaders demonstrating acceptance or rejection of the apology. Further, the extent to which the transgression is tied to the celebrity or forgotten in future media coverage may serve as an indicator an apology's success or failure.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Applications of Apology Analysis Framework

Facing the Music:

Janet Jackson & Justin Timberlake's Apologies for the Super Bowl XXXVIII Scandal

Expectations were high for the MTV-produced Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show on February 1, 2004. The network had assembled some of the most popular names in the music industry and been hyping a “shocking” halftime surprise in the days prior to the game (Kelly, Clark, & Kulman, 2004). After Kid Rock performed a medley of his hits, “Bawitdaba” and “Cowboy,” and rapper Nelly performed “Hot in Herre,” Janet Jackson took the stage to perform “All For You” and “Rhythm Nation.” Many had speculated that the “shocking” halftime surprise would be an appearance by Jackson’s brother, the iconic Michael Jackson. Instead, Jackson was joined by unannounced guest Justin Timberlake and the twosome broke into a flirty performance of Timberlake’s latest single, “Rock Your Body.”

Minutes later, Jackson and Timberlake shocked the game’s estimated 100 million viewers around the world (Reid & Mancini, 2004), but not for reasons MTV, the NFL, or CBS had anticipated. As Timberlake sang the lyric, “Bet I’ll have you naked by the end of this song,” he pulled off a piece of Jackson’s costume, revealing her right breast, which was decorated with a silver, star-shaped “nipple-shield” (Poniewozik et al., 2004). After only eighteen frames, less

than three-quarters of a second, CBS cut away from the image (Eggerton, 2004), but for a moment, millions of viewers wondered, “Did I just see what I think I saw?”

On Monday, the Janet Jackson/Justin Timberlake halftime “surprise” dominated the news and water cooler conversation across the country. The Lycos 50, which has tracked online searches since 1999, reported that the following day the incident became the most-searched topic in its history--and possibly in the history of the Internet--inspiring more searches than everything September 11-related on the day after the 2001 terrorist attacks (Evans, 2004). Similarly, the digital video recorder company TiVo announced that “the incident” was the most replayed moment the company had ever measured (“TiVo,” 2004). Indeed, Jackson garnered twice the number of U.S. press mentions as the commercials in the four days following the event (Atkinson, 2004), though much of the press was unfavorable, with media watchdog and morality groups speaking out against what was seen as indecency unfit for primetime network television (Blacker, 2004; Morality, 2004; Poniewozik et al., 2004).

The resulting press attention and widespread outrage left superstars Jackson and Timberlake struggling to repair their images and diffuse the intense media scrutiny. Both stars had their images--their very livelihoods--to lose, and both waged apologetic campaigns to restore those images to varying results.

Apologetic Statements of Jackson and Timberlake

Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake’s responses to the incident took the form of a series of formal apologetic statements released to the press over the next week, though Timberlake also

responded to the event when doing interviews before the Grammy Awards, which were to air on February 8, a week from the evening of Super Bowl.

Timberlake was the first to apologize in a short press release issued the very evening of the incident. The press release stated simply, “I am sorry if anyone was offended by the wardrobe malfunction during the Halftime performance of the Super Bowl. It was not intentional and is regrettable” (Reid & Mancini, 2004, para. 3). The statement was released in time to be widely reported in late night broadcast news stories about the incident as well as reports the following day. Though Jackson did not release an official statement that evening, her representatives told querying news organizations that she apologized for the incident.

The following day, however, Jackson did issue an official, written statement. Like Timberlake’s, the statement was brief. “The decision to have a costume reveal at the end of my halftime performance was made after final rehearsals,” said the statement. “MTV was completely unaware of it. It was not my intention that it go as far as it did. I apologize to anyone offended – including the audience, MTV, CBS, and the NFL” (Mancini, 2004, para. 2). While Jackson’s statement absolved halftime show producer MTV of blame, it left questions about how, if at all, Timberlake or any other parties were involved in the decision. The statement was also vague in stating, “It was not my intention that it go as far as it did.”

Further clarification would not come until the next day when Jackson’s spokesperson told the press that only the bustier portion of Jackson’s costume was supposed to be ripped off. That the entire breast was exposed “was a malfunction of the wardrobe,” said spokesperson Stephen Huvane. “It was not intentional...[Timberlake] was supposed to pull away the bustier and leave [a] red lace bra” (“Apologetic,” 2004, para. 9). Still, the statements did little to quell the media’s interest in pinning down a responsible party to receive blame. The question remained of who was

responsible for the “costume reveal” decision and many, like Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell, publicly stated that they were not convinced the incident was an accident.

Jackson released her second and final official statement in a videotape that was released late Tuesday. In the statement, Jackson apologized saying, “I am really sorry if I offended anyone. That was truly not my intention. My decision to change the Super Bowl performance was actually made after the final rehearsal. MTV, CBS, the NFL had no knowledge of this whatsoever, and unfortunately, the whole thing went wrong in the end” (“Janet,” 2004, para. 2). While the statement itself did not affirm the claim that Jackson’s red bra was meant to remain in place after Timberlake ripped away the bustier, Jackson’s spokespeople continued to repeat this claim.

Mum since his press release Sunday night, Timberlake again spoke about the incident to reporters on Wednesday during rehearsal for the Grammy Awards. Timberlake told one reporter that having a delay during the show’s broadcast to block any offensive material was a good idea as far as he was concerned (“Justin,” 2004). Timberlake further asserted, “I’m frustrated at the whole situation. I’m frustrated that my character is being questioned” (para. 4). He went on to claim that he had initially turned down Jackson’s request to perform with her at the Super Bowl, but agreed when she called him in person. “I was under the impression that what was going to be revealed...was a red brassier, bustier” (para. 7), said Timberlake. He claimed to be “completely shocked and appalled” by what happened adding that his own family was offended by the incident. Responding to accusations that the stunt had been planned, Timberlake claimed he did not need to do such stunts and that “they aren’t my style” (para. 9).

Questions of blame subsided as the media attributed fault to Jackson, though media discussions of the incident continued through the rest of the week. Attention shifted to questions of whether or not Timberlake and Jackson would attend the Grammy Awards, where Justin was nominated for five awards and scheduled to perform and Janet was to introduce a tribute to Luther Vandross (“Jackson,” 2004; Levin, 2004). CBS, the network hosting the award show, announced that it would employ a video delay to allow for the editing of inappropriate, unscripted material. The network also required both Timberlake and Jackson to make an on-air apology if they were to attend (“Timberlake,” 2004).

When Grammy night arrived, Timberlake was in attendance, but Jackson was not (“Timberlake,” 2004). Timberlake brought his mother as his date for the evening (Dixon, 2004), and while accepting one of his two awards, addressed the incident saying, “Listen, I know it’s been a rough week on everybody. What occurred was unintentional and completely regrettable, and I apologize if you guys were offended” (“Timberlake,” 2004, para. 5). Though there was little other on-air mention of the controversy, some reporters, like Guy Dixon of The Globe and Mail, noted that “the Janet Jackson-Super Bowl fallout seemed to linger over the event” (Dixon, 2004, p. A5).

The following weeks saw continued mention of the incident, as the issue of indecency in broadcasting was brought to the top of the political agenda. Jackson and Timberlake, however, were done talking for a while.

Evaluation of Apologetic Statements

While there were a particularly large number of people calling for an apology after Justin Timberlake exposed Janet Jackson's breast during the Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show, the offense can only be said to have presented a moderate challenge. A number of considerations underlie this assessment. First, the norms violated by Jackson and Timberlake were less serious than those reflecting human life or dignity. While some parents may have been forced to have uncomfortable conversations with their children, it is safe to say no audience member was personally humiliated or degraded by the event. Little actual "harm" was done. Second, when examined in the context of MTV programming and the often-racy Super Bowl commercials, the exposure was more surprising than shocking. Though there were loud cries of outrage, many journalists pointed out the hypocrisy of the situation (see, for example, Blacker, 2004; Poniewozik et al., 2004). While a decision by Jackson and Timberlake to minimize the significance or offensiveness of the act by pointing this contradiction out would have been a mistake, it is important to consider when examining the nature of the offense. In reality, viewers are likely to see comparable exposure in many rap videos and PG-13 movies. Finally, while Jackson and Timberlake both had relatively sexualized images, their histories were free of major scandals and they both had a generally favorable public image.

The major problem of Jackson and Timberlake's apologetic statements was their poor explanation. Claims that the exposure was an accident, that Jackson's leather bustier was to be ripped off but her red bra was supposed to remain in place, were simply not persuasive to those familiar with the design or function of a bra. Furthermore, the fact that Jackson's breast was adorned with a decorative silver "nipple shield" undermined claims that it was not meant to be

exposed. Neither the public nor the media believed the explanation and what seemed to be obvious deceit undermined any attempt they made at apologizing.

Their poor explanation also weakened Jackson and Timberlake's apologies as it prevented them from accepting responsibility. Apologizing and evading responsibility are fundamentally incompatible--one can't apologize for an offense they claim wasn't their fault, though Jackson and Timberlake attempted to do so. Without accepting responsibility, their public statements were not apologies, regardless of whether or not they included the words "sorry" and "apologize." Instead, their public statements were what Lazare (2004) calls "pseudoapologies," statements that fail to accept responsibility but nevertheless employ language characteristic of apology. Pseudoapologies tend to be unsatisfying--and this certainly seemed to be the case here.

Jackson and Timberlake also fell short in acknowledging their offense in at least two ways. First, both singers failed to recognize that they were being called to apologize not because their action had offended the audience, but for the action itself. This is a nuanced but important point. Instead of recognizing that the action was inherently offensive, Jackson and Timberlake made their apologies conditional by apologizing "if anyone was offended." In doing so, they implicitly placed the blame on the audience for *finding it* offensive. This was especially ill-advised considering their claims that the exposure was an accident. Having made such a claim, Jackson and Timberlake could have expressed unequivocal sympathy and understanding that the audience was offended, though neither did so. The artists also failed in ignoring a second offense: the deceit of MTV, CBS, and the NFL in planning the "costume reveal" after final rehearsals and without permission. While Jackson did mention this in her statements, it was discussed as background information for the "accidental costume reveal," not as an offense apology-worthy in itself. This omission was much more damaging for Jackson, as Timberlake

implied (by stating that he was “shocked and appalled” by the exposure) that Jackson had planned the exposure without his knowledge--an idea that was further supported when Jackson, in her second statement, referred to it as “[m]y decision.” While Jackson *did* properly accept responsibility for this second offense, she did not apologize for it.

Jackson and Timberlake further failed in naming their offense. While both artists made a number of public statements, they can be described as ambiguous at best. Early statements especially were marked by an unwillingness to divulge information. Timberlake’s initial statement made mention of a “wardrobe malfunction,” though it did not explain the nature of the malfunction--only later would the artists clarify that a red bra was supposed to remain in place. Similarly, Jackson’s first public statement made it known that the decision to have a “costume reveal” was made after the final rehearsals, but she did not clarify that it was her decision until her second statement. While slight clarification was provided with each coming statement, even the final statements left many questions unanswered.

The consequence of the artists’ equivocation was that the press was left to interpret (or misinterpret, as the case may be) the meaning of their public statements. After Jackson offered her videotaped second statement, it was widely reported that she “took full responsibility” for the incident (“Janet,” 2004), though this interpretation incorrectly characterized the nature of her statement. Similarly, the press was not receptive to the distinction between admitting to a “costume reveal” gone wrong and admitting to the purposeful exposure of Jackson’s breast. U.S News & World Report, for example, claimed that “by week’s end Jackson had essentially admitted the disrobing was by design” (Kelly et al, 2004, p.48). In Timberlake’s case, his public statements were sometimes interpreted as a claim that Jackson “made him do it” (Moraes, 2004,

p. C01). In their equivocation, Jackson and Timberlake relinquished power over the interpretation of their statements.

Jackson and Timberlake's apologies also had audience-related shortcomings. As mentioned, the apologies gave insufficient attention to MTV, CBS, and the NFL. However, though they were directed at "anyone" who was offended, their apologies did not feel like they were personally addressing the Super Bowl audience either. Indeed, Timberlake demonstrated his inability to recognize the proper recipients when he delivered his compelled apology at the Grammy awards. Here, his apology seemed to be directed at the immediate in-theater audience of his industry peers instead of to the home audience who may have also watched the Super Bowl. Timberlake also ignored an important third party to the apology--his sizeable black fan base. After leaving boyband *NSYNC, Timberlake had built his solo career around R&B and Hip-Hop, two genres dominated by African Americans. After his statements seemed to pin responsibility on Jackson, Timberlake suffered a small backlash as many African Americans in the music industry publicly spoke out against him, including actress and rapper Queen Latifah who told the press, "He loses a lot of respect for not taking responsibility for his actions. I think that was real shady on his part" (p. 56). Usher also spoke out, accusing Justin of having "skated from the responsibility of it" (Adams, 2004b, p. 42). African Americans also protested the announcement that he would co-host and ABC special, "Motown 45," a few months later. Tanya Kersey-Henley of Black Talent News voiced a common response, accusing Timberlake of "showing his true colors" when he "sold out" Jackson. She further charged that "[Timberlake] is ok with being identified as an 'Honorary brotha' as long as it doesn't cost him anything" (qtd. in Adams, 2004a, p. 46).

Another problem with Jackson and Timberlake's apologies were that they didn't express the appropriate sentiments. Jackson claimed she was "really sorry," and Timberlake twice characterized the incident as "regrettable," but the words alone do not communicate the necessary emotion. While their apologies did demonstrate that they regretted the incident, neither artist seemed particularly remorseful, sincere, humble, or, in a word, sorry. One issue was the medium of the statements. Both Timberlake and Jackson's first "apologies" were issued in written press release form, a form that has limited communicative potential for emotion. While this could have been compensated for, to some degree, by exploring what the offense meant to the audience (e.g. "I understand that many children were watching and may have been exposed to an inappropriate image..."), this was conspicuously absent. The artists' second apologies, both televised, also failed to capitalize on the opportunity to express the proper sentiments. Timberlake's brief televised apology, live from the Grammy awards, seemed like an afterthought and its placement (at the end of a timed acceptance speech) didn't lend itself to demonstrations of sincerity. Jackson's prerecorded apologetic statement was similarly brief and, while it was somber, it did not communicate remorse.

Jackson and Timberlake did succeed in one notable way: both singers offered their apologies, however wanting, in a timely manner. Timberlake's first statement was offered the very evening of the Super Bowl. Jackson's representatives also began to tell querying reporters that she apologized the evening of the incident and her first official statement was issued the following day.

Considering the above, the apologies of Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake must be evaluated unfavorably. The fact that each artist was compelled to make multiple apologies is a testament to their failure. This evaluation that is further supported by the results of their

discourse, which are in line with both the moderate reputational threat they posed and the limited virtuosity they demonstrated. As discussed, Janet Jackson bore the brunt of the fallout following the incident, as the press widely reported that she had accepted full responsibility for the decision to have a “costume reveal.” Following the incident, Janet Jackson’s name continued to appear in the press whenever the FCC’s campaign against objectionable broadcast content was mentioned. Meanwhile, through the month of March, she made a number of appearances on television to promote her upcoming album, “Damita Jo.” The issue of broadcast delays was invariably brought up in the press when these appearances were discussed. When “Damita Jo” was released on March 30, 2004, it was met with lukewarm reviews and was a sales disappointment, becoming Jackson’s first album to fall short of the number one spot on Billboard magazine’s Top 200 album chart since her 1989 release “Rhythm Nation 1814” (D’Angelo, 2004). Jackson’s next studio album, “20 Y.O.,” released in September 2006, also failed to capture the top spot on the Top 200, debuting at number two, and sold modestly compared to her earlier albums (Harris, 2006). Janet Jackson’s name continues to be synonymous with “unpredictable.” In December, 2006, national television advertisements for the Billboard Music Awards touted the show’s all-star performance line-up, ending, “And did we mention Janet Jackson live? Anything can happen at the Billboard Music Awards!”

Justin Timberlake faced a less serious threat, as Jackson’s statements absolved him from much of the blame for the incident, and he has seen continued success since the incident in 2004. His sophomore solo album, “FutureSex/LoveSounds” was released in September of 2006 to the largest first week sales numbers of the year (Harris, 2006) and has continued to sell extremely well. The album also garnered Timberlake critical acclaim and earned him four Grammy nominations, including “Album of the Year” (Kaufman, 2006). While references to Timberlake’s

involvement in the Super Bowl controversy do, from time to time, appear in the press, the incident does not seem to be a permanent--or at least significant--blemish on his career.

While it is impossible to determine how much the Super Bowl incident--and their subsequent apologies--impacted the careers of Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake, it is clear that the incident did not do irreparable harm in Timberlake's case, though this is less certain in Jackson's case.

“Cocaine Kate”:

Kate Moss' Apology for Drug Use

In 2005, then thirty-one year old Kate Moss--the face of Rimmel London, Chanel, Calvin Klein, Christian Dior, among others--had enjoyed a prolific career as a model (Moyes, 2005). After being discovered at the age of fourteen, Moss had modeled primarily in England until, at eighteen, she appeared in a series of ads for American designer Calvin Klein (“Kate,” 2006). The success of the campaign, which featured her waif-like figure semi-nude and introduced what has been called the “heroin chic” look, sparked a new era in the world of modeling. Healthy or voluptuous figures like that of Cindy Crawford were no longer desirable. Instead, rail-thin models like Moss became the norm. After the career-making campaign, Moss became one of the world's top supermodels. She graced the cover of British Vogue a record ten times (Moyes, 2005), walked the runways for the world's top designers, and earned an estimated £4 million a year from modeling contracts (“Backlash,” 2005; Moyes, 2005).

On September 15, however, Moss faced a major scandal. British tabloid newspaper the Daily Mirror ran the headline “Cocaine Kate[:] Supermodel Kate Moss snorts line after line”

along with a set of grainy cover photos, which depicted Moss in a West London recording studio where her boyfriend, Pete Doherty of rock group Babyshambles, was recording tracks for his group's latest album (Moyes, 2005). In one full-page picture Moss appeared to be dumping cocaine from a bag onto a plastic CD cover. A second, smaller picture depicts Moss lifting the CD cover with one hand and holding a rolled-up five-pound note between her nose and the case. The accompanying article describes a "debauched drugs and drink session" (para. 1) in which Moss, "[o]n five occasions...expertly prepares the lines of cocaine, carefully using a credit card to cut the powder into neat rows for her, Doherty and the others" (para. 16). The article, which notes that "[r]umours of her drug habits have circulated for years" (para. 6), continues by providing past quotes denying use of Class A drugs though Moss admitted to "dabbling" (para. 28) in less serious drugs and had spent a six week period in rehab in the late nineties for exhaustion.

The story was quickly disseminated throughout the world on entertainment news programs and pop culture blogs. Moss could hardly deny the allegations of the tabloid cover story--the pictures were proof--and the backlash was almost immediate. Two days after the story ran, Swedish clothing retailer H&M released a statement announcing that Moss had apologized to them and confirmed to company leaders that the allegations were true, though they said they would keep the model on for an upcoming campaign ("H&M," 2005). The company quickly changed their tune, however, announcing that they would be dropping Moss from the campaign three days later ("Kate," 2005a). In a statement, the company declared that "after evaluating the situation, we have decided that a campaign with Kate Moss is not consistent with H&M's clear disassociation from drugs" (para. 4). Other companies followed suit. Fashion labels Burberry, Chanel, and H. Stern also announced that they were dropping Moss as soon as their media

schedules would allow (as magazine-media schedules were already closed through November). Rimmel London, for whom Moss had appeared in television and print ads since 2001, also made their opinions known, though they took less decisive action. In a statement, Rimmel said the company was “shocked and dismayed at the recent press allegations surrounding Kate Moss’ behavior. We are currently reviewing her contract” (“Kate,” 2005b, para. 7).

With lucrative deals dissolving in front of her eyes, Moss faced a public relations crisis. The New York Times declared that Moss’ story was “a cautionary fashion fable...a parable of now you see her, now you don’t” (Trebay, 2005, para. 1) as ads depicting Moss disappeared from glossy fashion magazines. Moss, said the Times, was in “professional freefall” (para. 2) and numerous news articles began characterizing Moss as a fashion “pariah” (Dodds, 2005; Hudson, 2005).

Kate Moss’ Apologetic Statement

While Moss’ apology to retailer H&M was briefly mentioned in the company’s first public statement following the Daily Mirror story, the model made a single public statement of apology. The apology took the form of a statement issued to the media, though not delivered by Moss publicly.

On September 22, 2005, after seven days of silence, Moss’ brief statement was released. The statement read:

I take full responsibility for my actions. I also accept that there are various personal issues that I need to address and have started taking the difficult, yet necessary, steps to resolve them. I want to apologize to all of the people I have let down because of my

behavior, which has reflected badly on my family, friends, co-workers, business associates and others. I am trying to be positive, and the support and love I have received are invaluable. (“Supermodel,” 2005, para. 1-2)

Many interpreted Moss’ claim that she had “started taking the difficult, yet necessary, steps to resolve [her personal issues]” as a hint that she had entered a rehabilitation facility (Lambert & Wright, 2005), an idea many newspapers printed a few days later after “friends” of Moss had supposedly confirmed her plans (Boden, 2005; “Moss,” 2005b). On September 27, however, more credible reports surfaced as two major British papers claimed that Moss had been spotted in Arizona, home of The Meadows clinic (“Reports,” 2005). In the days following, those reports were echoed around the world. Indeed, though Moss’ representatives never confirmed that she had entered rehab, it was widely reported as fact and many publications printed “inside looks” at The Meadows, the clinic where Moss was reportedly admitted.

Beyond her public statement, Moss remained out of the public eye after the Daily Mirror story was printed, reportedly taking refuge in a New York City hotel (Millar & Randhawa, 2005). Hungry paparazzi caught only one glimpse of the model on the streets of New York after the story broke (“Moss,” 2005a). Her agent, on September 27, told inquiring journalists that Moss would be taking “a short break” (para. 1), though work commitments would keep her from staying out of the spotlight for long.

Evaluation of Apologetic Statements

While the threat that the Kate Moss cocaine revelation posed to the model’s career was clearly significant, a threat that was demonstrated in the numerous fashion labels and companies

that canceled planned campaigns with her, the expectations and standards to which Moss' apology would be held were relatively low. Moss' cocaine use was an almost purely personal transgression, which had limited or no repercussions for her audiences. While Moss modeled for a variety of fashion houses and products, she was not a spokesperson for any and her image was not firmly tied to any of her clients. She had not "offended" anyone. While her audience wished her to acknowledge her transgression, no one needed to be healed by her apology.

That being said, Moss' single public apology, delivered through a written statement, did address the proper audiences and clearly demonstrated an understanding of what her actions had meant to those audiences. Moss apologized to her "family, friends, co-workers, [and] business associates." Even without adding "others," this is an exhaustive list of those who may have been affected by Moss' actions. She acknowledged the effect that her actions may have had on these audiences--her drug use had "reflected badly" upon them. She had, she acknowledged, "let [them] down" and accepted "full responsibility" for having done so.

While Moss did not explicitly name her offense, there was little doubt what she was apologizing for--the proof was in the photographs and there was little interpretation to be done. Though naming her offense, use of Class A drugs, may have been seen as forthright and even courageous, it was not essential to her apology.

Some may suggest that Moss erred in releasing a written statement rather than delivering her apology in a press conference or in a pre-recorded video. Indeed, the latter mediums would have had provided a greater opportunity to express the appropriate sentiments of regret, remorse, humility, and sincerity than she had in her written statement. However, this criticism can be dismissed after a closer consideration of Moss' profession. A model's most important and bankable asset is his or her physical appearance. Had Moss made her statement in person, the

images from her apology would have been widely published, possibly tainting not only her reputational image but also her physical image. In addition, Moss successfully overcame her chosen medium's emotional limitations by admitting herself into rehabilitation, an action that demonstrated remorse, forbearance, and humility as well or better than anything she could have said.

Another possible criticism is that Moss allowed seven days to elapse between the Daily Mirror's revelation and her apology. By most accounts this would be an unnecessarily lengthy amount of time. For Moss, however, this period allowed her to assert in her apology that she had "started taking the difficult, yet necessary, steps to resolve [her personal issues]." As a result, she looked slightly more proactive than reactive, more sincere in her attempt to get help.

Moss cannot escape criticism, however, for her poor word choice. While Moss said in her statement, "I *want to* apologize," that phrase does not technically constitute an apology. She also did not actually say that she was sorry. While an apology is a speech act, sorry is a state of being. Lazare (2004) points out that, unlike the Spanish *disculpa* or the German *entschuldige bitte*, the word "apology" has no root that communicates a state of guilt or the acceptance of blame. Instead, the word comes from the Greek *apologia*, to justify or defend. As a result, it is weaker than the word "sorry" and often unsatisfying to recipients of an apology. While few would have held either of these points against Moss, her apology may have felt somewhat less satisfying than it would have if she had chosen her words better.

Overall, Moss' apology was among the more skillfully handled in recent memory, though the standards were admittedly low as her actions had not actually harmed anyone. The model showed consideration for all the relevant audiences, acknowledged and accepted responsibility for her offense, demonstrated appropriate sentiments through symbolic action, and delivered her

apology through the appropriate medium. Even the criticism that she did not properly name her offense is easily overlooked in light of the idiosyncrasies of Moss' situation. The post-apology trajectory of Moss' career reflects this positive evaluation.

After emerging from rehab, Moss was almost immediately approached by Virgin Mobile, who not only used her in their latest campaign, but also gave the model her first ever speaking part in a television ad (Choueke, 2006). The company's brand director, James Kydd, suggested that facing up to her drug problem made Moss a positive role model and brand analysts began to spoke of a "cachet of edginess" that Moss had come to hold after the allegations" (para. 3). When she appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* in December, the magazine asking "Can She Come Back," many were suggesting she already had (Baracaia, 2005; Fillion, Treble, & Patriquin, 2005; Rose, 2005).

A year after Moss' scandal, she was featured in eighteen major ad campaigns, had in the works her own clothing line for British retailer Topshop, and was earning more than triple what she made prior to the cocaine revelation (Serpe, 2006). In November, Moss was named "Model of the Year" at the British Fashion Awards but was so busy she sent iconic designer Vivian Westwood to accept it on her behalf. Not only did Moss survive her scandal, her apology and time in rehab had brought her career to new heights.

No Laughing Matter:

Comedian Michael Richards' Apology for Hate Speech

Michael Richards had been out of the public eye for some time. After his nine-year run as Kramer on the popular sitcom "Seinfeld" ended in 1998, the comic actor had done little high-

profile work, with the exception of his failed television series “The Michael Richards Show,” which premiered--and was quickly canceled--in 2000.

On Friday, November 17, 2006, Richards was headlining at West Hollywood’s famous Laugh Factory comedy club, though the actor had very little experience with stand up comedy (Elber, 2006; “Sinbad,” 2006). Shortly into his act, a pair of hecklers, both black, got a reaction from the comic--and then some. Richards spoke to the two men directly: “Shut up! Fifty years ago we’d have you upside down with a fucking fork up you’re ass!” (TMZ, 2006,). He then unleashed a string of racial epithets. “You can talk, you can talk, you’re brave now, motherfucker. Throw his ass out. He’s a nigger! He’s a nigger! He’s a nigger! A nigger, look, there’s a nigger,” Richards exclaimed (TMZ, 2006).

Michael Richard’s tirade did not end. He yelled back and forth with audience members, peppering his speech with profanity and racial slurs. Some members of the audience began to walk out while others sat, stunned. Still more chuckled. After two and a half minutes, Richards exited the stage and a representative of the comedy club quickly took his place to apologize for his outburst.

The whole scene was captured in a low quality video taken with an audience member’s cellular phone. The following day, the video appeared on entertainment news and gossip site TMZ.com and quickly spread throughout the Web (Elber, 2006). There was little newspaper coverage of the incident over the weekend, but on Monday, November 20, the story was everywhere. That day, a small group of protesters gathered outside the Laugh Factory to denounce Richard. They demanded an apology and club owner Jamie Masada quickly obliged and announced that Richards would not be allowed back at the club until he too apologized.

Massada told the press, “I’ve never seen anything like this in my life...I think it’s a career ruiner for him” (para. 20).

Michael Richards’s Apologetic Statements

That same day, Richards’ former “Seinfeld” costar and friend Jerry Seinfeld was scheduled to appear on “The Late Show with David Letterman.” According to a CBS publicist, Seinfeld encouraged Richards to take the opportunity to make a satellite appearance on the show and discuss what had happened. Richards did, indeed, join Letterman via satellite. While the Late Show would not air until 11:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, it taped in the afternoon. After taping completed on the show, CBS issued a press release that included a transcript of selected parts of the Letterman/Richards conversation (Evil, 2006)

When the show aired Monday evening, viewers saw Richard’s appearance and statements in their entirety. The conversation began when Letterman invited the former television star to explain what had happened. “I lost my temper on stage,” said a seemingly nervous and perplexed Richards. “I was at a comedy club trying to do my act and I got heckled and took it badly and went into a rage and, uh, said some pretty nasty things to some Afro Americans.” The audience laughed but Richards continued. “...A lot of trash talk.” The audience laughed again and Richards trailed off. Jerry Seinfeld, who was on the couch, scolded the audience. “Stop laughing. It’s not funny,” he said.

Letterman asked Richards if he had actually been heckled or if audience members were simply talking and disturbing his act. “There was a little of both,” said Richards. He diverted his

vision, looking as if he would continue, and then looked at the camera, finished. The audience again laughed.

I'm hearing your audience laugh and it's, uh, and I'm not even sure that this is where I should be addressing the situation. I've already heard you make some jokes about it and that's ok but I'm really busted up over this and I'm very very sorry to those people in the audience--the blacks, the Hispanics, whites--everyone who was there who took the brunt of that anger and hate and rage and how it came through and I'm concerned about more hate and more anger coming through, uh, not just toward me but towards, uh, a black/white conflict. There's a great deal of disturbance in this country and how blacks feel about what happened [after Hurricane] Katrina and, you know, many of the comics and performers are in Las Vegas and New Orleans trying to raise money for what happened there. For this to happen, for me to be at a comedy club and flip out and say this crap, I'm deeply deeply sorry and, um, I've got--I'll get to the force field of this hostility, why it's there, why the rage is in any of us, why the trash takes place--whether or not it's between me and a couple of hecklers in the audience or this country and another nation--

Letterman asked if he could interrupt Richards, who was showing no signs of stopping. He asked the actor what his response would have been like had the hecklers been white or another race other than black.

It may have happened, it may have happened. You know, I'm a performer, I push the envelope, I work in a very uncontrolled manner on stage, I do a lot of free association and spontaneous--I go into character. I do--I don't know--in view of the situation and the act going where it was going I don't know. The rage did go all over the place, it went to

every body in the room. But you can't--you know, it's--I don't--I know blacks could feel, "What is he?" I'm not a racist. That's what's so insane about this. I don't--and yet, it's said. It came through. It fires out of me.

Richards continued and explained that he had apologized to "quite a few" audience members but that many had left and he didn't know how to contact them. Letterman asked him what more he could do or would like to do, having apologized. Richards responded, saying, "I just have to do personal work. I...um...I'm still wheeling from this and it's just been a few days, I don't know yet." Letterman thanked Richards for appearing on the show, and the actor sheepishly nodded before the satellite feed ended.

Over the next few days, a variety of figures from African American leaders to fellow comedians weighed in on Richards' apology. On Wednesday, November 22, two days after Richards had appeared on "The Late Show" to discuss and apologize for the Laugh Factory incident, news sources across the country began to report that Richards had hired veteran New York publicist Howard Rubenstein whose affiliated companies Rubenstein Associates, Inc., and Rubenstein Communications, Inc., specialize in crisis management ("Rubenstein," n.d.). Rubenstein himself made a number of press statements explaining in one that he had "been very involved in the African American community for 25 to 30 years. It would be a tragedy if this exacerbated our race relations. I hope I can help... It's always been an effort on my part to improve African-American and Jewish ethnic relations" (qtd. in Schou, 2006, para. 15). Rubenstein also arranged for Richards to call reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, both outspoken leaders in the African American community. Jackson publicly accepted Richards' apology, telling the press that he "expressed his remorse and confusion" ("ENT," 2006, para. 5) over the incident. The Reverend also invited Richards onto his syndicated talk show "Keep Hope

Alive” to reach out and apologize to the black community (“Michael,” 2006). Some members of the media began to allude to Richards’ “damage control” efforts (Curry, 2006) and his “mea culpa tour” (“Richards,” 2006; Navarette, 2006). Unlike Jackson, Sharpton was unwilling to accept Richards’ apology. He reported to CNN that he told Richards “You need to sit down and deal with this. This is not about accepting an apology, this is about starting a process to really deal with the continual problem of racism in this country” (qtd. in “Sharpton,” 2006, para. 3). Sharpton also told the press that “The Late Show” was not the appropriate venue for Richards’ apology.

While Richards continued his apologetic campaign under the leadership of Rubenstein, who also announced on Saturday, November 25, that Richards had begun psychiatric counseling to control his anger and understand his actions (“Michael” 2006), the story’s newsworthiness was fading. By the end of November, the issued rested where it lay for the American public and the media.

Evaluation of Apologetic Statements

The standards to which Michael Richards apology would be held to were extremely high. Richards had used language loaded with hundreds of years of violence and oppression, language that conjures up powerful emotions for Americans of all races. Richards’ comedy club rant had broken an extremely strong taboo and his statements were at odds with a number of important American values. He had degraded an entire race of people--and he had been caught on tape doing it. Richards faced a formidable challenge in delivering an acceptable apology.

Richards' apology had certainly been delivered in a timely manner, a mere three days after the incident had taken place and the same day it was widely reported by newspapers and entertainment news programs. The venue for the apology, however, was ill-chosen. The seriousness of Richards' offense was not reflected in his decision to apologize on "The Late Show with David Letterman" and the interview format in which the apology took place allowed Richards limited control over the process. At one point, Letterman even interrupted the comedian to redirect the conversation. In addition, Richards came across as inarticulate, rambling, and confused when delivering his apology. Whether his confusion was genuine or an attempt to strengthen his "I don't know what came over me" position, it left little room to demonstrate sincerity. It may have won him the sympathy of some, but it did not help heal the victims of his tirade. Finally, his decision to join Letterman via satellite gave the in-studio audience enough psychological space that they felt comfortable laughing audibly as Richards attempted to apologize. Seeing those audience members reactions to Richards statement likely affected the way the home audience and the press gauged the apology's effectiveness.

Richards also fell short in naming his offense. While he acknowledged that he "said some nasty things to some Afro Americans" in the beginning of the interview, he spent most of his time talking about the "rage" he went into. In doing so, he misinterpreted his offense. Richards owed no one (except, perhaps, the immediate Laugh Factory audience) and apology for losing his temper during a show. He had been called to apologize because of the hateful, racist language he used. The "rage" he went into was the context, not the offense. While Richards said he was "sorry to those people in the audience--the blacks, the Hispanics, whites--everyone who was there and took the brunt of that anger and hate," the real recipients of his apology should have been African Americans, who he had degraded. Instead, Richards attempted to minimize the

racial nature of his offense by asserting that “the rage did go all over the place, it went to everybody in the room.”

While Richards acknowledged that he lost his temper, his apology was also weak in his acceptance of responsibility. Each time the actor uttered the word “sorry,” he then proceeded to universalize his offenses, rather than accept them as personal transgressions. After saying sorry to all who had “took the brunt of [his] anger,” Richards continued by saying he was “concerned about more hate and more anger coming through, uh, not just toward me but towards, uh, a black/white conflict.” He then spoke of general racial discontent following Hurricane Katrina. After he expressed an understanding that he needed to get to the root of his hostility, he again universalized the problem saying he intended to explore “why the rage is in any of us, why the trash takes place.” In universalizing his problems, Richards attempted to minimize his offense, a poor strategy when delivering an apology. Richards avoided the acceptance of responsibility more blatantly when he claimed, “I’m not a racist.” The declaration struck many as absurd in light of his actions and was widely quoted as a result. His explanation, that after losing his temper he was so overcome with rage that he said things he didn’t mean and used words he didn’t believe in, was anything but persuasive.

Richards’ decision to contact reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton (and to subsequently appear on Jackson’s “Keep Hope Alive” radio show) seemed to be a step in the right direction. By allowing himself and his actions to be part of a dialogue on racism, Richards offered a type of symbolic reparations for his actions. However, the strength of these gestures was somewhat diminished by the presence of publicist Howard Rubenstein. After it was announced that Rubenstein had taken Richards on as a client, all of the comedian’s actions seemed a bit calculated and this was reflected in the press coverage of his subsequent actions.

Furthermore, Rubenstein's own statements to the press demonstrated that it was his idea, not Richards', to contact the reverends. When Rubenstein announced that it had "always been an effort on my part to improve African-American and Jewish ethnic relations" (qtd. in Schou, 2006, para. 15), one was forced to wonder who was supposed to be garnering good publicity from Rubenstein's counsel--Richards or Rubenstein himself.

Michael Richards' apologetic statement was weak in almost every respect. Because the incident and apology were so recent, the trajectory of Richards' post-apology career is yet to be seen. It is, however, hard to imagine a time when the actor's name will not conjure memories of his racism scandal.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Conclusion

In the last decade we have witnessed the rise of apology as a rhetorical speech act in all aspects of public life. While public figures of the past were guided by the maxim “Never apologize, never explain,” political leaders, corporations, and celebrities of other sorts have recently shown a greater propensity to admit wrongdoing and make penance for actions and behaviors that offend or injure a salient audience. The proliferation of public apologies by entertainers has been especially pronounced and raises questions regarding the motives for and values demonstrated in such *mea culpa*.

In this thesis I have explored the proliferation of apologies in public life, suggesting explanations for this phenomenon generally and in the idiosyncratic case of celebrities. Nearly a decade ago, Benoit (1997a) suggested that the apologies of entertainers are of little consequence, as the actions of celebrities affect few. I have posited that this assessment is outdated, as celebrities have come to more closely resemble human brands and corporations in their own right, even as they lend their image, likeness, and endorsement to other products and services. Celebrities have valuable images to protect and the apology has become an important form of image management. At the same time, the increasing visibility of celebrities has raised the stakes involved in apologetic public statements as their apologies have come to serve important social functions by clarifying group norms and values.

The increasing significance of public apologies by celebrities demands a more sophisticated evaluative framework than has been offered in previous scholarly work. While

public relations scholars like Benoit and Coombs recognized the potential of apology as an image repair strategy, limited attention was given to the elements necessary for success. As common sense would dictate, not all apologies are equal. Indeed, this thesis' examination of prominent celebrity apologies has clearly demonstrated this fact. As public apologetic statements are made with increasing frequency, there is every reason to believe the public is becoming more critical consumers of apologies. This thesis has proposed a comprehensive model for apology incorporating not only public relations scholarship but also work in the fields of sociology and psychology. This model may not only aid in the assessment of public apologies but also serve public figures and public relations practitioners in crafting apologies that both mitigate reputational damage and heal an injured or offended audience.

The apology is a rhetorical speech act whose time has come and, though 2006 was coined "The Year of Celebrity Apologies," there is little evidence that we should expect public apologies to arrive with less frequency. Instead, the conspicuous absence of scholarly public relations literature that identifies the consequential elements of a public apology suggests exciting opportunities for future research in the field.

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