

“I’m very sorry to say that I’ve behaved
badly”

Image repair, public apologies and non-
apologies during the Weinstein scandal.

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1. Abstract

In English

In late 2017 and early 2018, there was a surge of sexual misconduct allegations directed at hundreds public figures, mostly in The United States. This became commonly known as the so-called Weinstein scandal. This paper provides analysis of some of the public apology statements issued by the people who faced accusations during that scandal. The purpose of the research is to learn what strategies were used in the statements, and how prevalent non-apologies were among them. All in all, 35 statements are analyzed. The analysis reveals that, while expressing remorse and apologizing was the most frequent strategy due to the choice of statements, reducing the apparent offensiveness of the act, reducing the accused person's apparent responsibility for the act, and offering a corrective action were the next most common strategies that were used. 33 statements contained an apology in some form and 30 of those apologies contained at least one of the eight characteristics of a non-apology. The three most frequent characteristics were a vague or incomplete acknowledgement of the offense, minimizing the offense, and questioning the harm that befell the victim.

In Finnish

Vuoden 2017 loppu- ja vuoden 2018 alkupuolella satoja julkisuuden henkilöitä syytettiin seksuaalisesta häirinnästä, pääosin Yhdysvalloissa. Tämä ilmiö tunnetaan nykyään nimellä Weinstein-skandaali. Tämän tutkielman tarkoitus on tarkastella tuona aikana syytettyjen henkilöiden julkaisemia julkisia anteeksipyyntöjä ja lausuntoja syytöksiinsä liittyen. Analyysi kattaa yhteensä 35 lausuntoa. Analyysi paljasti, että vaikka katumuksen ilmaisu ja anteeksipyyntö olivat yleisimmät strategiat johtuen lausuntojen luonteesta, kolme strategiaa olivat yleisiä: Teon ilmeisen vääryyden tai loukkaavuuden minimointi, syytetyn henkilön vastuullisuuden minimointi ja korvaavan, tai ongelman uusiutumisen estävän teon tai toiminnan tarjoaminen. 33 lausuntoa sisälsi anteeksipyynnön jossain muodossa, ja niistä 30 sisälsi vähintään yhden kahdeksasta pseudoanteeksipyynnön piirteistä. Kolme useimmin ilmenevää piirrettä olivat vajavainen tai epämääräinen kuvaus loukkaavasta teosta, teon loukkaavuuden minimointi ja uhrin kokeman haitan kyseenalaistaminen.

2. Introduction

Towards the end of 2017, Hollywood was hit with a tidal wave of sexual misconduct allegations, with hundreds of people coming forward with their stories of being sexually harassed or abused. It all started when The New York Times reported that Harvey Weinstein, co-founder of Miramax and The Weinstein Company, had allegedly sexually harassed and abused multiple women during his reign as the top producer in the film industry (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). The publication of these allegations opened the floodgates to many more women coming forward with sexual harassment allegations against celebrities, politicians, and journalists.

The media uproar around Weinstein's allegations is commonly (and in this paper) referred to as the Weinstein Scandal. As the situation progressed, the hashtag #metoo started trending on social media platforms, as men and women turned to the internet to publish their own accounts of being sexually harassed or abused in the workplace. The #metoo hashtag is part of the "me too." movement, that was founded in 2006 to help the victims of sexual violence¹.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the public apologies issued by the accused people, using Benoit's image repair theory (Benoit, 2014), supplementing it with other apology research (Arendt, LaFleche, & Limperopulos, 2017; Eisinger, 2011; Meier, 1998). Image repair is an act in which a person or organization attempts to repair or prevent a negative effect on their reputation or image (Benoit, 2014, p. 20). Benoit (2014) divides image repair strategies into two supercategories, according to the shouldering of responsibility: Either the actor argues that they are not responsible for the action, therefore attempting to maintain a favorable impression of themselves, or the actor accepts responsibility for the action and uses strategies to improve their reputation in other ways (p. 21-29). With this in mind, the statements from the accused will hopefully give an indication of the shouldering of responsibility for the alleged actions, and the ways in which that is reflected in the language, if at all. In other words, this paper should answer the following questions:

1. What image repair and apology strategies are used in the statements?
2. How prevalent are non-apologies among the apology statements?

¹ See <https://metoomvmt.org/>

Due to the limited scope of this research, only the statements that fully or partially accepted responsibility were analyzed. The materials used for analysis will be further detailed in section 3.

Image repair and apologies have been extensively studied in the past few decades (See Arendt et al., 2017; Eisinger, 2011; Meier, 1998), but with the recent ubiquity of social media, public apologies have become a very common, yet relatively little studied area of apology research (Ancarno, 2015; Bentley, 2015). It can be argued that public apologies and apologies between two individuals can have different motivations: There is often little financial gain to be had in a private individual apologizing to another person for an offensive act, but in the case of a public figure or a company, public image can be an important part of business (Benoit, 2014, p. 21). In this case, most celebrities can be thought of as having similar motivations as a business, because negative publicity can affect their career in negative ways. This can be observed in the media coverage of the Weinstein scandal, where many celebrities lost business due to the negative publicity².

Furthermore, public apology and image repair research has focused heavily on corporations (Arendt et al., 2017, p. 1) so additional research of celebrities' image repair strategies is warranted. In terms of motivations for image repair, an argument can be made that celebrities fall somewhere between a corporation and a private individual: Corporations' sole motivation for maintaining a good reputation is financial gain, but celebrities may have a desire to maintain a favorable reputation not only from a financial standpoint, but also from that of a private individual whose personal relationships are affected by their reputation. Therefore, analysis of the language used by celebrities in their public discourse, especially when responding to a threat to their reputation (and possibly whole career) can be useful for further study in a wide array of fields, such as public relations, linguistics and sociology.

3. Theoretical framework

Apologies and image repair—also called image restoration in earlier research (see Benoit, 2014)—have been the subject of a vast amount of studies in the past few decades. Furthermore, there is quite a bit of overlap between the different branches of image repair and apology research. Some researchers situate their studies in crisis communication, some in image repair, and others in

²See: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/nov/04/netflix-fires-kevin-spacey-from-house-of-cards> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/arts/television/louis-ck-statement>

apology research (which is further divided into various different sub-fields), and there is extensive interplay between them (Arendt et al., 2017; Meier, 1998).

Benoit's 2015 revision of his image repair theory takes many other theories into account and shares quite a bit of similarity with some of them (ch. 2). It can be seen as a kind of amalgamation of the theories that came before it. Due to the amount of different theories and fields of research, and the limited scope of this paper, mainly Benoit's theory was used in this paper, with some parallel research used to supplement the analysis. However, many of the different theories are quite similar in many ways, which will also be touched upon in the following paragraphs.

3.1 Benoit's image repair theory

In their meta-analysis of apology, image repair, and crisis communication research, Arendt, LaFleche, and Limperopulos (2017) state, that "apologetic rhetoric consists of messages designed to repair and restore the image, credibility, and legitimacy of a person or an organization." (p. 517) They also state that in apologetic rhetoric, an apology is considered a defense, instead of carrying the usual meaning of "I am sorry" (Arendt et al. 2017, p. 517). However, in Benoit's (2014) image repair theory, all image repair strategies (including apologizing) are considered as ways of repairing a damaged reputation or maintaining an already favorable image (p. 13). In fact, he bases his theory on the assumptions that "communication is a goal directed activity", and that one of the central goals is to maintain a positive reputation (Benoit, 2014, p. 14). Therefore, it can be argued that in the context of this theory, all image repair strategies are defensive in nature, as their purpose is to prevent a negative impact on the user's reputation.

Arendt et al. (2017) describe Ware and Linkugel's four common strategies in apologetic rhetoric, which are denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (p. 518). Conversely, in Benoit's (2014, ch. 2) theory, there are five strategies:

- Denial
- Evade responsibility
- Reduce offensiveness
- Corrective action
- Mortification

In Benoit's (2014) theory bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence are listed as variations of the reducing offensiveness strategy (p. 30). The following sections will outline the different strategies and provide examples of each strategy from the data when clarification is needed.

3.1.1 Denial

Benoit (2014) divides denial into two subcategories: Simple denial and shifting blame. Simple denial is when the accused denies performing the action they are accused of performing, or that the action did not occur at all. This strategy absolves the accused of responsibility, and if believed by the audience restores their image (p. 22-23).

Shifting blame entails that the accused admits that the act happened, but that somebody else performed the act, therefore absolving them from responsibility. Benoit (2014) argues that this strategy may be the more effective of the two, because it may shift the bad feelings of the audience toward another target and provides them with a possible perpetrator for the act (p. 22). Denial can be used in tandem with other strategies, so a person can take responsibility for certain actions, or parts of actions, but deny the rest. This will be further discussed in the analysis section, chapter 4.

3.1.2 Evading responsibility

Evading responsibility is a set of strategies where the accused does not deny doing the offensive act but attempts to reduce or completely evade the apparent responsibility for the act (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). In Benoit's (2014) theory, evading responsibility can be achieved in four ways: Provocation, defeasibility, accident, good intentions (p. 23).

Provocation is a strategy where the accused person claims that the offensive act was performed in response to another wrongful act, thereby justifying the act they are being accused of (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). Defeasibility means "pleading lack of information about or control over important factors in the situation" (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). Again, the accused does not deny performing the offensive act, but rather refers to a lack of information, lack of intent, or lack of ability to act otherwise. If successful, this strategy reduces the accused person's apparent responsibility for the offensive act. The accident strategy means that the accused person claims that the act was performed due to a lack of control over the circumstances, or random

unperceivable factors that led to the act (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). This differs from defeasibility in that there is an external force or variable, which the actor cannot reasonably perceive, which leads to the action. The fourth and final strategy for evading responsibility, is good intentions. It means that the accused attempts to justify the action based on intentions (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). According to Benoit (2014), "People who do bad while trying to do good are usually not blamed as much as those who intend to do bad" (p. 24). This strategy is very similar to the defeasibility strategy, in that, they both can refer to a lack of volition for performing the offensive act. Additionally, a statement like, "it was not my intention," may be considered to constitute the good intentions strategy, but it also fulfills the criteria for defeasibility.

3.1.3 Reducing offensiveness

In general, reducing offensiveness entails that the accused admits to performing the offensive act, but attempts to "reduce the degree of ill feeling experienced by the audience" (Benoit, 2014, p. 24). This can be achieved by engaging in one or more of the six variations of this strategy, which Benoit (2014) outlined (p. 24-26): bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, and compensation.

Bolstering, which can also be found in Ware and Linkugel's theory (qtd. in Arendt et al. 2017, p. 518) means that the accused attempts to make the audience see the actor of the offense in a more positive light by, for example presenting the audience with some positive characteristics the actor possesses, or positive deeds the actor has performed in the past. According to Benoit (2014), self-deprecation is also a form of bolstering (p. 24). Ideally this results in a net positive effect on the accused person's reputation, despite the negative effect of the offensive act. Minimization means that the accused convinces the audience that the offensive act is not as offensive as it seems, therefore reducing the negative effect on the accused person's reputation. Differentiation is a strategy where the accused admits to performing the action, but distinguishes the action from other similar, but less desirable actions. This makes the actions seem less bad in comparison to the other actions they are being compared to. Transcendence is a strategy where the accused person attempts to shift the action into a broader context, or to make the audience look at the action from a different frame of reference. Attacking the accuser is a strategy where the accused attempts to either lessen the credibility of the accuser or divert attention away from the initial accusation. Additionally, if the accuser and the victim are the same person, the accused may try to argue that the victim deserved to be the target of the offensive act. Compensation is a

strategy where the accused offers the victim compensation in the form of money, goods or services. If the accuser accepts this compensation, the negative impact of the offensive act is potentially lessened. This strategy was not used in any of the statements.

3.1.4 Corrective action

This is a strategy where the accused makes a promise of fixing the problem or preventing it from happening again (Benoit, 2014, p. 26). This is different from the compensation strategy because corrective action addresses the source of the offense or injury in order to prevent the recurrence of the offense, while “compensation consists of a gift designed to counterbalance, rather than correct, the injury” (Benoit, 2014, p. 26).

3.1.5 Mortification

According to Benoit (2014), mortification can “include an explicit acceptance of blame, expression of regret or remorse, or a request for forgiveness” (p. 26-27) Essentially, apologizing for, or admitting to, an offensive act, or expressing regret for having performed such an act, constitutes mortification. However, mortification is a troublesome strategy because of the ambiguity of the phrase “I’m sorry.” This issue will be further explained in the next section.

3.2 Apology research

Apologetic rhetoric and the image repair strategies detailed in the previous section are notably different to what A. J. Meier (1998) lists as apology strategies in her review of the past 25 years of apology research (p. 216). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that apologetic rhetoric and apology strategies are two different fields with different terminologies and research goals. However, both fall under apology studies whose goals are, according to Meier (1998), to “describe apology strategies and identify contextual factors (severity of offense, interlocutor relationship) that inform their choice” (p. 25-216). Again, there is evidently quite a bit of overlap between the numerous theories and fields, and this section will attempt to form a coherent theoretical whole from a few of them.

In of this paper, much of the data contains apologies that could easily be filed under the mortification section of Benoit’s (2014) theory. However, as Benoit points out, saying “I’m sorry” “can reflect an admission of guilt, as in “I’m sorry I hurt you,” or it can be an expression of

sympathy, as in “I’m sorry you have been hurt” (implicitly by someone else),” (p. 26) and his theory does not differentiate between these forms. Therefore, it is useful to refer to other research specifically about apologies.

Meier (1998) states, that the most frequently used apology strategy is an expression that contains the word apologize, sorry, forgive, excuse, pardon, of which “an expression containing sorry is the overwhelming favorite” (p. 216). Robert Eisinger (2011), lists the required components of an apology, according to Goffman and Tavuchis (qtd. in Eisinger 2011, p. 136), and both state that there needs to be an acknowledgement of the wrongful act, and a display of remorse or regret.

The most frequent way of apologizing is with just the word “sorry” or with “sorry that,” or “sorry about.” British data shows that the most frequently used intensifiers with “sorry,” are “terribly” and “awfully” while in American English, “really” is used the most (Meier, 1998, p. 217). Meier (1998) also puts forward the claim, that in formal and written contexts, “apologize” is used more frequently than “sorry” (p. 217). Theoretically, the data set for this paper should contain more expressions containing “apologize” than “sorry” due to the formal and mediated nature, and the text format of the statements. This will be further discussed in the analysis.

Eisinger (2011) outlines the characteristics of what he calls the non-apology (also called a pseudo-apology), which technically falls under the mortification section of Benoit’s (2014) theory, but actually does not facilitate any shouldering of responsibility (p. 137). A non-apology is an apology that contains an offer of apology, as described above, but “diffuses blame” using various other strategies. Eisinger (2011) uses Aaron Lazare’s (qtd. in Eisinger, 2011, p. 137) list of characteristics of a pseudo-apology, which are:

- Offer of a vague or incomplete acknowledgement of the offense
- Use of passive voice
- Phrasing the offense as conditional
- Questioning the harm that befell the victim
- Minimizing the offense
- Using an empathic offer of apology (as in “I’m sorry that you were hurt”)
- Apology to the wrong party
- Apology for the wrong offense

If a statement contains all of these, it is clearly a pseudo-apology, but as Eisinger (2011, p. 137) notes, if it contains only some of them the apology may be interpreted as a genuine offer of apology and result in a restoration of reputation for the accused.

All in all, the structure of the various strategies used in this study can be visualized in a figure as follows:

- Denial
 - Simple Denial
 - Deny the occurrence of the act, or your responsibility for it
 - Shifting Blame
 - Admit the act occurred, but claim that another party was responsible
- Evading responsibility
 - Provocation
 - Claim that the act was performed in response to another offensive act
 - Defeasibility
 - Claim lack of knowledge to prevent act, or lack of volition for the act
 - Accident
 - Claim that the act was performed due to external circumstances that were out of your control
 - Good Intentions
 - Claim that the act was performed with good intentions
- Reducing offensiveness
 - Bolstering
 - Attempt to make the audience see you in a more positive light
 - Minimization
 - Attempt to make the audience see the act as less offensive
 - Differentiation
 - Attempt to differentiate the act from other, more offensive acts
 - Transcendence
 - Attempt to make the audience see the act in a broader context, in which the act is either acceptable, or less offensive

- Attacking the accuser
 - Attempt to make the audience see the accuser in a negative light, hopefully making the accusation less believable
- Compensation
 - Offer money, goods, or services as an attempt to compensate the victim for any negative effects of the offensive act
- Corrective action
 - Offer to either fix the problem, or prevent the problem from occurring again
- Mortification
 - Apology
 - Acknowledge the offensive act, display remorse or regret, and/or offer an apology
 - Non-apology
 - Fulfill one or more of the criteria listed by Lazare (qtd. in Eisinger, 2011):
 - Offer of a vague or incomplete acknowledgement of the offense
 - Use of passive voice
 - Phrasing of the offense as conditional
 - Questioning the harm that befell the victim
 - Minimizing the offense
 - Using an empathic offer of apology (as in “I’m sorry that you were hurt”)
 - Apology to the wrong party
 - Apology for the wrong offense

4. Data

The data for this research consist of 35 public statements given by the people accused of sexual harassment, during the so-called Weinstein scandal and the “me too.” movement. The statements are attempts at image repair, and they exhibit various strategies, ranging from denial to apologies. The statements are gathered mostly from news articles, in which the accused gave a statement to the press, and in some cases from the accused person’s own website or social media page.

To find a suitable number of statements, an article by Time magazine was used as a starting point (Cooney, 2017). It lists 122 people who have been accused of sexual harassment or misconduct (at the time of writing this paper the article was last updated on January 26, 2018 4:21 PM ET). The Time article has hyperlinks to most of the original articles which contain the statements. Most statements were given straight to the press, but some were posted to the accused person's social media page, which the articles then referenced. If the original statement was not available, the statement quoted in the Time article was used.

All statements in video or audio form were ignored, and the written transcriptions provided in the articles were used instead. Additionally, all statements that were paraphrased or broken up into few-word-utterances, were ignored, as they are not conducive to analysis in this case. The data was collected from sources that were publicly available at the time of writing this paper. Of the 122 people mentioned in the Time article, 85 had given public, written (or transcribed by the interviewee) statements pertaining to their allegations. The rest either did not provide a statement at all, or their statements did not fit the criteria mentioned above.

The statements were compiled and then divided into groups, according to the degree of the shouldering of responsibility in the statement (and therefore, the most prevalent image repair strategy) (see Benoit, 2014, ch. 2): apology, denial, and mixed. Statements where the accused person fully, or partially took responsibility and used mortification were categorized as apologies, regardless of whether the apology fulfilled any of the characteristics of a non-apology. According to Eisinger (2011), a non-apology does not constitute shouldering of responsibility (p. 137), which would justify dividing the apology category further into apologies and non-apologies. However, for the sake of simplicity all data was categorized according to Benoit's (2014) theory, and further analysis would reveal if the apologies contain elements of non-apology. Statements where the accused clearly did not take responsibility for the action they were accused of, were categorized as denials. Finally, statements that did not fit in either of the previous categories were categorized as mixed. These were statements where the shouldering of responsibility was not clearly addressed or were otherwise unsuitable for either of the other categories. To limit the scope for this paper, only the apologies and mixed statements were analyzed. This is because the frequency of mortification in the data set is highest in those groups, and the purpose of this paper is to look at image repair and apology strategies used in the statements. This resulted in a final data set of 35 statements, which will be detailed in the next chapter.

I recognize that this categorization is fairly arbitrary and would not necessarily result in the same distribution if all of the statements were analyzed first, or if it was done by someone else. However, the distribution of statements does not really matter, since in an ideal situation, all of the statements would be analyzed to reach a significant conclusion. Furthermore, the study does not rely on any statistical analysis to achieve results (only to illustrate popularity of strategies in this particular set of data).

5. Analysis and discussion

This section will present the overall frequency of the most used strategies in the data and the differences between the two analyzed groups of statements. Additionally, examples of the various strategies will be presented. After that, an analysis of a number of individual statements will be detailed.

5.1 Overall distribution of strategies

Out of the original 85 statements, 50 (59%) were denials, 25 (29%) were apologies, and 10 (12%) were mixed, which resulted in a total of 35 statements (apologies and mixed statements) used for analysis in this study. According to a meta-analysis of the past 30 years of image repair research, conducted by Arendt et al. (2017), denial was the most common strategy used, while also being the least successful in repairing the reputation of the user. Although assessing the successfulness of the statements issued during the Weinstein scandal is beyond the scope of this study, it is interesting to see that denial is also the prevalent strategy used in the original set of 85 statements. However, at least in this case, this is affected by a number of variables, such as the truthfulness of the statements, the truthfulness of the accusations, and the legal ramifications of admitting an illegal act. For example, a person accused of something that they did not do is not likely to admit committing the act in favor of using a more successful image repair strategy.

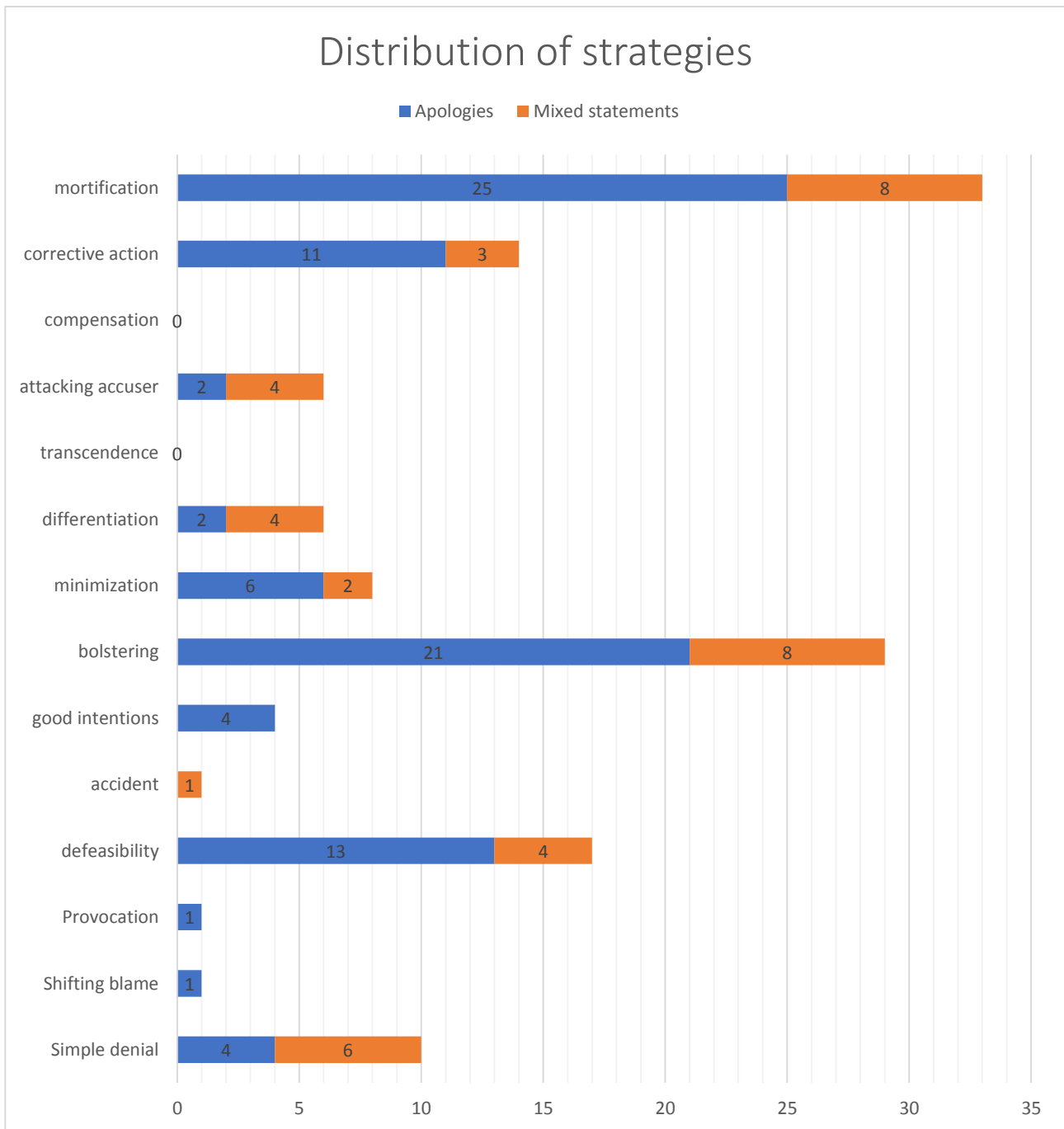


Figure 1. Distribution of strategies

All of the apologies, and 8 out of 10 of the mixed statements contained some form of mortification. Benoit (2014) proposes that mortification may be most successful when paired with corrective action (p. 26). In Arendt et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis, corrective action turned out to be the most successful, however, they used a multitude of theories, some of which did not contain mortification in the same form as in Benoit's (2014) theory. It would seem, then, that mortification

paired with corrective action does indeed appear to be an effective strategy for repairing one's image.

As stated in section 2, Benoit's theory does not handle apologies well, in that, it does not differentiate between non-apologies and sincere apologies. To illustrate the difference between an apology and a non-apology, here is Ben Affleck's tweet on 11 October 2017, apologizing to Hilarie Burton for allegedly groping her:

I acted inappropriately toward Ms. Burton and I sincerely apologize³

Contrast that with Kevin Spacey's use of mortification in his response to allegations by Anthony Rapp on 29 October 2017:

But if I did behave as he describes, I owe him the sincerest apology for what would have been deeply inappropriate drunken behavior, and I am sorry for the feelings he describes having carried with him all these years.⁴

In Affleck's tweet, he admits the offensive act and apologizes to the victim of those actions using the intensifier "sincerely." Conversely, in Spacey's statement, he admits to owing Rapp an apology, but only if he had behaved in the way that was described. This constitutes four of the characteristics of a non-apology: 1. phrasing the offense as conditional, 2. questioning the harm that Rapp experienced, 3. offering a vague acknowledgement of the offense, and 4. minimizing the offense. Spacey then says he is "sorry for the feelings" that Rapp "describes," but does not offer the apology he allegedly owes Rapp. With this, Spacey ticks two more boxes from the list of non-apology criteria: 5. using an empathic apology, and 6. apologizing for the wrong offense (Rapp's feelings).

In the apology group, there were 17 instances of the word "apologize" used in mortification, and 13 instances of "sorry". In the mixed category, "apologize" was used in 4 instances, and "sorry" in 6 instances. Overall, this amounts to 21 instances of "apologize" being

³ https://twitter.com/BenAffleck/status/918166049501208576?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

⁴ <https://twitter.com/KevinSpacey/status/924848412842971136>

used, and 19 instances of “sorry”. In these 35 statements, both words are used in similar amounts, which suggests that either these situations may not be perceived as formal by the issuers of the apologies, which would explain the differing results from Meier (1998) Another possibility is that public apologies and apologies between individuals have inherent differences in terms of word choice preference. However, more data is required to reach any conclusion on this matter.

In terms of intensifiers, an apology with no intensifier was the most popular (13 instances), “deeply” was the second most common (8 instances), and the third was “sincerely” or “sincere” (6 instances). Again, this differs from Meier’s (1998) data because none of the most frequent intensifiers mentioned in her article (terribly, awfully, or really) (p. 217) were used in these statements. This may also be an indication that public and private apologies lead to differing word choices.

23 of the 25 apology statements fulfilled at least one of Lazare’s (qtd. in Eisinger, 2011) criteria for non-apologies. Additionally, all of the mixed statements that contained an apology (8 of the 10 statements) contained at least one element of non-apology. Most (24 out of 33) statements contained one to three strategies of non-apology, the most popular of which was minimizing the offense, and second most frequent was a vague acknowledgement of the offense. However, due to the public release platform of the statements, the accused may feel that it is not necessary to give a full account of the actions, because the accusations were also made publicly. Nevertheless, even if the vague acknowledgement criterium is ignored, minimizing the offense is still a frequent element of the apologies.

Corrective action was used in 11 (44%) of the apologies, and in 3 (30%) of the mixed statements. All statements that used corrective action also used mortification. Many people offered resignation from their positions as a form of corrective action, while some offered to listen (presumably to women) more in the future. Another popular offer was to promise to change one’s behavior in the future. An example of the corrective action strategy used in this way can be found in Morgan Spurlock’s statement (14 December 2017):

By recognizing and openly admitting what I’ve done to further this terrible situation, I hope to empower the change within myself...⁵

⁵ http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1sqc244

He offers to change himself in order to prevent his actions from happening again, hopefully making the audience see him in a more positive light as a result.

Reducing offensiveness was the second most common category in both statement groups. Bolstering was by far the most popular strategy (and the second most common after mortification out of all of the individual strategies): it was used in 21 of the apologies (84%) and 8 of the mixed statements (80%). This may be because of the public nature of the statements, since the apologies are essentially there just to appease the audience in order to restore the accused person's image: The accused person could merely apologize to the accuser in private, but since the accusations were made publicly, they pose a threat to the accused person's image. Reducing the apparent offensiveness of the action or, as was more common in the data, attempting to make the audience see the accused in a better light may be a popular strategy because the public figure uses their own name and face as a brand of sorts. After all, maintaining a positive brand image is beneficial to business. Furthermore, the public figure may want to maintain a positive image of themselves as an individual for social reasons.

An example of bolstering can be found in congressman Trent Franks' statement on 7 December 2017, upon leaving congress amidst allegations that he discussed surrogacy with staff members:

I have always tried to create a very warm and supportive atmosphere for every last person who has ever worked in my congressional office. It is my deepest conviction that there are many staffers, former and present, who would readily volunteer to substantiate this fact.⁶

In this statement Franks refers to his efforts at creating a good environment for his employees, and to the fact that there are character-witnesses to attest to that fact, as ways of creating a more positive image of himself in the eyes of the audience.

⁶ <http://time.com/5055442/republican-congress-trent-franks-resigns-sexual-harassment-surrogacy/>

Minimization was overall the second most common form of reducing offensiveness, with 6 apologies (24%) and 2 (20%) mixed statements using it. Kevin Spacey also used minimization in his response to Anthony Rapp:

...I owe him the sincerest apology for what would have been deeply inappropriate drunken behavior...⁷

Here Spacey attempts to minimize the apparent offensiveness of the alleged sexual harassment by referring to the alleged act as “drunken behavior,” implying that the action would have been more reprehensible had he been sober.

Contrary to the apology group, differentiation was used more than minimization in the mixed statement category (4 out of 10 mixed statements, and 2 out of 25 apologies). This strategy is also present in Trent Franks’ statement:

I have absolutely never physically intimidated, coerced, or had, or attempted to have, any sexual contact with any member of my congressional staff.

Franks was accused of discussing surrogacy with some of his staff members, who interpreted it as him sexually harassing them. He admitted to, and apologized for discussing the topic with the accusers, but mentions a variety of worse acts that he did not commit. This comparison potentially makes his actions seem less offensive.

Attacking the accuser was used the same amount as differentiation (2 out of 25 apologies and 4 out of 10 mixed statements). Usually the accused attempted to make the accusation seem somehow offensive, as was the case in Lorin Stein’s statement (published on 6 December 2017) responding to allegations that he hired women based on looks (in addition to allegations of sexual harassment):

⁷ <https://twitter.com/KevinSpacey/status/924848412842971136>

The suggestion that I put a premium on looks over talent is not just mistaken but, frankly, an insult to the staff who put that magazine together, to say nothing of the writers and artists who honored us with their work.⁸

Stein argues that accusing him of favoring looks over qualifications insults the people he worked with, making the accuser the perpetrator of an offensive act as well. This potentially shifts the attention from the sexual misconduct to which he admitted and lessens the negative impact on his reputation.

In the apologies, evading responsibility was the third most common group of strategies used, with 14 (56%) of the statements containing one or more strategy of evading responsibility. The most common one was defeasibility, which was used in 13 statements (52%). It was mostly used to claim that the intentions were not to offend, or that the accused did not know the actions were offensive. This functions in a similar way to bolstering: The accused claims that they did not act out of malice, but out of ignorance, which puts forth the implication that it is not in their nature to act in such a way. Thus, the audience potentially sees the accused in a more positive light, resulting in a less damaging, if not even a net positive effect on their image. An example of defeasibility can also be found in Morgan Spurlock's statement:

I thought I was doing ok, I believed she was feeling better. She believed she was raped.

Spurlock is talking about a sexual encounter with a girl who later accused him of rape, and asserts that he did not know how the girl had perceived their sexual encounter until he heard about it later on. This can be seen as an attempt to reduce his responsibility for the act, due to a lack of knowledge and volition.

Next came good intentions, with 4 instances (16%) found. In the mixed statements, only 4 (40%) used defeasibility and none used good intentions. As stated in chapter 2, defeasibility and good intentions may be interchangeable, depending on the wording of the statement. However, I would argue that the important distinction is that in good intentions, the accused attempts to *justify* the action based on intent, instead of claiming a lack of intent, as described by Benoit

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/books/lorin-stein-resigns-the-paris-review.html?smid=tw-share>

(2014, p. 23-24). Therefore, in order to make a definite distinction between the two in this research, only statements that provided, or referred to, an alternate intention to the perceived one were considered to constitute good intentions. Conversely, if no alternate intention was mentioned, it was considered defeasibility. As an example, in George H. W. Bush's (13 November 2017) response to groping allegations, his spokesperson said:

[Bush] has patted women's rears in what he intended to be a good-natured manner.⁹

Here, an alternate intention is provided to counteract the perceived intention of harassment. To contrast, in Chris Savino's statement only the lack of intention is mentioned:

Although it was never my intention, I now understand that the impact of my actions and communications created an uncomfortable environment.¹⁰

Here, an alternate intention is not provided, just that the perceived intention is not the one he held at the time of the act, therefore constituting defeasibility instead of good intentions.

Provocation was used only once in all of the statements. Morgan Spurlock's statement contained the only example among all of the analyzed statements:

But why? What caused me to act this way? Is it all ego? Or was it the sexual abuse I suffered as a boy and as a young man in my teens? Abuse that I only ever told to [sic] my first wife, for fear of being seen as weak or less than a man?

Is it because my father left my mother when I was child? Or that she believed he never respected her, so that disrespect carried over into their son?

Here Spurlock attempts to give potential reasons for his infidelity and sexual misconduct, making the apparent responsibility for his actions seem to lie less on his own shoulders, but rather on

⁹ <http://time.com/5019182/george-hw-bush-groping-allegation/?xid=homepage>

¹⁰ <http://time.com/5015204/harvey-weinstein-scandal/>

people who have wronged him in his childhood. Notably, this also functions as a form of bolstering, potentially making him seem more of a victim of his environment.

Accident was another strategy which only occurred once. This was in Garrison Keillor's statement (published on 29 November 2017), which he issued when he was fired over allegations of sexual harassment:

I meant to pat her back after she told me about her unhappiness and her shirt was open and my hand went up it about six inches.¹¹

Keillor refers to the fact that the woman's shirt was open as a factor that he could not reasonably be expected to have predicted, which then led to him touching the woman's bare back. Ideally, this shifts the responsibility from Keillor onto an external factor which is not under his control (Benoit, 2014, p. 23).

Unlike the apologies, in the mixed statements denial was the third most common category. 6 statements (60%) used simple denial, and none used shifting blame. For the apologies, the corresponding numbers are 4 (16%) and 1 (4%). Denial can be used to attempt to repair one's image, even if the overall statement is an apology. This was apparent in the data, as 5 (24%) of the 25 apologies contained some variation of denial in it, even though the statements themselves were designated as apologies (shouldering of responsibility, and consequent apologies for the actions the accused took responsibility for). A popular choice was to deny some aspect of the accusation and use other strategies for the rest. As an example, in Lorin Stein's statement, he denies the accusation that he hired people based on looks:

...I never made an editorial or hiring decision to reward anyone, man or woman, for anything but the quality of the work they did for the magazine. And I never passed up a story, by anybody, if I thought it was right for the Review.

Here, Stein clearly denies part of the accusation, even though he apologized for some parts earlier in the statement.

¹¹ <http://www.startribune.com/read-garrison-keillor-s-full-email-to-the-star-tribune/460827763/>

The distribution of denial and mortification between the two statement groups seems to support the validity of the categorization of the statements, although a similar analysis of the denials group would be necessary to be certain. Extrapolating from these results, the denial statement group should hypothetically contain very little mortification and a 100% use of the denial strategy in order to verify this compartmentalization of the statements as correct, or at least accurate. However, without looking at what is actually said in the statements it is impossible to know what the contents of it is, despite knowing which image repair strategies were used. This will become evident in the next section.

5.2 Analysis of individual statements

Johnny Iuzzini's statement, which was published on 29 November 2017, is an interesting example of an apology that overall, accepts responsibility for his actions, but switches back and forth between denial and mortification. He begins with mortification, which contains a vague acknowledgement of his actions, one of the elements of a non-apology:

I am shattered and heartbroken at the thought that any of my actions left members of my team feeling hurt or degraded. More importantly, I am deeply sorry to those who felt hurt.¹²

But in the very next sentence he denies some of the accusations, and then uses bolstering when he describes his relationship to a former employee to make the audience aware of his virtues as an employer:

I certainly deny the allegations, as presented to me, that I ever had a drug problem, threw an empty nitrogen canister at anyone or that I left Jean-Georges on anything other than good terms (I provided three months' notice and maintain a good relationship with chef and mentor Jean-Georges to this day).

In the next sentence, Iuzzini minimizes the actions he is accused of, without specifying any details:

¹² <https://mic.com/articles/186356/4-former-employees-accuse-celebrity-chef-johnny-iuzzini-of-sexual-harassment-and-abuse#.9YxsibEuD>

Many of the other allegations are inaccurate, others I do not recall [sic] and none were meant to hurt people.

This makes his actions seem less offensive without him having to provide any evidence or examples. Next comes another use of mortification, which fulfills four of the criteria for a pseudo-apology:

Nonetheless, I must take responsibility if any of the members of my team felt uncomfortable by my words or actions, regardless of my intent or recollection. I must hear that what the women making the accusations are telling me and recognize I caused pain.

In the first sentence, he 1) offers a vague acknowledgement of the offense, 2) phrases the offense as conditional, 3) questions the harm that befell the victim, and 4) minimizes the offense. Although these sentences do not contain the words “apologize” or “sorry,” it still fulfills the characteristics of an apology, which Eisinger (2011) describes as “a succinct addressing of an offense, an expression of remorse, and either an offer of reparations or an assurance that the offense will not be committed again” (p. 136). Next, he uses bolstering:

I have strived to be a good mentor over the course of my career, and I now understand that I failed some people. To me, that is unacceptable.

His aspirations to be a good mentor and the fact that failing “some people” is unacceptable to him potentially makes the audience view him in a more positive light. Ideally this results in reducing the apparent offensiveness of his actions: Considering that he was accused of sexual harassment, not succeeding in being good mentor seems much more noble a mistake. In the next section he uses defeasibility:

Since learning that allegations were coming I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about this subject. Thinking of the way kitchen culture has changed, thinking of the mistakes we made, the mistakes I was complicit in. I began working in kitchens when I was 15 years old, back in a time when it was rare to see women in the kitchen, and behavior was more

bawdy than professional. There were dirty jokes and vulgar remarks, times where people would lose their tempers and it was deemed permissible since four-star kitchens are high-stress jobs. This was the behavior I learned as a boy, and for too many years participated in during my restaurant career. And it was wrong.

luzini refers to the kitchen culture as his reason for acting inappropriately: He lacked sufficient knowledge of the correct behavior due to growing up around the culture which he describes. This shifts some of the responsibility for his actions onto the kitchen culture's shoulders, ideally making him look less responsible for the actions. He issues another non-apology, which fulfills five of the criteria listed by Lazare (qtd. in Eisinger, 2011):

There are obviously people who I have hurt, and I cannot even begin to address how sorry I feel not only about what may have transpired, but about the fact they did not feel comfortable coming to me as their superior and letting me know how they felt.

He 1) offers an incomplete description of his actions, 2) phrases the offense as conditional, 3) questions the harm that the victim experienced, and 4) uses an empathic apology, all by using the words "what may have transpired". Next, luzini states that he is sorry that his employees "did not feel comfortable" to take these issues up with him, using empathic apology again and 5) apologizing for the wrong offense. The concluding section of his statement begins with mortification and ends with him using the corrective action strategy:

That is a failure of mine as a mentor, as a leader. I hope that anyone who felt wronged by me will reach out to me and give me the opportunity to apologize to them personally. I assure you that I will continue to learn, continue to do better and continue to strive to be the type of chef who can lead our industry into a culture of respect through example.

Here, luzini promises to fix the current issues by personally apologizing to his employees and to prevent the same mistakes from happening again by improving himself as a leader. The hope is that any ill will that the audience feels toward luzini will be mitigated due to him offering to take action to fix the situation caused by him.

On 12 December 2017, Ken Friedman issued a statement in response to sexual harassment allegations, which can be labeled as a non-apology. He begins with minimization:

My personal and professional life was intertwined with our restaurants and our staff.¹³

This is an attempt to reduce the apparent offensiveness of the actions he is accused of, by making it seem that he was mistakenly behaving in a way that he would behave among friends or family. The blurring of the lines between the personal and the professional would ideally be an acceptable excuse to the audience, which would reduce the negative emotion they feel towards him. He continues with a non-apology:

I own my behavior which can accurately be described at times as abrasive, rude and frankly wrong.

This, while being an acknowledgement of the wrongful act, is a vague and incomplete one. Additionally, he uses passive voice to describe his behavior. Friedman continues with bolstering and mortification:

The women who work at our restaurants are among the best in the business, and putting any of them in humiliating situations is unjustifiable.

Praising his female employees is a way of potentially making the audience see him in a more positive light due to his support and praise of the females who work in his restaurants. He then states that putting employees in humiliating situations is unjustifiable, even though he began the statement with a semi-justification of his actions. Additionally, he describes the sexual harassment he was accused of, in a way that does not clearly describe the offensive actions. The next sentence can be interpreted in two ways:

Some incidents were not as described, but context and content are not today's discussion.

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/12/12/dining/document-Ken-Friedman-Statement.html>

Depending on the interpretation of this sentence, it could constitute minimization or bolstering. If by “today’s discussion” he literally means this discussion he was having on the day that he wrote the statement, it would constitute bolstering because he waives the right to discuss the context and content of his actions and apologizes instead. This potentially makes the audience see him as a selfless person who will forgo personal gain (of reputation) over the feelings of his employees. Conversely, if the discussion he is referring to means the current political climate and the media coverage of the sexual misconduct allegations in general, the sentence can be seen as minimization: He attempts to change the audience’s view of the actions by stating that the actions which he is accused of are not the actions that he actually performed. Arguably, the first interpretation seems more plausible since the statement is meant to be understood as an apology. With that said, he ends the statement with another non-apology:

I apologize now publicly for my actions.

If Friedman had provided an accurate and unambiguous account of the actions for which he apologizes, this could perhaps be seen as a genuine apology. However, due to the way he described his actions in the statement, this fulfills the vague acknowledgement criterium of non-apologies.

Both Luzini’s and Friedman’s statements are prime examples of public apologies which may at first be interpreted as genuine offers of apology but fall apart upon scrutiny. To contrast, here is Michael Oreskes’ statement, which was published on 1 November 2017:

I am deeply sorry to the people I hurt. My behavior was wrong and inexcusable, and I accept full responsibility.¹⁴

He begins with mortification, taking responsibility for the act and issuing a genuine apology. He then continues:

¹⁴ <http://money.cnn.com/2017/11/01/media/michael-oreskes-npr/index.html>

To my colleagues, I am grateful for every minute I've had to work with each of you. NPR has an important job to do. Public radio matters so much and I will always be your supporter.

Here, Oreskes concludes with bolstering, leaving the audience (which was the employees at NPR since this was an internal memo, which was leaked to the press) with a positive sentiment, which ideally will alleviate some of the negative feelings they may have towards him. This statement, when compared to Luzini's or Friedman's statements, seems more simple and honest, due to the lack of excuses and non-apologies. However, whether or not Oreskes' statement was more successful in repairing his image is unclear, as it is outside the scope of this paper.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper revealed some trends within the group of statements, pertaining to the image repair strategies used in them. For example, bolstering, defeasibility, and corrective action appeared to be very popular strategies among celebrities and other public figures who found themselves in a career threatening crisis. Ideally these strategies result in a reduction to the negative impact on the accused person's reputation. More specifically, bolstering and defeasibility are strategies which can work in a similar fashion in that they may be used to imply that the accused person acted in a way that was uncharacteristic of them. This may be particularly useful for public figures who are in a position where they, not only use their own name and face to market themselves but have to be able to interact with people in their private life as well. Therefore, it may be beneficial to reframe the offensive actions in a way that it appears to be an anomaly in behavior, instead of an underlying vice for example.

Additionally, 30 of the statements that contained an apology fulfilled at least one of the criteria for non-apology and only three did not fulfill any. The most popular strategies were and incomplete or vague acknowledgement of the offense, minimizing the offense, and questioning the harm that the victim experienced. The first strategy may be explained by the public nature of these statements and the accusations that elicited the statements: The accused person may assume that the audience already knows which acts they are referring to and may choose to omit them from the statement. However, many still chose to include a vague or incomplete account of

the actions, when it could be argued, that omitting the actions altogether would have resulted in a more genuine apology.

Moreover, none of the intensifier or word choice preference, that were described by Meier (1998, p. 217), were present in the data, which either means that the data pool was too small to exhibit these preferences, or that there is an inherent difference in the word choices for public and private apologies.

Finally, this study reveals that there is further research to be done in the field of public apologies, and the Weinstein scandal, which was a catalyst for the publication of an unprecedented mass of statements which can be studied.

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