

Hit after Hit:
Examining the Image Repair Strategies of Johnny Manziel

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Lisa L. DeRuiter

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Abstract

Over the past decades, the landscape of sports journalism has changed to where now, athletes are often in the news just as frequently for their positive on-the-field play as they are for their negative off-the-field issues. Following these issues, the athletes must find strategies to employ to fix their damaged reputations. This thesis includes a rhetorical analysis of the image repair strategies employed by Johnny Manziel after each of his countless reputation-damaging incidents. The paper examines each of Manziel's problems in depth, gives an overview of his biography, and includes a thorough review of literature regarding Benoit's Image Repair Theory and its application to sports. It then examines more than thirty of Manziel's press conferences, interviews, official statements and social media posts where he engages in crisis communications using Benoit's Image Repair Theory. The researcher found initially Manziel successfully employed mortification and corrective action in his major rhetoric. Over time, his incidents began to pile up, and he mostly abandoned his successful strategies, instead using damaging methods such as minimization and simple denial. Even when he tried to employ the previously successful strategies, his actions did not match his words. Because of this discrepancy and the volume of problems, Manziel's overall image repair was completely unsuccessful.

Keywords: image repair, Benoit, rhetorical analysis, crisis communication, sports, Manziel

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The story goes like this: Two sportswriters are sitting in a dining car when a naked Babe Ruth streaks past followed by a woman wielding a butcher knife. One sportswriter turns to the other and says: ‘I didn’t see anything. Did you?’” (Kramer, 1987, para. 1). An editorial published in the *New York Times* in 1987 started with this antidote. The author discussed the “rewritten rules of sports journalism”—how in the past the story above would simply be passed from sportswriter to sportswriter until it became an urban legend. It would never turn to ink. The reporter would bury the story in exchange for premium access to the athletes and organization (Connor, 2010). Sports coverage had shifted, and in her time, that story would grace the cover of every national newspaper the following day, complete with a colored picture (Kramer, 1987).

Today, the rewriting of sports journalism rules beginning a few decades ago is complete, assisted by technological advances (Connor, 2010). The aforementioned anecdote would not only make newspaper headlines; it would hit Twitter in an instant, followed shortly by cell phone pictures and bite-sized video clips. In 1987, “sportswriters still [knew] much more than they [were] telling about their subjects’ private lives” (Kramer, 1987, para. 5). Now, there is little information about a public figure that, if newsworthy, a reporter keeps unpublished (Firm, 2013). Fans crave every detail about their favorite sports figures’ personal lives and behavior, especially if it affects their performance on the field (Mynk, 2009) (Connor, 2010) (Kramer, 1987). In addition, many athletes have built up hero personae for themselves to capitalize on marketing opportunities, which makes it easier to condemn them when they fail to live up to those ideals (Connor, 2010).

A few decades ago, sports news included game scores, highlights from recent contests and the latest incredible on-field accomplishments and failures (Cohn, 1999). Today, people turn

to sports news and are greeted with stories about player arrests, failed drug tests and unacceptable actions by coaches (“Off-field issues,” 2012). Unfortunately, readers are fascinated by scandal, and “the scandalous behaviour [sic] of sports people is being increasingly reported by a media that seeks sensational copy to sell its product” (Connor, 2010, p. 2012). The incredible on-field athletic accomplishments are overshadowed by off-field scandals (Keating, 2014). Unfortunately, with the invention of the Internet and social media, this is the case more and more frequently. Athletes’ private lives, and the mistakes they make when they are not on the field performing their jobs, are no longer private, and they are held to higher standards for their off-field behavior (“The Politics,” 2014). Sports scandals are inevitable (Connor, 2010).

Athletes’ reputations are often damaged through publicity of these negative incidents, and they are forced to find strategies to repair their images. Sadly, there have been many notable examples of this of late. One recent case involves former National Football League (NFL) player Ray Rice. Rice was involved in a disturbing incident last year in which he struck his then-fiancée Janay Rice (formerly Palmer) in a casino elevator. He lost his job and has been permanently stigmatized (Elliott, 2014). Later that year, another NFL player was involved in a violence incident when Adrian Peterson, running back for the Minnesota Vikings, was accused of child abuse. He left significant injuries on his four-year-old son when he spanked him with a tree branch (“The Politics,” 2014). Examples of other recent scandals in the NFL include quarterback Brett Favre exposing himself via text to a league employee; Bill Belichick and the Patriots videotaping another team’s signals and plays in “Spygate” and, several years later, being accused of lowering the air pressure in their game footballs in “Deflategate”; and quarterback Michael Vick running a dog-fighting ring (“Top 10,” n.d.) (McCann, 2016) (Givens, 2011).

Baseball has had repeated issues with image damage due to steroids. One of the most notable involved Alex Rodriguez, a member of the New York Yankees, who served the longest suspension for using steroids in MLB history, 162 games plus the playoffs (Eder, 2014). Cycling has also had issues with doping, including positive tests by Tour de France winners Lance Armstrong and Floyd Landis (“Top 10,” n.d.). One of the NBA’s biggest scandals came in 2007 when it was discovered that a referee, Tim Donaghy, was betting on league games (“Donaghy sentenced,” 2008). It also weathered a storm in 2003 when NBA superstar Kobe Bryant was accused of sexual assault and in 2009 when NBA star Gilbert Arenas brought guns into his team’s locker room and an incident ensued (Tuchman & Cabell, 2003) (Scott, 2015). Golf’s biggest disgrace of the past decade involved its greatest player, Tiger Woods, who made headlines when he was outed by several mistresses while married to his wife Elin in 2009 (“Top 10,” n.d.).

College athletics has also had its share of image problems (Schackner, 2014). Duke lacrosse was involved in a major scandal in 2006 when three players were accused of rape (“Top 10,” n.d.). All charges were dropped 13 months later, but not before irreversible damage had been done by the negative media coverage—the athletes had been convicted in the court of public opinion for months, the remaining lacrosse season was cancelled, and the coach was forced out to “create a fresh start for the program” (Looking back,” n.d., para. 6).

Many of the collegiate issues involved players receiving improper benefits from boosters. Reggie Bush, former running back for the University of Southern California, returned his Heisman in 2010 after being caught accepting gifts, and five Ohio State football players were suspended for selling their memorabilia for free tattoos in 2011 (Givens, 2011). Most recently, former Florida State University quarterback and Heisman winner Jameis Winston found himself

at the center of various issues. The most serious was a sexual assault accusation in 2012; no criminal charges were filed (Vaughan, 2014). Winston has also been accused of causing thousands of dollars' worth of damage with a pellet gun; stealing crab legs from a Publix and soda from a Burger King; yelling a profane, sexually charged phrase from a table in the middle of campus; and accepting benefits for autographs (Vaughan, 2014).

Another case involving a former Heisman winner and collegiate football star that has been playing out the past few years is the continual image destruction and reparation of Johnny Manziel. Manziel is a former NFL quarterback for the Cleveland Browns and the former quarterback for the Texas A&M University Aggies. He has been repeatedly involved in incidents casting him in a negative light, usually involving partying and alcohol, but also taking a serious turn with an alleged domestic violence incident (Reedy, 2015) (Boyd, 2016). This paper examines the many incidents surrounding Manziel and his crisis communication after each problem. It conducts a rhetorical analysis of his communication using Benoit's Image Repair Theory to determine which strategies Manziel used to try to fix his damaged reputation and the effectiveness of those strategies.

Problem History

In less than four years, Johnny Manziel went from working over opponents on the field to being investigated for domestic violence off of it. He lived almost a double life, switching between roles as an incredible athlete on the field and a notorious troublemaker off of it.

Jonathan Manziel is an incredible football player and the only redshirt freshman to win the Heisman Trophy.

Where many of us would shrink under the pressure, he is most at home on the football field, between the lines, under center and in front of 100,000 screaming nut-jobs. This is where Jonathan Manziel can be himself.

But Johnny Football is a totally different person.

He parties with Mark Cuban, Justin Timberlake, Drake, Jessica Biel and the entire Duck Dynasty crew. He rubs elbows with hip-hop and NBA stars, vacations in Cabo and tees it up at Pebble Beach. But he also gets into meaningless twitter spats with people who buy the ink by the barrel (looking at you, Paul Finebaum and Matt Hayes). He trolls opposing fan bases, rips on his own college campus and gets kicked-out of prestigious summer camps (Gall, 2013, para. 1-4).

Which is the real Manziel? Time will tell, but according to Manziel in a 2013 profile, “my name’s not Jonathan” (Thompson, 2013, para. 113).

The anger issues, drinking and difficulties dealing with his celebrity image first hit the public eye in the early morning hours of June 29, 2012, though few outside of College Station took note (Sallee, 2013). Manziel and a friend were involved in a fight with a middle-aged man outside a downtown bar after his friend reportedly directed a racial slur at the man (Gall, 2013). Manziel jumped in between as it turned physical and was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, failure to identify himself and possession of two fake IDs after police discovered his real one (Reedy, 2015). The fact Manziel could carry false identification illustrates the dramatic shift his fame has seen since that time. The incident produced a shirtless mugshot, and Manziel later pleaded guilty to failure to identify but had the other charges dismissed (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014) (“A timeline,” n.d.) (Gleeson, 2013).

Due to his arrest, Manziel was suspended indefinitely from the football team (Gall, 2013). History was almost rewritten as a result of the incident; Manziel intended to transfer schools until his suspension was lifted by the school's dean of student life following an appeal (Chase, 2013). After winning the starting quarterback job, Manziel's on-field play dominated all talk about him until Halloween when Manziel officially added Internet sensation to his resume (Sallee, 2013). He showed up to a party in a Scooby Doo onesie and quickly became the main attraction, drinking and dancing with scantily dressed young women. Photographs documented the night for everyone on social media, though his audience was still small ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014).

Manziel managed to keep headlines focused on his on-field play the rest of the regular season, including leading his team to a huge upset victory over then No. 1-ranked Alabama on the road in Tuscaloosa. While the win was certainly a triumphant moment for Manziel, according to those closest to him, it may have also started of his downward spiral (Anderson, 2015). "In a matter of three heart-stopping hours, Manziel...had become [sic] a national figure" (Anderson, 2015, para. 24). His life completely changed. He went from a few thousand followers to a million on Twitter, and he could not venture into College Station without causing a scene. After winning the Heisman Trophy later that season, he started feeling the pressure to live up to the hype, and according to a family friend, "at some point, demons started running through his head" (Anderson, 2015, para. 30).

After the season ended, Manziel's private life appeared on the Internet again on December 20, 2012, when he sat courtside at an NBA game in Houston and posted a photo of himself with the team's star in the locker room after the game (Sallee, 2013). The next night he was again courtside in Dallas to watch the Mavericks take on the Miami Heat and posed with

LeBron James after the game (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014). Speculation began as to how a college kid obtained such pricy seats to which Manziel replied on Twitter, “Bought myself a little birthday present tonight stop hating! #HEATvsMAVS” (Sallee, 2013). Reports of his family’s great wealth eventually started to surface, and the event marked the shift in perception of Manziel from a college football star to a full-blown celebrity (Sallee, 2013).

Manziel returned to the field shortly after New Year’s to lead his team to a season-ending Cotton Bowl win over Oklahoma, but less than 24 hours after the victory, his off-field antics returned to center stage (Bender, 2013). He posted a photo of himself holding a fan of money alongside two friends on Instagram, captioning the image “casino ballin” (Reedy, 2015, para. 7). The picture was deleted shortly afterwards but replaced with a tweet from Manziel that read, “Nothing illegal about being 18+ in a casino and winning money...KEEP HATING!” (Reedy, 2015, para. 7). The next night he appeared in photos on TMZ holding a bottle of champagne in a 21 and over Dallas night club—though the owner stated Manziel’s parents were present, making alcohol consumption legal in the state (Gleeson, 2013) (Reedy, 2015). Manziel later admitted to the Associated Press his decision making needed to improve in the future (Sallee, 2013). He returned to the NBA courtside scene about a week later, watching the Rockets take on the L.A. Clippers and meeting superstar Chris Paul, and rounded out the month by guest-starring in a video with Texas A&M trick-shot masters and YouTube stars “Dude Perfect” (Gleeson, 2013).

Manziel’s partying lifestyle was in full swing by February with a trip to New Orleans for Mardi Gras and the Super Bowl (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014). Social media was flooded with images of Manziel partying with celebrities Justin Timberlake and Jessica Biel, the Duck Dynasty crew, Patriots’ tight end Rob Gronkowski and Ole Miss linebacker Denzel Nkemdiche

(Sallee, 2013). He enjoyed the NFL championship game from prime lower bowl seats (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014).

About a week later, the San Antonio Express-News reported that Manziel was now a full-time online student (Bender, 2013). He began the semester in a residential course at Texas A&M but switched to online only courses after attending the first day; according to Manziel, his presence caused a bigger distraction than he expected (Sallee, 2013). The story was spun into a negative one as people questioned the legitimacy of his course load (Sallee, 2013). Shortly afterwards, the Manziel family trademarked the phrase “Johnny Football” and filed a lawsuit against an individual selling T-shirts that included the nickname (Bender, 2013).

Manziel kicked off his Spring Break with a visit to Toronto to visit Canadian native and rapper Drake (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014). He then traded the cold for a more tropical location, heading to Cabo, Mexico, with friends to party and drink (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014). Photos of the trip surfaced online, including one of Manziel shirtless with a Texas Longhorns tattoo he later admitted was a fake (Gall, 2013). The previous month Manziel had been caught giving the Longhorns’ famous Hook ‘em hand signal on stage at a concert, and this double betrayal did not sit well with Aggie fans (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014).

After the break, spring practice started up for the Aggies, and as a testament to Manziel’s fame, a small incident on the field became a national storyline. A defensive graduate assistant was celebrating a Manziel interception, one of three interceptions he had thrown on the day (Gall, 2013). Out of frustration, Manziel shoved him, and the two had to be separated by the other players and coaches (Gall, 2013). Commenting on the incident, Manziel claimed the graduate assistant pushed him first (“A timeline,” n.d.). Regardless, the event was a common occurrence on a football field that only became a story because of Manziel (Sallee, 2013).

Four days later, on March 27, 2013, Manziel decided to take a break from Twitter to focus on football and distance himself from the negativity surrounding it (Sallee, 2013). However, his Instagram account remained alive and well; he added a picture of himself and LeBron James after a Heat-Spurs game a short while later (Sallee, 2013). The Twitter hiatus lasted less than two weeks (“Jonny Manziel’s,” 2014).

The next few months were relatively quiet for Manziel. He threw out the first pitch at a Rangers game, appeared at a charity event back home in Kerrville (where a photograph surfaced of him in a car smoking weed that turned out to be Photoshopped) and attended a Yankees game and a UFC match on the same day in April (Gleeson, 2013). The next month he threw out another first pitch, this time at a San Diego Padres game; shot a 79 at famed California golf course Pebble Beach; and worked out with quarterback guru George Whitfield, reportedly completing 25 of 27 passes while blindfolded (Gleeson, 2013). The beginning of June, Manziel and an Aggie teammate starred in country singer Granger Smith’s music video for “Silverado Bench Seat,” and Manziel tweeted about attending an NBA Finals game in Miami (Gall, 2013).

His next major headline appeared on June 16, 2013. Manziel received a parking ticket for parking the wrong way on a street outside his house and having windows tinted too dark (Gall, 2013). At the time, he was actually out of town, but, bizarrely, the officer who wrote the ticket actually knocked on his house’s door and then called and had a conversation with Manziel (Thompson, 2013) (Gall, 2013). His father later claimed the officers knew whose car it was and were harassing Manziel (Thompson, 2013). Shortly afterwards, his new black Mercedes-Benz, which his father bought because he did not want him “to do something stupid to get it for himself,” (Thompson, 2013, para. 1) was keyed (Gall, 2013). Manziel expressed his frustration by tweeting “Bull---- like tonight is a reason why I can’t wait to leave College

Station... whenever it may be” (Gleeson, 2013, para. 17). He followed that tweet with another: “Don't ever forget that I love A&M with all my heart, but please, please walk a day in my shoes” (Gleeson, 2013, para. 17). A couple of days later, the Texas A&M student body had started to turn on him as the college newspaper ran a column titled “Johnny, Be Gone” (Thompson, 2013). He ended his rough month by having beer poured on him and getting kicked out of a University of Texas frat party (Reedy, 2015).

On July 13, 2013, Manziel was back in the news after leaving the Manning Passing Academy, where he was serving as a counselor, before the camp ended (Bender, 2013). Initially, Manziel stated he left due to illness and dehydration, but reports surfaced that he was asked to leave by Archie Manning after showing up hung over to sessions and missing meetings because of his late nights (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014). On ESPN’s SportsCenter, Manziel claimed he missed a meeting because his cell phone died and he overslept and that had nothing to do with him leaving the camp (Wesseling, 2013). He declined to answer whether he drank alcohol while at the camp (Wesseling, 2013). The following evening, Manziel was spotted out in a popular nightclub and bar district in College Station and a few days afterward attended the ESPYs in Los Angeles (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014) (Gall, 2013). Two weeks later, Manziel was thrown out of another University of Texas frat party and peppered with beer cans; however, he returned to another party the next day wearing a Tim Tebow Jets jersey (Gall, 2013). According to TMZ, Manziel was asked to exit the first party because he was underage drinking (Leslie, 2016).

The month ended with ESPN Magazine publishing an in-depth profile piece on Manziel (Gall, 2013). The release date was less than ideal as Aggie practices started only a few weeks later. The article was a “brilliant piece” that “paint[ed] a bizarre and blindingly accurate portrait of Manziel’s upbringing, internal struggle and change in personality after gaining fame from his

Heisman Trophy exploits” (Gall, 2013, para. 22). His family said at the time they only saw the true Johnny on the football field; the rest of the time he was consumed by stress and his emotions (Thompson, 2013).

The article included several interesting revelations. It was the first time Manziel’s drinking was identified as a possible serious issue with his father Paul stating that he thought Manziel drank to help relieve the massive stress he was under. He also revealed that Johnny briefly underwent counseling for alcohol and a few months later saw a therapist but stopped his appointments because he was too busy (Thompson, 2013).

The most interesting quote of the interview came when Johnny’s father expressed his fear for what could happen if Manziel did not mature quickly:

"Yeah," Paul says one evening, driving in his car, "it could come unraveled. And when it does, it's gonna be bad. Real bad."

He imagines a late-night call, and the cable news ticker, and the next morning's headlines.

"It's one night away from the phone ringing," he says, "and he's in jail. And you know what he's gonna say? 'It's better than all the pressure I've been under. This is better than that'" (Thompson, 2013, para. 73-75).

It also contained several intriguing anecdotes. The author revealed Manziel had broken multiple phones, pretended to snap or flung golf clubs through the air after bad shots on the golf course and lashed out at relatives due to his temper. He once cussed at his aunt after she made a comment about him not wanting to meet an NFL player at a restaurant. He was simply exhausted of people. He could not take a trip to a local mall because of his fame, and his parents had to supply bodyguards whenever he left his home. His mom recalled once seeing a new look in his

eyes, one of panic and fear, when a crowd was trying to crush toward him after one game.

Manziel has also broken up with a girlfriend after questioning whether she was only with him for the fame (Thompson, 2013).

The author conveyed Manziel's amusement, then disappointment after running into an old teacher on the golf course and realizing her autograph request was in earnest. At the time, he signed every autograph in sight—his parents would bring him boxes full of items to sign; something he committed himself to after remembering a time when Tiger Woods had promised to meet him at the Isleworth clubhouse to sign one for him and never showed (Thompson, 2013).

The article showed how despite his fame and accomplishments, Johnny was still a boy at heart, having his mother do his laundry, forgetting to pack clothes on a trip home and calling his sister to ask how to make macaroni and cheese. His father saw a lot of Johnny in himself—the temper, immaturity and struggle with local rumors about the family name; they even share a birthday. The difference was Paul's father was never around and never helped him reach his full athletic potential in golf. Paul promised to do the opposite when he was a father and did so, maybe to a fault (Thompson, 2013).

The profile also told of the rift between the Manziel family and Texas A&M. Manziel and his family had a growing frustration with the school's marketing expectations, selfish behavior and the lack of care for Manziel's wellbeing; thought the school was leaking private information about Manziel; and accused them of holding back his Heisman trophy to use for their own fundraising and recruiting efforts. Johnny's on-field exploits brought an economic boost for College Station, a new football atrium for the school and a million dollar raise for the head football coach, but a fishbowl "he [was] not mature enough to escape" for himself (Thompson, 2013, para. 39). Texas A&M's policy of not letting freshman speak to the media

also hurt him. They “wouldn’t let anyone know Jonathan Manziel, so they all fell in love with Johnny Football” (Thompson, 2013, para. 29).

Perhaps the biggest storyline of Manziel’s 2013 offseason broke only a day before Texas A&M began their football camp (Gall, 2013). On August 4, 2013, ESPN’s Outside the Lines reported the NCAA was investigating Manziel to find out if he had been paid for signing autographs on memorabilia (Wheeland, 2015b). He reportedly signed more than 250 items for a prominent eBay autograph broker in the days before and after the 2012 Alabama-Texas A&M game, and his personal assistant later informed the broker that Manziel would no longer sign items without compensation (Gall, 2013). According to witnesses, a second signing of hundreds of items allegedly took place for a five-figure payment (more than \$10,000) during the 2013 Discover BCS National Championship festivities in Miami (Rovell & Gubar, 2013) (Gall, 2013) (Leslie, 2016). He reportedly signed up to 4,400 items (Townsend, 2013). His father claimed many of the autographs were fake, but multiple autograph authentication companies examined and declared them real (Rovell & Gubar, 2013). Video emerged of Manziel actually signing items, but Manziel denied to the NCAA that he was compensated or that he knew the items would be sold and no proof of a cash exchange was found (Wheeland, 2015b) (Patterson, 2013). As a result, Manziel was suspended only the first half of the Aggie’s season opener against Rice for an “inadvertent violation” (Wheeland, 2015b).

When the Aggies practices began, the team and Manziel decided it was best that he did not talk to the media (Gall, 2013). During their season opener, he entered the game in the second half after serving his suspension but was benched by his coach in the fourth quarter after receiving an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for taunting the opposing team (“Johnny

Manziel's," 2014). Earlier in the game, Manziel was also caught on camera signing an autograph in the air for the opposing defense ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014).

Manziel's play dominated storylines during the season except for a short trip on December 6, 2013, to a Las Vegas casino to celebrate his 21st birthday with A-list actor and rapper Drake, but the party was reportedly subdued for a Manziel bash ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014). After completing his career at Texas A&M with a comeback win over Duke in the Chick-fil-A Bowl, Manziel met back up with Drake to kick off the new year in Miami and take in a Heat game courtside ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014). Three days later he traveled across the country to Los Angeles for the BCS National Championship Game where he was spotted in an L.A. club partying and leading Florida State fans in their signature tomahawk chop before being featured as a guest on ESPN's pregame show ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014).

For the next four months, Manziel mostly disappeared from gossip headlines, preparing for the NFL draft. On May 8, 2014, he joined the NFL as a Cleveland Brown after texting the team's quarterbacks coach that the team should choose him so they could "wreck this league" together (Reedy, 2015, para. 14). After his selection, he crossed the stage with his hands in the air forming his signature "money" gesture (Oliver, 2015). He was spotted out celebrating later that night with plenty of celebrities and champagne (McManamon, 2016d). Though the Browns did take Manziel in the first round, his drinking may have influenced his draft selection. The Houston Texans were reportedly considering choosing Manziel with the No. 1 overall pick. They told him to be on his best behavior and stay out of the limelight until the draft took place. He responded shortly afterwards by drinking too much and making "a spectacle of himself" (para. 36) at the Masters golf tournament, cementing the Texans' decision not to draft him with the top pick (Bayless, 2015).

Unfortunately, Manziel's problems followed him to Cleveland. He purchased a downtown apartment and started hanging with a group of people who "didn't have Johnny's best interests in their hearts" according to his family (Anderson, 2015, para. 32). "'Johnny started to party a little harder,' said a family member... 'It got out of control'" (Anderson, 2015, para. 33).

Despite a quiet start to Manziel's offseason, he was back in the headlines on May 26, pictured at a pool party in Las Vegas with notorious partier and NFL player Rob Gronkowski (Reedy, 2015). Shortly afterwards, two of the most iconic snapshots of Manziel's partying regime surfaced (Wheeland, 2015b). First, on June 9, an image emerged of Manziel at the Austin X Games in the middle of a pool lying on an inflatable swan drinking champagne (Reedy, 2015) (McManamon, 2016d). A week later, while at Drake's Houston Appreciation Weekend festivities, Manziel was videoed pretending to use an enormous stack of money as a cell phone and shouting "I can't hear you, there's too much money in my [explicit] hand" (Wheeland, 2015b, para. 12). Two weeks later, Manziel responded to criticism of his actions by telling reporters at the NFL's Rookie Symposium that "I'm not going to change for anybody. I am going to enjoy my time off. I work very hard at my job which doesn't get reported and won't get reported" (Reedy, 2015, para. 18).

On July 6, 2014, the incident that Manziel's employers, the Cleveland Browns, found most disturbing hit the Internet; an image emerged on *BustedCoverage.com* of Manziel in a bathroom tightly rolling up a \$20 bill the previous night (Reedy, 2015) (Wheeland, 2015b). This practice is often done to snort recreational drugs though Manziel was not found with drugs that night and has never failed a drug test (Wheeland, 2015b). The team admitted shortly afterwards that they were "alarmed" by some of Manziel's actions (McManamon, 2016d).

He met with the Browns coaches, general manager and owner July 26, the day before training camp opened, about his off-field incidents (Reedy, 2015). About two weeks later, Manziel was handed his first team fine after being late to a team meeting because, in his words, he “misread the schedule” (Wheeland, 2015b, para. 21). He made his NFL debut a week later on August 18, 2014, in a pedestrian four-series showing in a preseason game against the Redskins (Reedy, 2015). This time, his on-field behavior managed to make headlines for the wrong reasons after he was shown on national television giving the middle finger to the Washington bench (Wheeland, 2015b). He was fined \$12,000 by the league and officially lost the starting quarterback battle two days after the incident (Wheeland, 2015b).

Three months passed with little playing time and few storylines. On November 22, 2014, Manziel burst back onto the gossip pages. He was involved in an altercation in the lobby of the posh downtown Cleveland hotel and apartment complex where he lives at 2:36 a.m., hours before he was supposed to fly with the Browns to Atlanta (Reedy, 2015). Reportedly, an overzealous (and intoxicated) fan approached Manziel and his friends and started the fight, during which punches were thrown and the police called, though no arrests were made and no charges were filed (Cabot, 2014d). Though he was not at fault, Manziel’s bosses were upset about his whereabouts in the early hours of the morning (Cabot, 2014d).

The focus shifted back on to Manziel’s on-field play the next week. He entered a game against Buffalo and scored on a 10-yard scramble, flashing his signature money sign after the score (Reedy, 2015). The on-field focus in the media did not last long as a week and a half later *Yahoo!* published a detailed report of Manziel’s crazy, celebrity lifestyle at Texas A&M (McManamon, 2016d). Two weeks later in Manziel’s first professional career start, the money sign reappeared—though this time on the hands of the opposing Bengals players after three sacks

(Reedy, 2015). His season came to an end the following week with a hamstring injury, and Manziel admitted to the media, “It’s been a year of growing up for me. It’s a job for me now. I have to take it more seriously than maybe I did at first,” (para. 32) acknowledging for the first time that his behavior may be an issue (Reedy, 2015).

The following week though on December 27, 2014, Manziel was initially absent from his mandatory injury treatment after reportedly throwing a huge party the night before that many of his teammates attended (“Johnny Manziel fined,” 2014). The team had to send security to his apartment to find him, and Manziel was fined for being late (“Johnny Manziel fined,” 2014). Two days later, at his final media session, Manziel claimed the party reports were completely false but admitted he realized most people would not believe him (Reedy, 2015). He also stated that he knew “it’s about action. It’s about being accountable and doing what I’m gonna say instead of looking like a jack---” (Reedy, 2015, para. 34).

Manziel’s 2014-15 offseason did not have a promising start. Hours after acknowledging a change in his behavior was needed, he bolted from Cleveland to South Florida for another “crazy night” of partying with friends (Cabot, 2014f). A video of him in South Beach wishing NBA superstar LeBron James a happy birthday appeared on his Instagram feed (Reedy, 2015). Photos appeared on social media of him celebrating James’ birthday with Hollywood actor Ryan Phillippe and then later ringing in the New Year poolside with cocktails and champagne at a posh Miami hotel (Salinas, 2015). Less than a week later, Manziel was spotted giving hecklers the middle finger in a Houston nightclub, which resulted in them tossing drinks at him and his posse (Wheeland, 2015b). After a change of clothes, he partied on into the night (Wheeland, 2015b). From there, images of Manziel partying on vacation with Josh Gordon in Aspen, CO, came to light (Cabot, 2015a). A few weeks later an ESPN article reported his lack of preparation and

poor practice sessions led to a disappointing season (Reedy, 2015). An anonymous teammate called Manziel a “100 percent joke” (Wheeland, 2015a, para. 2).

On February 2, 2015, Manziel’s publicist and the Cleveland Browns released statements that the oft-troubled quarterback had entered a rehabilitation program on January 28 for undisclosed treatment (Wheeland, 2015b) (Fowler, 2015a). Proving the power of Manziel’s celebrity status, his rehab trip filled the headlines and dominated the NFL rumor mill less than a day after future Hall-of-Famer Tom Brady won his fourth Super Bowl ring (Wheeland, 2015b). In regard to his decision to seek treatment, Manziel’s publicist’s statement said, “Johnny knows there are areas in which he needs to improve in order to be a better family member, friend and teammate, and he thought the offseason was the right time to take this step” (Cabot, 2015a). The Browns reiterated that it was Manziel’s decision alone to enter rehab and pledged their support during the process (Cabot, 2015a).

Before he entered treatment, Manziel took a trip back to his hometown to gather with about 100 family members for his grandmother’s 70th birthday party. He seemed relaxed and at peace. Family members could see Manziel was determined to alter his partying ways (Anderson, 2015).

Several weeks later a source reported to ESPN that Manziel was expected to end his rehab stint in early April and be back with the team April 20, when the Cleveland Browns opened their offseason workout program (Fowler, 2015a). Their general manager, Ray Farmer, confirmed that he expected Manziel to participate in the workouts but said that his release date would be determined fully by those in charge of his treatment (Fowler, 2015a).

He took a short break from treatment to be with his family in Tyler for Easter. During his trip, “there were more glimmers that the old Johnny—the Johnny with the bright eyes, the easy

smile and the quick wit—was back” (Anderson, 2015, para. 43). He was “the sober life of the party” and ready to get back on the field and prove himself in Cleveland to make his family proud (Anderson, 2015, para. 44).

On April 11, after more than ten weeks of treatment, Manziel was released from the rehabilitation center, Caron Pennsylvania (Fowler, 2015b) (Manziel, 2015). The exact nature of his treatment was not disclosed, but the facility where he stayed specialized in drug and alcohol addictions. Three days later, Manziel made his first public appearance after leaving rehab. He was spotted sitting in the VIP section with his girlfriend at a Texas Rangers baseball game (Associated Press, 2015a).

Later that day, Manziel issued his first public comments via the Cleveland Browns’ website. He thanked his family, friends, the Browns organization and the fans for their support, apologizing and taking responsibility for his actions. Manziel said he had learned a tremendous amount in the past months but realized his recovery was an ongoing process. He asked for continued privacy about the matter as he returned to the football field the following week and worked to become a better athlete and individual (Manziel, 2015). Two days after issuing his statement, Manziel had a courtside view for the Cleveland Cavaliers’ first playoff game (Dubin, 2015a).

At the start of the Browns’ offseason workouts in April, Manziel received positive reviews from teammates about the changes he had made in his life. Joe Haden reported Manziel did not show up at his house to play pool because he was putting in extra hours at the team’s facility, and Joe Thomas, who had previously been critical of Manziel and how he had lost the team’s trust, stated Manziel’s attitude and actions were a “night and day” improvement from the previous year (Dubin, 2015b, para. 2).

The positivity lasted until May 30, when Manziel's first post-rehab incident came to light. Manziel was attending the AT&T Byron Nelson golf tournament when, according to reports, an 18-year-old fan asked Manziel for an autograph or photo. When Manziel refused, the kid continued badgering and heckling him for a couple of hours before Manziel lost his temper and through a water bottle at the fan as he was leaving the course. The police were involved, but they dismissed the incident and did not file a report (McManamon & Fowler, 2015). The Browns and their head coach also dismissed the incident as a non-story (Associated Press, 2015b).

A few weeks later, Manziel faced the media for the first time since leaving rehab. He apologized to the team and fans and told reporters his focus was now on football, and he was going to try his best to keep the media reports involving him focused on that as well. He acknowledged his rookie season was "a disaster" and his off-field antics had been a distraction to the team, which he felt bad about (McManamon, 2015a, para. 3). He admitted to being overwhelmed by the "Johnny Football" character and hysteria that had started growing while he was at Texas A&M and to buying into the hype that surrounded it, losing himself in the process and buckling under the pressure. One way he was going to try to separate himself from that previous persona was by cutting out his traditional money sign celebration (McManamon, 2015a).

Manziel kept out of the spotlight in the ensuing months though rumors did start to fly in the middle of July that there was a chance he could be cut (Moranor, 2015). A couple of weeks later, the Browns head coach Pettine refuted those reports and said Manziel had an opportunity to win the starting job if his on-field performance warranted it (McManamon, 2015b). He played well in his first two preseason games before missing the final two with an injury and was not named the starter heading into the season. He played and started sporadically during the season

when the starter, Josh McCown, went out due to injury and offered equally sporadic play on the field, showing a few flashes of greatness and a few equally awful ones (McManamon, 2016b).

His off-field life once again took center stage on October 12 when Manziel was questioned by the police about a bizarre roadside domestic incident involving his then-girlfriend Colleen Crowley. Multiple witnesses called 911 after observing Manziel's car flying recklessly down the highway at about 90 miles per hour. They reported the driver and a female passenger were arguing, the female tried to jump out of the car while it was moving, and the male had put her in a headlock to keep her from exiting (Hanzus, 2015) (Cabot, 2015). The car then made a dangerous exit off the highway cutting across several lanes (Cabot, 2015). According to the police report, Manziel would not give Crowley her phone to call her parents, so she threw his wallet out of the car (Hanzus, 2015). Crowley first became upset when Manziel wanted to invite a friend to join them at the movies (Cabot, 2015b). When police arrived on the scene, the couple were still arguing. Crowley initially claimed Manziel had beaten her and pushed her head against the window (McManamon, 2016b) (Hanzus, 2015). She had an abrasion on her arm from when Manziel tried to stop her from exiting the moving car but did not want to press charges and later recanted her statement about his abuse (Hanzus, 2015) (Boren, 2015). Manziel admitted they had both been drinking earlier in the day (Crowley was described as intoxicated in the police report) but denied physically assaulting Crowley (Cabot, 2015). The police determined there was not enough evidence to arrest Manziel for domestic violence and neither was drunk enough to press charges (McManamon, 2016b) (Hanzus, 2015). Manziel and Crowley left together in his car (Hanzus, 2015).

Manziel tweeted about the incident a few days later stating he was embarrassed but that everything was fine. The Browns' general manager released a statement that the team was aware

of the incident, was taking it seriously and had talked to Manziel, but the conversation would remain private (Hanzus, 2015). Manziel later met with the NFL about the incident, but they determined there was insufficient evidence to discipline him (“NFL statement,” 2015).

Manziel returned to Texas A&M the weekend of November 7 to serve as an honorary captain for the Aggies home game (McManamon, 2016b). Pictures appeared of him on social media hitting up the college party scene, holding what appeared to be a beer and being kissed by a random blonde girl. A couple of college-aged girls also posted about being in his house and how Manziel had given one of them his very large gold chain (Hendricks, 2015).

After being named starter for the rest of the season on November 17, Manziel promised his head coach he would not embarrass the Browns with his behavior during their upcoming bye week (McManamon, 2016b). He also told the Cleveland media that “I don’t think anyone has to worry about me this (bye) week” (Kinsey, 2015, para. 1). Six days later, *Busted Coverage* and *TMZ* posted a video of Manziel in a club in Austin, TX, clutching a bottle of what DJ LX labeled “Dom Perignon” (pink champagne) on Instagram and singing along to a hip-hop song (Kinsey, 2015). Photos also appeared from his weekend in Austin where he served as an honorary captain at the Texas A&M game, and sources reported Manziel was drinking and partying with friends until all hours of the morning, going on a two-night bender (McManamon, 2016d) (TMZ Staff, 2015).

When asked about the videos, “Manziel hinted that the video of him posted Friday night with the bottle in his hand could be old” (Cabot, 2015c, para. 5). He refused to answer whether or not it actually was old or whether or not he was partying in Dallas over the weekend (Cabot, 2015c). The day after the video appeared, the Browns head coach announced Manziel had lost the starting job and been demoted to third string, voicing his frustrations with his player’s

behavior (McManamon, 2016b). A few days later, *FOX Sports* reported Manziel was demoted not because he was partying over the bye week but primarily because he lied to the team about the video. Manziel falsely told the Browns the video was old and asked friends to cover up for him and lie about when it was recorded (Parziale, 2015).

Manziel remained on the bench the next two games, even when McCown went down with a broken collarbone, but was named the starter heading into the team's December 13 game against San Francisco (McManamon, 2016b). The organization decided it needed to "further evaluate Manziel's ability on the field and how he handle[d] any success and failure off it," so the Browns had a better understanding of their quarterback situation for the future (McManamon, 2015e, para. 4). Manziel made headlines by signing a \$100 bill before the game against the 49ers and started the next three games with limited success (one win and two losses with up-and-down play) before another video appeared on the Internet on December 29 of Manziel rapping along to a Future song in a person's home (McManamon, 2016d) (McManamon, 2015f). On Tuesday, the Browns' coach said he planned to watch and then address the video with Manziel (McManamon, 2015f). Before he had a chance, Manziel arrived at the team facilities the next morning complaining of concussion-like symptoms and was placed in concussion protocol (Gribble, 2015). The next day he was ruled out of playing in the team's final game due to the injury (McManamon, 2016b).

NBC Sports reporter Mike Florio commented on the curious timing of Manziel's injury—how it was three days after the game, the day after the Brown's coach told reporters he planned to talk to Manziel about the video, but before the coach had a chance to do so. He wrote "it doesn't take a non-concussed brain to realize that the easiest way for a 23-year-old with a history of off-field issues and no self-awareness to avoid getting in trouble at work (again) would be to

claim that he has headaches and/or other symptoms of a concussion” (Florio, 2015, para. 2).

News reports also came out quoting multiple Browns coaches about how Manziel needed to fix his off-field behavior if he wanted to be a starting quarterback in the NFL (Withers, 2015).

Unfortunately, Manziel did not heed this advice, and on January 4, 2016, reports came out that he had been in Las Vegas, partying at the Hakkasan Night Club in the MGM Grand the previous Saturday, the night before the Browns last regular season game. The story took a bizarre turn from there with witnesses stating Manziel was wearing a blonde wig and fake mustache and introducing himself as “Billy.” He even tried to avoid paying his bill with a credit card, presumably so he did not have to disclose his name (Moss, 2016). He also visited the Planet Hollywood casino where a casino employee proclaimed to guests that Manziel was in the house after checking his ID (Boeck, 2016). A *USA TODAY* reporter stated he saw Manziel at the casino, and the waitress serving Manziel confirmed his identity (Brown, 2016). As the reports surfaced, Manziel attempted to refute the rumors by posting a photo on Instagram that showed himself and his dog laying on the floor together, captioning it “#SaturdayNights” and later tagging the location as Avon, Ohio (Boeck, 2016). It was his first post in two weeks, and Manziel seemed to be trying to convince everyone he had spent the night at home in Ohio with his pet (Brown, 2016).

The Sunday morning after his reported trip, Manziel did not show up to the Browns facility for his mandatory concussion protocol treatment. The team’s owner admitted to the media they had no idea where he was the entire day Sunday though he had come in for treatment Saturday morning (Petchesky, 2016). Multiple individuals unsuccessfully attempted to contact and locate him throughout the day (Wilson, 2016). A few weeks later, Manziel was fined for

missing his mandatory treatment, and the Browns' VP of football operations admitted they still were unsure exactly where he was at that time (Patra, 2016).

About the same time that reports of Manziel's Las Vegas trip surfaced, a reporter for the Cleveland Plains-Dealer, Grossi, stated on ESPN Radio that Manziel had showed up "disheveled and inebriated" to the Browns' facility the week before (Augustine, 2016, para. 2). He revealed he asked the Browns' coach, Pettine, if this had happened on Tuesday, which he denied. Grossi further stated that other people claimed the incident occurred Wednesday, which Pettine was not questioned about (Augustine, 2016). One news site stated plainly that Manziel showed clear signs of clinical alcohol dependence (alcoholism) with the Las Vegas incident proving his lifestyle was interfering with his work (Petchesky, 2016).

Manziel did appear at the teams' facility the Monday morning after his eventful weekend for the team's season exit meetings. One topic addressed at the meetings was the firing of the Browns' head coach and their general manager the day before (Cabot, 2016a). While at the facility, Manziel greeted a few teammates but did not enter the locker room or speak with reporters (Wilson, 2016).

After these latest incidents, reports surfaced that, according to an unnamed assistant, the Browns had been living constantly on edge, waiting for the next Manziel incident. The team was done with him, and reportedly the feeling was mutual as Manziel now wanted to play for the Cowboys (Augustine, 2016). However, they were not publicly admitting it for fear of diminishing what little trade value he had left (Wilson, 2016). The owner did hint that team members need to meet certain expectations to remain with the team though multiple teammates voiced their support and stated they felt like a new coaching staff could be a fresh start for him (Cabot, 2016a).

TMZ spotted Manziel buying wine the Tuesday after the meetings, a disconcerting event considering his history in rehab (TMZ Staff, 2016a). *USA TODAY* reported Bernie Kosar, an adored former Browns' quarterback, revealed Manziel had ignored more than a dozen attempts to get in touch to dispense advice on not squandering his career (Peter, 2016).

The following day, LeBron James' business manager announced that James' marketing firm, LRMR Management Co., would no longer be representing Manziel. He stated Manziel needed to focus on his personal growth and that the company was heading in a different direction professionally, expanding beyond marketing. James had commented earlier in the day that he was concerned about Manziel and hoped he would figure things out ("LeBron James' agency," 2016). Also on Wednesday, the North Olmsted Police Department released a video showing Manziel had been stopped and ticketed for driving with expired license plates the Saturday before his reported Las Vegas trip. While a minor incident in itself, it was yet another item for Manziel's undesirable off-field record (Steer & Gallek, 2016).

Later that week, the Browns announced the hiring of a new head coach, Hue Jackson. Reportedly, Jackson told the Browns' leaders during his interviews that he wanted to move on from Manziel, and they told him that would not be an issue (Young, 2016). In several initial interviews, Jackson seemed to confirm this, stating that the team needed a quarterback and repeatedly indicating the character of his players was of utmost importance, especially at the quarterback position. In addition, he termed Manziel's behavior as that of a "non-starter" though he did state he would evaluate Manziel before making a final decision on him (Cabot, 2016b).

Anticipating Manziel's release from the Browns, ESPN released a story surveying its writers for each of the 32 NFL teams that attempted to gauge each team's interest in Manziel. Only one reporter, assigned to the Rams, listed his team as moderately interested in Manziel. The

rest reported their teams had no interest in the troubled quarterback (Lisk, 2016). Instead of working hard to change this fact, Manziel was spotted at a club in Dallas on January 21 with NBA player Chandler Parsons along with a few other professional athletes and celebrities (Caplan, 2016). He continued his partying into the weekend, this time getting cozy with a female friend, indicating his relationship with girlfriend Colleen Crowley may be done. Busted Coverage released multiple photos and videos of Manziel drinking and dancing at a bar and private residence (Kinsey, 2016).

The Browns VP Sashi Brown again expressed concern about the repeated partying videos and stated Manziel had “something to prove before he’s back on the team next season” (Cabot, 2016c, para. 1). Manziel needed to show the Browns that being their quarterback was the number one priority in his life. Brown did leave the door open for his return but revealed the team would be closely monitoring his behavior during the off season (Cabot, 2016c). The Browns’ owner echoed these sentiments a few days later, stating the team’s relationship with Manziel was repairable, despite the fact that Jackson had yet to talk to Manziel (Ruiter, 2016a).

On January 30, that cracked door resoundingly slammed shut. The Fort Worth police department released a statement that Manziel was being investigated in a domestic disturbance issue that had taken place at about 2 a.m. that morning. Manziel and his (now) ex-girlfriend Colleen Crowley were involved in an incident; another woman overheard and called 911. When police arrived on the scene, Crowley was the only one who remained (Cabot, 2016d). She would not cooperate with officers, growing angry at their questions and rejecting their request to photograph any possible injuries (TMZ Staff, 2016c). She did tell police she was worried about Manziel’s well-being. When police could not locate him by phone or after checking various

locations, they launched a police helicopter to search for him. Eventually they determined he was safe. No arrests were made (Cabot, 2016d).

The NFL stated they were looking into the matter, and the Browns had no immediate comment (Cabot, 2016d). Browns fans though had had enough. They rallied on Twitter to start a “Johnny Free February” boycott on social media (Withers, 2016). News sites commented on the craziness of seeing a story about Manziel being searched for by helicopter rolling across the TV ticker and finally agreed on the seriousness of his issues (T. F. Smith, 2016).

Three days later, the Browns finally agreed with their fans; they released a statement asserting Manziel was not living up to the Browns’ expectations with his continual off-field incidents, and he was harming the team. They stated they would address his position on the team when the NFL rules allowed. Sources told *Cleveland.com* that the Browns would cut Manziel at the start of the new league year on March 9 (and not sooner due to salary cap implications) (Cabot, 2015e). On February 3, the day after the Browns statement, Manziel was spotted at a Mavericks game and approached by an *ESPN* reporter, but he refused to answer questions about anything other than basketball (Garcia, 2016).

Right when it looked like things could not get worse for Manziel, they did—significantly. Crowley decided to cooperate with police the previous Sunday and gave a full statement. On February 4, the disturbing details from the affidavit emerged. According to Crowley, she met Manziel in his hotel room at Hotel ZaZa in Dallas, TX, at about 2 a.m. on January 30. They started arguing over a girl, and Manziel threw her on a bed and prevented her from leaving the room. He then forced her downstairs to the valet, where she pleaded to the valet for help crying, “Please don’t let him take me. I’m scared for my life!” (Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 2). The valet replied that he was not sure what to do and let Manziel force her into the passenger’s seat. They drove to

Crowley's car, and Manziel forced her to get into the passenger seat. She jumped out as he started to drive, and ran to hide, but he drove back, grabbed her by the hair and threw her back into the car. He struck her on the ear with his open palm for running. She responded by hitting him as she was fearful for her life, but Manziel threw her; she hit her head on the window and fell to the floor. He pulled Crowley back into the seat, yelled at her to stop and refused to hand over her phone (Fitzgerald, 2016).

As they started to drive toward her apartment, Crowley started crying and told Manziel she hated him. He responded by saying he would "drop [her] off, take [her] car] and go kill himself" (Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 3). Thinking he might be using some type of drugs or having a severe mental breakdown, Crowley attempted to pacify him by saying she loved him and they could work things out. She became terrified as he started to laugh and then responded to her tears by stating, "Shut up or I'll kill us both!" (Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 3). She pleaded with him, and he replied confusingly that he would not kill her because she did not deserve it, that he would only kill himself (Fitzgerald, 2016).

Manziel and Crowley reached her apartment, where the mostly verbal argument continued, and Manziel shattered her phone, so she could not use it. She attempted to use her laptop to FaceTime her parents for help while he paced outside, but he returned and caught her by checking her computer. She became extremely fearful and grabbed a knife from the kitchen and moved toward him. He ran out of the apartment but remained in the parking lot, so she started pounding on a neighbor's door. Another neighbor heard and asked if she needed help to which she yelled, "Yes!," but Manziel had taken off on foot before they arrived (Fitzgerald, 2016).

The same day the affidavit was revealed, the official police report was released, albeit with some blacked-out lines. A few additional details were included by the reporting officers. The report collaborated that Crowley met Manziel at the hotel, and that he acted aggressively and struck her. She told officers he acted as if he had taken drugs and added that she was certain he was not drunk. Manziel then told her he was driving her home, so she would not drive in an intoxicated state. She stated he shouted angrily at her and struck her multiple times but did not give specifics. Crowley told officers they reached her apartment in the early morning hours but became annoyed when they started to question her about any further assault at her home. She said she ran out to ask a neighbor for help, and Manziel took off on foot. Crowley became more and more uncooperative, did not want to make a report and refused to have herself or her injuries photographed. She did say she was concerned for Manziel's well-being, so the helicopter was sent to search for him. Neither the helicopter nor officers on patrol were able to locate him, and several calls to friends and family members in attempt to reach Manziel were unsuccessful. Another officer finally reached his father, who said he had seen Manziel, and he was fine. Manziel's father did not want to comment further and asked not to be contacted unless a warrant was issued. (Boyd, 2016).

TMZ also posted a recording of the 911 call from that night on February 4. A neighbor reported hearing Crowley's screams and investigated the noise, finding Crowley outside. Crowley told her that her boyfriend had "beat her up," but she did not want the neighbor to call 911. The neighbor decided she should call anyways, and her husband waited with Crowley for the police to come (TMZ Staff, 2016b, para. 2).

The same day the affidavit became public, February 4, the Dallas police announced they had investigated the incident and were closing the case with no charges being filed (Fitzgerald,

2016). The Fort Worth police stated the alleged incident had taken place outside of their jurisdiction, so they were unable to further investigate, leaving it in the hands of the Dallas police (Ruiter, 2016b).

Continuing to fear for her well-being, Crowley applied for and received a restraining order against Manziel after a judge decided there was reasonable evidence that domestic violence had taken place (Fitzgerald, 2016). The order would stay in effect for two years and required Manziel to stay 500 feet away from Crowley's work and home and to pay legal fees of \$12,000 in addition to staying out of further trouble (Cabot, 2016g).

Manziel finally broke his silence the day the details emerged, ironically to *TMZ*. They reached him by phone, and Manziel completely denied all wrongdoing. He stated "he did NOT strike his ex-girlfriend Colleen Crowley during a January 30th dispute saying bluntly, 'It didn't happen'" (TMZ Staff, 2016c, para. 2). Manziel also denied threatening to kill himself, assuring *TMZ* he was stable, safe and secure. He then turned the conversation assuring them he had great things coming and was completely committed to football. He also stated, "I know I've been having fun but I just need to get my body right" (TMZ Staff, 2016c, para. 5).

Johnny Manziel's father, Paul Manziel, told a reporter he was working on getting his son better but had not been successful as of yet (Lopez, 2016). The following day, February 5, Paul revealed to *The Dallas Morning News* that Johnny had refused to enter rehab twice that week. Paul tried to get him into a facility Saturday, January 30, right after the domestic incident, but Johnny refused to stay. His father tried to force him into Carrollton Springs Hospital on Tuesday after he told police Johnny was suicidal, but Johnny was allowed to leave on his own. Paul was upset he was not forced to stay and stated, "I truly believe if they can't get him help, he won't live to see his 24th birthday" (Hairoopoulos, 2016, para. 2).

Manziel's agent, Erik Burkhart released a statement that he would no longer represent Manziel after serious discussions with Manziel and those close to him. His publicist, Denise Michaels, told the same reporters Manziel would remain a client with her firm (Cabot, 2016f). The Browns stated they were aware of the new report but had nothing to say, and the team's owner, Haslam, said he had tried and failed to reach Manziel several times (Fitzgerald, 2016). The NFL released a statement that they were reviewing the incident (Lopez, 2016).

While initially the police announced Manziel would not be charged, the case did not stay closed for long. The next night, Friday, February 5, the Dallas police sent out a news release that they had received a delayed assault complaint from the incident naming Manziel as the suspect ("Police investigate," 2016). Crowley had decided to press charges (Schwab, 2016a). The police also stated that delays in reporting this type of case was not uncommon ("Police investigate," 2016). The investigation was now on-going as detectives were looking into the incident and would decide whether any criminal charges would be filed (Schwab, 2016a). The maximum penalty Manziel could face was up to a year in jail and a fine of \$4,000 (Cabot, 2016i).

Crowley released a statement saying she had met with the domestic violence specialists at the police department, given a complete statement about the incident and answered any questions. She asked for privacy and stated it was in the hands of the Dallas police ("Police investigate," 2016). Her attorney also added that Manziel struck Crowley so forcefully that her left eardrum was ruptured and, over a week later, she still had lost hearing in the ear. Eventually, it was expected to heal (Gordon, 2016).

The NFL VP of football operations Troy Vincent stated the NFL, Browns and players association were all there to help Manziel, but that he was the one who needed to accept the help. He said the league was worried about Manziel's personal life, not his football career and had

reached out to try to help with their resources. Other players and coaches had also offered advice, but Manziel had yet to accept (Associated Press, 2016).

The barrage of negative news about Manziel continued February 9 when Mike Silver of the NFL Network reported Manziel had arrived drunk to practice on Wednesday, December 30, and the Browns lied about the incident, instead saying he was in concussion protocol. They did so to protect him, but they also enabled his irresponsible behavior. Silver stated a Browns player had relayed the event directly to him (Brinson, 2016a). However, the Browns immediately refuted this report and said an independent neurologist had examined Manziel after he arrived at the facility complaining of concussion symptoms and determined he had a concussion. Another source told ESPN's Adam Schefter that Manziel "looked terrible" and "wasn't drunk, but he was heavily hung over on something" (McManamon, 2016c, para. 1). They had not tried to engage in a cover-up but had no choice but to put him in concussion protocol after he complained of the symptoms per league rules. Other players told Schefter that Manziel had been late to a meeting earlier that morning, looked disheveled and the team removed him from said meeting (McManamon, 2016c).

On February 22, the head of the domestic violence unit for the Dallas police held a press conference to update the media on Manziel's case. Major Boyle stated the police hoped to finish their investigation by the end of the following week, which could result in Manziel facing charges. She added the police had interviewed witnesses including Crowley but were trying to build their case against Manziel before contacting him. His attorney had contacted them for information about the investigation. They had also received and reviewed Crowley's medical records and surveillance videos from the locations where the incident occurred (Cabot, 2016h).

Three days later, the Dallas police released a statement saying that they had finished their investigation, and the case had been sent to a grand jury, which would decide whether or not to charge him with domestic violence. No further details would be released while the case was awaiting review. Multiple legal experts weighed in on what this meant. Toby Shook, a Dallas criminal defense attorney, told *Cleveland.com* he thought the police were not confident enough in their case to charge Manziel, so they passed the decision on to the grand jury. He also revealed this was an unusual decision and might be a sign that the case had issues, such as Crowley waiting to go to the police or the police failing to locate Manziel the night the alleged act took place (Cabot, 2016i). Another Dallas criminal defense attorney told *ESPN* he thought there was enough evidence to charge Manziel and the police may be “giving Johnny more benefit of the doubt than they give every other citizen they deal with” (“Johnny Manziel domestic,” 2016, para. 9).

On March 11, Manziel was officially released by the Cleveland Browns with a one-sentence, eight-word line stating he had been waived (Cabot, 2016k). They held on to him a few extra days past the start of the new league year hoping for a trade, but no teams showed any interest. Fans were more than happy to see him go with a few local bars coming together to hold a “Say Bye to Johnny” party (McManamon, 2016d). Twitter also lit up with fans rejoicing over his release. They posted funny GIFs and one-liners. One fan simply wrote, “FINALLY!” (“#BrownsTwitter,” 2016). Twenty-four hours after he was waived, Manziel cleared waivers (no team chose to claim him), and he officially became an NFL free agent (Orr, 2016).

Manziel responded to his release with a statement. He thanked the Browns, his teammates and the fans for the opportunity and support. He also said he had hoped they were building a championship team (McManamon, 2016d). *TMZ* caught up with Manziel as he was

leaving a club in Hollywood a few days afterwards, and he told their camera that he definitely expected to be playing in the league next year, though NFL experts would disagree (Orr, 2016) (TMZ Staff, 2016d). He took one step toward that though by hiring a new agent, Drew Rosenhaus, who is known for representing NFL players that frequently grace the headlines with their antics (“Johnny Manziel hires,” 2016). Rosenhaus is quite a personality himself and spoke with the media less than two days after he was hired, insisting that more than one team is interested in adding Manziel to its roster. Ironically, he also added that they were trying to keep his business life private due to the fact that so much of Manziel’s life was already so public (Breech, 2016b). In the weeks following, only one team (the Broncos) contacted Manziel, and it seems it was because the coach shared an alma mater with Manziel and wanted to check on him. They were not interested in signing him (Brinson, 2016b).

Numerous articles were published during this time charting Manziel’s downfall. One *Fox Sports* radio host, Colin Cowherd, even proposed that Manziel’s crazy off-field behavior might have been a calculated move on his part because he wanted to leave Cleveland. He wanted to be cut so that he could sign with another team, one perhaps in a warmer, more party-friendly location (Shaw, 2016). Other articles discussed who was to blame. Tales of enablement starting with Texas A&M, continuing to the Browns and up to the NFL offices through minimizing, excusing and failing to discipline him for his errant behavior show they all played a part. Texas A&M’s football program has deteriorated since Manziel’s departure, and one of the two prominent quarterbacks transferring from the school after the 2015 season stated, “I think the culture was a big part of it, and I think that stems from Johnny's era there -- the way that they let Johnny and [others] act there...A lot of people were riding off that, 'I can do whatever the hell I want and win on Saturday'” (Grossi, 2016, para. 32-33). Manziel’s grandfather, who he was

close to, chose to blame his former girlfriend, stating Manziel was simply lovesick over Crowley, and people needed to leave him alone. He continued by stating Crowley had problems of her own, implying she had significantly contributed to Manziel's problems (Hendricks, 2016). NFL Hall-of-Famer Deion Sanders actually alleged the same thing the week before, stating "Johnny's in love with something that's crippling him right now" (Cabot, 2016g, para. 13). Ultimately, it is Manziel who has to bear the responsibility for his own actions (Grossi, 2016).

Unfortunately, he has yet to do so with reports of his off-field actions continuing. A video surfaced of him partying, rapping to Drake and drinking in Houston at a former Texas A&M teammate's wedding (he was a groomsman) on Valentine's Day weekend. Reportedly, Crowley was furious after seeing the video and pictures of him enjoying himself with friends (Parry, 2016). He made a strange return to Twitter by retweeting a post with advice from troubled actor Charlie Sheen telling him to refocus on his health and football (Traina, 2016). Only a few hours after his case was referred to the grand jury on February 25, Manziel was seen visiting various clubs and drinking a huge bottle of champagne in South Beach (Breech, 2016a). About a week later, he was spotted with former teammate Josh Gordon, who was suspended from the NFL for substance abuse, at a UFC196 fight in Las Vegas (Cabot, 2016j). From there, he was spotted the next couple of days in Hollywood at multiple night clubs and strip clubs ("Reports: Johnny," 2016). He returned to Las Vegas shortly afterwards, hitting up clubs, partying with celebrities like Scott Disick (a reality star and Kardashian ex-boyfriend) and a picture appeared of him hanging with a famous chef (Dubin, 2016c).

Manziel continued his tour of Hollywood clubs on a nightly basis over the next weeks with *TMZ* constantly on his tail. Its paparazzi caught him leaving clubs and quizzed him on many random subjects, but he initially refused to answer questions about his partying or football

career. He finally commented on his football career on March 14, telling a *TMZ* cameraman that he definitely expects to play next season (TMZ Staff, 2016d). On April 3, he posted to Instagram a picture of himself with Justin Bieber and added, then deleted, one of a new tattoo on his hand of the Rolex logo (Boren, 2016). He addressed his partying on April 8 but claimed to *TMZ* that even though he had been out the past five or six nights he was not really partying and was not drinking. He was simply grabbing food at nice restaurants with his buddies (TMZ Staff, 2016e). Two days later, he appeared in another *TMZ* video acting strange, though he repeatedly stated he was not drunk. He grabbed the camera, and when he was asked about his image problems, Manziel replied by claiming he was living with Von Miller (TMZ Staff, 2016f). Von Miller refuted the report, and Manziel apologized (Breech, 2016c).

Manziel's name reappeared in conjunction with police on April 13 when he was the passenger in a hit-and-run car accident. His friend was driving and hit a light pole before both he and Manziel left the scene on foot. They were picked up later by Josh Gordon, Manziel's former teammate who is currently suspended from the NFL for failing multiple drug tests. They later returned to the scene, and Manziel admitted that he was in the car at the time of the accident but was not charged with anything by the police (TMZ Staff, 2016g). With this latest incident, Manziel's new agent, Rosenhaus, decided he had had enough. The next day, he terminated his contract with Manziel with one caveat. If Manziel entered a treatment program in the next five days, Rosenhaus would continue to represent him ("Agent Drew," 2016).

On April 14, a real estate broker told *Page Six* that Manziel had rented a house from him for two evenings starting April 4 and "threw large parties on both nights, causing extensive damage...Evidence suggests [Manziel] and his guests were consuming drugs and alcohol" (E. Smith, 2016, para. 5). Multiple neighbors, including celebrity comedian Kathy Griffin, called the

police about the disturbance. When the agent came to the house April 6, he found cocaine on a table, mushrooms in front of Manziel, alcohol strewn throughout the house, broken glass and a Champagne glass caught in a tree, in total about \$32,000 worth of damage to the property. He even provided pictures (E. Smith, 2016).

In addition, instead of following Rosenhaus's advice and seeking treatment, Manziel was spotted goofing off in a ball pit at Coachella and pictured hanging out with Drake's father and his personal assistant (SportsDayDFW.com, 2016). A new tattoo also materialized on his hand that appeared to be a marijuana leaf and the numbers 420, a nickname for the drug. Manziel added several new tattoos to his collection during the weeks prior (DeVecchio, 2016).

On Monday, April 18, Manziel's new agent, Rosenhaus officially dropped Manziel as his deadline for the troubled quarterback to enter treatment expired. An agent cutting ties with a client is almost unheard of in the sports business, and Manziel was dropped twice in the same offseason (Schwab, 2016b). Reports also came out that Manziel had been dropped by Nike, his largest sponsor and possibly his last. Other deals Manziel had with Panini America, Nissan, MusclePharm, Snickers and McDonald's had all been temporary agreements or allowed to expire over the past year or so (Rovell, 2016). In addition, the Dallas County district attorney announced that Manziel's pending domestic violence case would be heard by the grand jury that Thursday (Schwab, 2016b).

Manziel finally released an official public statement, his first since he had been dropped by the Browns to *USA TODAY* on April 19. In his two sentence release, he stated that he hoped to take care of his issues so he could focus on doing what he needed do to prepare to play in 2016. In addition, he thanked those who truly knew and support him (Perez, 2016a).

On April 26, Manziel was officially indicted by a grand jury on misdemeanor domestic violence charges. His attorney reported Manziel would plead not guilty to the charges, which carried penalties of up to a year in jail and a \$4,000 fine (“Johnny Manziel indicted,” 2016). He was required to appear in court on May 5. Manziel turned himself in to the Highland Park Police department on May 4 and posted bond of \$1,500. He was set to appear before a judge the following morning to enter his plea and hear from the judge (Perez, 2016b).

Over the years, Manziel has had plenty of ups and downs, both on the field and off. Currently, his off-field issues outshine his on-field ability. He is lauded as “a prime example of the player who loves the celebrity more than the sport itself,” (Oliver, 2015, para. 6). He has done plenty of apologizing for his off-field antics, but his rehabilitation trip was the first time his actions matched his words, and he did something major to try to change his life (Cabot, 2015a). Unfortunately, his rehabilitation did not last long, and in the year since, his problems continued to pile up, topped off by the alleged domestic violence incident. It remains to be seen whether Manziel can first fix his life and then begin to repair his reputation. What image will come to mind when someone hears the name Johnny Manziel in the future? “Will it be the guy who led the nation in total offense, scored 47 total touchdowns [in a season] and miraculously defeated Alabama [at Texas A&M]?” (Gall, 2013, para. 27). Or will it be the guy scrolling across the ESPN ticker being searched for by a police helicopter (Cabot, 2016d)?

Theory Introduction

In 1995, Benoit fully laid out the Image Restoration Theory in his book, “Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies” (Benoit, 2015). Benoit detailed five image-repair strategies that accused corporations and people can employ when their image is attacked, and they must defend their reputation (Benoit, 2015). To deflect accountability

of the charges, they can utilize “denial” or “evasion” (Borchers, 2013). “Reducing offensiveness” and “corrective action” attempt to minimize the attack (Borchers, 2013). The last strategy, “mortification,” is used when the accused is willing to accept responsibility (Borchers, 2013).

The image-repair strategies in Benoit’s theory can be broken down into more specific sub-methods. There are two ways the accused can employ “denial” (Benoit, 1995b). He or she can use “simple denial” and deny that anything happened, that the incident was his or her fault or that the act was damaging in any way (Benoit, 1995b). The other approach is “blame shifting,” which involves placing the responsibility and guilt on another party (Benoit, 1995b). “Evasion” is utilized through four different tactics. “Provocation” involves claiming that another incident occurred first that provoked the accused’s offensive act, and therefore, the accused is not responsible (Benoit, 1995b). The “defeasibility” method is used by asserting the offender “lacked information about or control over important elements in the situation that caused the offensive act” (Borchers, 2013). The last two options involve claiming the offensive act was an “accident” or that it happened while the accused was actually attempting to do “something good,” and the negative outcome was unanticipated (Benoit, 1995b).

There are six methods the accused can employ to “reduce offensiveness” (Borchers, 2013). “Bolstering” is applied when the offender tries to enhance his positive image to the effect that it overcomes any negativity received through the wrongful act (Benoit, 1995b). “Minimization” downplays the severity of the offensive action, and “differentiation” makes the action seem less harmful than other comparable acts (Benoit, 1995b). Utilizing “transcendence” involves “recontextualizing the act to show that higher values were at stake” (Borchers, 2013). A company can also “counterattack” its accuser or provide “compensation” to the harmed party

(Benoit, 1995b). “Corrective action,” the other “minimizing the attack” method, is employed when a company does what it can to fix the harm it caused and/or makes a commitment to ensuring it does not happen again (Benoit, 1995b). This step can be taken without actually admitting any wrongdoing (Benoit, 1995b). The mortification strategy involves admitting accountability, apologizing and requesting forgiveness (Benoit, 1995b).

Since its creation, Benoit’s theory has been used to study the image repair strategies of multiple parties in the sports field (Blaney, Lippert, & Smith, 2013). Benoit first used it to study an athlete, looking at Tonya Harding’s image repair (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994) Since then, researchers have taken a look at the image restoration of Roger Clemens, Mark McGuire, Barry Bonds, Marion Jones, Michael Phelps, Floyd Landis and Lance Armstrong, athletes who were all involved in recreational or performance-enhancing drug scandals (Smith, 2013c) (McGuire, Melton, & Wanta, 2013) (Smith, 2013b) (Kramer, 2013) (Troester and Johns, 2013) (Glantz, 2010) (Thomsen & Anderson, 2015). Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant and Ben Rothlisberger were guilty of marital infidelity or sexual misconduct, and case studies have taken a look at their reputation repair discourse (Benoit, 2013) (Tuchman & Cabell, 2003) (Meng & Pan, 2013). The strategies of Michael Vick, Gilbert Arenas and Plaxico Burress have also been examined after their problems with social deviance and integrity (Smith, 2013a) (Sheckels, 2013) (Glantz, 2013). Serena Williams and Elizabeth Lambert, two female athletes, had destructive on-field incidents that have been studied (Brazeal, 2013) (Compton, 2013). Researchers have also taken a look at the image repair of several sports organizations who were involved in scandals, including the Canterbury Bulldogs rugby team; Formula One racing; Major League Baseball and its Players’ Association; the NCAA; Dale Earnhardt, Inc. and the NHL (Bruce & Tini, 2008) (Pfahl & Bates, 2008) (Meyer & Cutbirth, 2013) (Milford, 2013) (Jerome, 2013) (DiSanza et al., 2013).

These are only a few of case studies performed involving athlete scandals in the past decades.

This paper will continue in this line of research, applying Benoit's Image Repair Theory to perform a rhetorical analysis of Johnny Manziel's crisis communications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Biography of Johnny Manziel

Jonathan (Johnny) Paul Manziel, also known as “Johnny Football,” was born on December 6, 1992, in Tyler, Texas (“Cleveland Browns,” 2014). He was raised in the state, playing a variety of sports, including football, golf, baseball and basketball (“Cleveland Browns,” 2014). At age two, he would “swing his three-foot-long Fisher-Price golf club as if he were a miniature Ben Hogan, repeatedly blasting plastic golf balls over his backyard pool, over a fence and into the neighbor’s yard,” and at age nine, he was hitting so many home runs in Little League that they built a taller fence in left field, which he promptly conquered in his first at-bat facing the new wall (Anderson, 2015, para. 13). He was known for his intensity, aggressiveness and hyper-competitiveness—he cried after he lost his first football game at age eleven (Anderson, 2015).

While his uncle can recall him throwing 50-yard bombs as a 12-year-old Pop Warner player, Manziel first started to gain recognition on the football field for his quarterback play at Tivy High School (Anderson, 2015). He threw for 7,626 career yards and 76 touchdowns, ran for 4,045 career yards and 77 touchdowns and was named a Parade All-American and the Player of the Year by the National High School Coaches Association and the Texas Associated Press Editors his senior season (“Cleveland Browns,” 2014) (“Johnny Manziel biography,” 2012).

Coming out of high school, Manziel was not highly recruited. He was listed as only a three-star prospect and the No. 22 quarterback in his graduating class (Dimengo, 2014). He hoped to play football for the Texas Longhorns, a team he grew up rooting for, but they did not recruit him out of high school (Dimengo, 2014). Originally, Manziel committed to the University of Oregon, but after receiving an offer from Texas A&M University, he decided to remain in his

home state and signed with the Aggies, enrolling in the Spring 2011 semester and redshirting his first year (Sallee, 2013) (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014).

Entering his redshirt freshman season, Manziel found himself competing with three other quarterbacks for the starting spot (Sallee, 2013). He began the school year as the backup. After a short-lived suspension, Manziel surprisingly vaulted into the starting position two weeks before the Aggie’s scheduled opener against Louisiana Tech (Sallee, 2013). The team’s first game was postponed due to Hurricane Isaac, but on September 8, 2012, Manziel became Texas A&M’s first redshirt freshman quarterback to begin the season in the starting position, leading the Aggies to a 20-17 loss to the Florida Gators (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014) (Sallee, 2013). His breakout game came a week later when he threw for a Texas A&M freshman record 294 yards and four touchdowns to accompany 124 rushing yards and two more touchdowns in a 48-3 demolition of Southern Methodist University (Sallee, 2013). He won the SEC Freshman of the Week award, one of twelve weekly SEC awards he would go on to win that season (Sallee, 2013). Other notable performances include breaking the SEC record for total offensive yards with 557 (453 passing and 104 rushing) against Arkansas (a 58-10 win) and then re-breaking the record with 395 passing and 181 rushing yards (576 total) in a close win against Louisiana Tech (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014) (Sallee, 2013).

Manziel’s most impressive performance of the season came on November 10, 2012, against the No. 1-ranked Alabama Crimson Tide. His game stats were mediocre by his standards, but he led his team to a huge 29-24 upset victory on the road, vaulting himself into the front-runner position for the Heisman and officially stepping into the national spotlight (Wheeland, 2015b) (Sallee, 2013). Because of the hype leading up to the matchup with Alabama, Manziel

earned the distinction of being the first athlete to have a camera dedicated purely to following him to ensure none of his antics would be missed (Dimengo, 2014).

Less than a month later, Manziel became the first freshman to win the Heisman Trophy, the most prestigious individual award in college football (Bender, 2013). The voting was clearly in his favor as he received more than triple the number of first place votes the runner up, Notre Dame player Mante Te'o, did (Sallee, 2013). Manziel led his team to an 11-2 record in its first season in the SEC, capped off by a 41-13 blowout victory over Oklahoma in the Cotton Bowl, and compiled 3,706 yards and 26 touchdowns passing to accompany 1,410 yards and 21 touchdowns rushing on the season (Reedy, 2015) (Sallee, 2013). That year he was also the first freshman to win the Davey O'Brien award, given to the nation's top collegiate football player, and the Manning Award, given to the nation's top quarterback ("Bio," 2014). He was named All-American first-team, All-SEC first-team, the 2012 SEC Offensive Player of the Year and the 2012 SEC Freshman of the Year, crowning achievements to one of the most remarkable freshman seasons in collegiate football history ("Cleveland Browns," 2014) (Gleeson, 2013).

After an eventful offseason, including winning an ESPY for Best Male College Athlete, Manziel started the 2013 football season by leading his team to a win against Rice after serving a first-half suspension for an inadvertent NCAA violation (Gleeson, 2013) ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014). He threw for a career-best 464 yards against Alabama two weeks later, but his team could not repeat the previous season's upset, losing a close rematch 49-42 ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014). In the last home game of his career, Manziel tied his school-record 464 passing yards and five touchdowns in a win against Mississippi State ("Johnny Manziel's," 2014). He finished the regular season with two poor performances in road losses, the only time he lost consecutive games in his career, before leading the Aggies to a 52-48 comeback win over Duke in the Chick-

fil-A Bowl (“Johnny Manziel’s,” 2014) (Wheeland, 2015b). Manziel ended his career at Texas A&M as the school’s record holder in passing yards, passing touchdowns, completion percentage and total offense in a single season (Wheeland, 2015b).

Manziel was a finalist again in 2013 for the Heisman and Davey O’Brien trophies after producing even more impressive statistics than his previous year, but his team did not perform as well, finishing 9-4 (Dimengo, 2014) (Reedy, 2015). He lost both awards to Jameis Winston, quarterback for the team that went on to win the national championship that year, the Florida State Seminoles (Dimengo, 2014). Manziel did win the 2013 SEC Male Athlete of the Year and was again named All-SEC first-team (“Cleveland Browns,” 2014). During his two years as starting quarterback, he compiled a 20-6 record and became the only player in NCAA FBS history to account for 5,000 total yards in one season, reaching 5,116 in 2012 (“Cleveland Browns,” 2014).

On January 8, 2014, Manziel declared for the 2014 NFL Draft (Wheeland, 2015b). He gave up his final two years of college eligibility, ending his prolific career as an Aggie (“A timeline,” n.d.). Four months later on May 8, Manziel officially joined the NFL when he was selected by the Cleveland Browns with the 22nd pick in the NFL Draft, who traded up to ensure his availability (Reedy, 2015).

On August 18, Manziel made his pro debut in a preseason game versus the Washington Redskins (Reedy, 2015). He had a mediocre showing, finishing with 65 passing yards and a touchdown in four series (Reedy, 2015). Two days later, the Browns announced Brian Hoyer as the team’s starter (Reedy, 2015). Manziel played sparingly during the season with limited success (including a diving touchdown against Buffalo) until he was named the starter on December 9 as the head coach tried to jumpstart the offense (“A timeline,” n.d.) (Reedy, 2015).

He played poorly in his starting debut, finishing 10 of 18 for 80 passing yards and two interceptions in a 30-0 shutout loss to the Bengals (Reedy, 2015). Manziel's season ended only six quarters into his stint as starter during the second quarter of the next game against Carolina after he pulled his hamstring; he was having another rough game up to that point (Wheeland, 2015a) (Reedy, 2015). Though his season ended with injury and poor play at the starting position, the Browns repeatedly stated they expected him to compete for the starting job the next season (Fowler, 2015).

After entering a rehabilitation center about a month after the season finished, Manziel left treatment in time to participate in off-season workouts with the Browns starting at the end of April (Fowler, 2015b). During the first two preseason games of the 2015 season, Manziel enjoyed success, recording a running and passing touchdown in each game. He missed the final two preseason games with elbow soreness and was named the backup heading into the season (McManamon, 2016b).

Only one quarter into the regular season, Manziel was thrown into action when the starter, McCown left the game with a concussion (McManamon, 2016b). He had a poor showing with three turnovers and only one touchdown in a 31-10 loss to the New York Jets (McManamon, 2015c). Manziel played moderately well the following week against the Tennessee Titans, throwing two long touchdown passes and leading the team to a win, but was replaced in the starting lineup the following week when McCown returned from injury. With McCown again out with an injury, he started on November 5 against Cincinnati and struggled in a loss but had moderate success the following game, throwing for 372 yards in a loss to Pittsburgh, which led the coach to name him the starter for the remainder of the season (McManamon, 2016b). Before he had another chance on the field, Manziel was benched due to

off-field matters for the next two games (McManamon, 2015d). He was again named the starter for the Browns' December 13 game against San Francisco and led the team to a big win, throwing for 270 yards and a touchdown, before playing poorly in a huge loss the following week against the Seahawks. The following week against the Chiefs, Manziel showcased mediocre play in a close loss, the last game of his season as he missed the Browns' final game versus the Steelers with a concussion (McManamon, 2016b).

The Browns' hired a new coach, Hue Jackson, on January 27, 2016, and reports stated Jackson was not interested in retaining Manziel on the roster (McManamon, 2016b). On February 2, after police began investigating Manziel for a domestic violence incident, the team released a statement asserting that Manziel was not meeting the team's off-field expectations for their players and his actions were hurting the image of his teammates and the organization. In addition, they stated "his status with [the] team [would] be addressed when permitted by league rules," insinuating Manziel would be cut when the team had the salary cap space to do so on March 9 (McManamon, 2016a, para. 3).

On March 11, Manziel was officially waived by the Cleveland Browns after two tumultuous seasons. Manziel issued a statement shortly afterwards thanking the Browns for the opportunity and the fans for their support (McManamon, 2016c). He cleared waivers 24 hours later and officially became an NFL free agent (Orr, 2016).

As prolific as Manziel's on-the-field storylines and accomplishments are, his off-the-field incidents are just as numerous. After examining his family history, this fact may not come as a surprise—certainly not to his hometown residents who shrug and say, "He's kin to the Manziels. He comes by it naturally" (Townsend, 2013, para. 7). His family past also includes celebrity friends, alcohol abuse and run-ins with the law (Tedesco, 2013).

Manziel comes from a wealthy family, starting with his great-grandfather, Bobby Joe Manziel, who struck it rich drilling for oil on the grounds of a Baptist church. The former boxer from the nation of Lebanon was friends with heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey and borrowed \$400 from him in the 1930s to purchase the oil drill. He had a talent for finding oil, discovering nine lucrative fields (Tedesco, 2013). The Manziel family fortune is still “a lot of money,” enough that Johnny will never want for anything (he drove a black Mercedes in high school) according to Johnny’s father, and it is spread across several businesses, including oil and real estate (Dimengo, 2014, para. 49).

After making his fortune, Bobby Joe Manziel settled in Tyler, Texas, where the Manziel family continued to make a name for themselves, though not always in a positive light. Manziel’s great-uncle, Bobby Joe Manziel II, has been arrested for a confidence racket, arrested for hiring two men to murder another man and convicted of possession of cocaine with intent to distribute (Tedesco, 2013). His son, Bobby Joe Manziel III, was arrested in July 2015 “after leading sheriff’s deputies on a three-county chase” in his truck when an officer attempted to stop him for speeding and has previously been arrested for “multiple instances of possession of methamphetamine and other controlled substances, aggravated assault of a public servant, driving with an invalid license, theft and driving while intoxicated” (Schmelzer, 2015, para. 2, 9). Manziel’s grandfather, with whom he has a close relationship, has been charged with driving while intoxicated, evading arrest, interfering with the duties of a public servant and bribery (Tedesco, 2013). In total, at least ten Manziel descendants have served jail time (Townsend, 2013). Past relatives have also enjoyed gambling and breeding birds for cockfighting (Tedesco, 2013). The family notoriety grew so great that Manziel’s parents moved to Kerrville, Texas, when he was in 7th grade in part to protect him and his sister from the stigma and judgment

(Tedesco, 2013). Unfortunately, the move did not prevent Johnny from following in the family footsteps.

Benoit's Image Repair Theory

History of Benoit's Image Repair Theory

Benoit's Image Repair Theory first appeared and was utilized in Benoit's study on President Reagan and the Iran-Contra affair in 1991 (Benoit, 2015). However, the theory was expanded on, and an updated, complete version (the one utilized today) was published in Benoit's 1995 book *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies* (Benoit, 1995a). Initially, Benoit labeled it the Image Restoration Theory, but over time, he changed it to the Image Repair Theory to acknowledge that complete image restoration may not be achievable or, at times, desirable. He published a second edition of his book in 2015 re-titled *Accounts, Excuses and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research* updating his image repair discourse and officially explaining the name change (Benoit, 2015).

Benoit researched image repair and employed versions of his theory in studies before publishing his theory. Two major studies were done on Tylenol and AT&T. In 1987, Benoit and Lindsay explored how Tylenol dealt with the damage to its image after customers were poisoned through their product. Researchers discovered Tylenol used three strategies: denial, by shifting blame to a mentally unstable individual; bolstering, by pushing that its new products were better; and corrective action, by creating new tamper-proof caps and discontinuing the capsule product. Overall, Tylenol's strategies were effective as Tylenol's reputation was repaired, and sales went back up (Benoit and Lindsay, 1987). In 1994, Benoit and Brinson analyzed AT&T's response after the company's interruption of long distance service in New York on September 17, 1991. This interruption caused major dissatisfaction among customers. He and Brinson found that the

company initially used blame shifting strategies. After receiving more backlash, it switched its strategies to accepting responsibility and mortification. This switch did help repair the company's image (Benoit and Brinson, 1994). Benoit also did other studies on President Nixon's Watergate rhetoric in 1982 and Senator Kennedy's Chappaquiddick speech in 1988 (Benoit, 1995a).

Through this research, Benoit noticed a common theme, the studies "all concerned rhetorical attempts to restore the person's image after being the target of blame" (Benoit, 1995a, p. vii). He realized that despite how common this practice was, no one had created a complete theory that contained all of the different excuses and apologies individuals employed. He set out to create a general theory of image restoration that would fill that void. The core theme of his 1995 book and the premise behind his theory was that "human beings engage in recurrent patterns of communicative behavior designed to reduce, redress, or avoid damage to their reputation (or face or image) from perceived wrong-doing" (Benoit, 1995a, p. vii).

To create his theory, Benoit drew on many different approaches to image restoration. Four rhetorical approaches he studied were Rosenfield's *analog*, Ware and Linkugel's theory of *apologia*, Burke's theory of *purification* and Ryan's *kategoria-apologia* approach. He also looked at theories from social science literature that dealt mainly with accounts, including works written by Sykes and Matza in 1957, Scott and Lyman in 1968, Goffman in 1971, Schonbach in 1980, Schlenker in 1980, Tedeschi and Reiss in 1981, and Semin and Manstead in 1983 (Benoit, 1995a).

Benoit took strategies and parts of Ware and Linkugel's 1973 notion of *Apologia*, Burke's 1969 *Purification* and Scott and Lyman's 1968 *Accounts* and built on them to create a more complete, general image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995a). For example, Ware and

Linkugel originally established the denial strategy in their apologia discussion, but Benoit expanded it, adding the two subcategories. He re-termed their definition of denial as simple denial and added the strategy of blame shifting. Three reducing offensiveness categories, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence, were also taken from Ware and Linkugel's work on apologia (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

In creating his theory, Benoit worked on the assumptions that "communication is best conceptualized as a goal-directed activity" and "maintaining a positive reputation is one of the central goals of communication" (Benoit, 1995a, p. 63). In addition, he established that an attack on a person's image included two parts: a disagreeable act taking place and the individual being responsible for the act. According to Benoit, both of these components must be true for image restoration to be necessary (Benoit, 1995a).

His theory has become known as the "most comprehensive discussion of apologetic rhetoric and strategies" and is the most widely used in research (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 168). The basic essence of the theory is multiple communication strategies that individuals or groups can employ to try to improve their image following a reputation-damaging event. These methods are often used in different combinations to defend a reputation (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

Benoit's Image Repair Theory Typology

Benoit's Image Repair Theory is made up of five main image repair strategy categories (three of which contain subcategories) that individuals or groups employ to attempt to repair their reputations when they are under attack following an undesirable action. The five main categories the typology includes are denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Denial contains the subcategories simple denial and shift

blame; evade responsibility includes provocation, defeasibility, accident and good intentions; and reduce offensiveness encompasses bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser and compensation (Benoit, 2015).

When a person employs the first strategy, denial, he or she claims that they did not commit the offending act or that the act did not even take place. There are two subcategories of denial: simple denial and shift blame. Simple denial is self-explanatory; the accused simply denies that they are responsible. He or she may also try to explain away any evidence or claim that there is none. An example would be, "I never took performance enhancing drugs during my playing career." If an offending act took place but the accused is denying it, then the public will be looking for someone to blame, so the accused may employ the second subcategory, blame shifting. It is also a type of denial because the accused cannot be responsible if someone else is, and it is often more successful than simple denial because it provides another scapegoat and gives the public someone else to blame. To employ this strategy, the accused may make a statement like, "My teammate was the one point shaving during the game, not me" (Benoit, 2015).

The second main category is evade responsibility. In this case the accused tries to avoid taking the blame or to decrease their guilt. The individual can utilize four subcategories to do so: provocation, defeasibility, accident and good intentions. Provocation involves stating that the offending act was in response to another wrongful act that was committed against the accused first. This first offense was the cause of the accused's action, and therefore the first offender should be held responsible. To employ this method, the accused may say, "I did get in a shouting match with my coach, but he cussed me out first." The second subcategory is defeasibility, and it takes place when the accused claims they did not have knowledge about or control over key parts

or over the entire offending event. For example, “My alarm did not go off, and I was unaware of the location; that’s why I missed the charity event.” Accident is when the accused claims the offending incident was an uncontrollable misfortune (accident), so he or she is not responsible. “I did not knowingly take steroids; my trainer told me the pills were vitamins” would be an example. Lastly, good intentions involves the accused not denying the event but stating that the intentions behind the wrongful act were good, even though it turned out badly or a wrongful event did take place. The person “[did] bad while trying to do good” (Benoit, 2015, p. 24). A statement exemplifying this would be, “I did not tell you that I was arrested during our championship run because I did not want to reflect badly on and tarnish the achievement for the organization, my teammates and the fans” (Benoit, 2015).

Reduce offensiveness is the third main category, and it involves the accused trying to minimize the seriousness of the negative action and, in turn, the ill will of the public. The individual does not deny that the act took place or try to minimize his or her responsibility. There are six ways to do this: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser and compensation. Bolstering is when the accused tries to build himself up in the eyes of the audience by stating past accomplishments, good character traits and prior positive acts. The individual may state, “I have won three championships and two most valuable player awards during my career, really helping to put this organization on the map.” Secondly, minimization involves trying to reduce the negative feelings by claiming the event was not as bad as people first thought or as bad as it could have been. For example, “I drove a car after I had had a few drinks at our postgame celebration, but I did not cause an accident or injure anyone while doing so.” Differentiation takes place when the accused separates his or her offensive actions from other incidents that are similar but also worse. Basically, the accused admits to a lesser

wrongdoing than the one he or she is distinguishing his action from. For example, “I borrowed my teammate’s Ferrari for a quick ride, but I did not steal it.” Transcendence involves placing the act in a larger, positive context that promotes higher values and therefore should lessen the offensiveness, such as stating, “Conducting bag checks at the Super Bowl may be inconvenient for the attendees, but it helps prevent acts of terrorism.” The attack accuser subcategory has the accused try to hurt the reputation and credibility of the party or parties claiming the offending action took place by criticizing their character and/or claiming they deserved it. For example, “He claims I injured him on purpose, but he is known for being a dirty, deceitful player.”

Compensation is when the accused reimburses the victims of the incident in the form of goods, services or money. The accused may state that “Because your relative died in an accident at our ballpark, we will pay you a sum of money” (Benoit, 2015).

Corrective action is when the attacked individual promises to make up for the wrong by correcting the issue. The accused restores the situation to how it was before the offensive action took place and does what he or she can to ensure that it will never happen again. It is similar to compensation, but in corrective action, the individual “addresses the actual source of injury” while in compensation, the victim receives “a gift designed to counterbalance, rather than correct, the injury” (Benoit, 2015, p. 26). An example of corrective action is if the accused offered, “Because I damaged your vehicle in the arena parking lot, I will pay to have it repaired” (Benoit, 2015).

Mortification is the last strategy in Benoit’s Image Repair Theory. It involves admitting the action was wrong, expressing remorse, apologizing and/or asking that the audience for forgiveness. An example of mortification would be, “I deeply regret striking the referee and am sorry for the harm that it caused.” Mortification is a complicated method to explain because

apologies can take on many forms and include different components. A person can even apologize without explicitly saying that they were responsible. Some people choose this tactic for fear that fully admitting responsibility will hurt their image even more, or they do not want to relive the negative event (Benoit, 2015). Benoit states that mortification is often more effective in conjunction with corrective action. Twork and Blaney (2013) conducted a study testing this belief by exposing 300 individuals to image repair rhetoric by athletes who used mortification only or mortification plus corrective action strategies and then surveying their opinions of the athletes. They found there was no significant difference in public opinion if the athlete used mortification-only or mortification plus corrective action (Twork & Blaney, 2013).

Additional Strategies

Since Benoit initially created the theory, researchers have added strategies to his original list over the years. In 2008, Sanderson published a study of Roger Clemens', a former Major League Baseball pitcher, image repair methods after he was accused of using steroids. The author discovered a new response termed suffering (or victimization) where the individual or group claims that it is hard to defend itself because the public has already deemed it guilty (Sanderson, 2008).

That same year, Bruce and Tini (2008) added a method called diversion in their study on the Canterbury Bulldogs rugby team's salary cap scandal. Using this method, a team or athlete attempts to divert attention from the wrongful action by focusing on the non-guilty parties or other events.

While examining the image repair strategies of Duke University and its lacrosse team after three lacrosse players were falsely accused of rape, Len-Rios (2010) found another strategy, disappointment. This method is used in third-party defense and involves admitting that there was

faulty judgment on the part of the accused, but the third-party does not completely distance himself or herself from the accused (Len-Rios, 2010).

In 2013, Smithson and Venette conducted a case study of the strategies British Petroleum (BP) used after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill crisis. They added a new strategy called stonewalling that they defined as “uncooperative communication that strategically obstructs and delays the flow of information” (Smithson & Venette, 2013, p. 399).

Hambrick, Fredrickson and Sanderson examined cyclist Lance Armstrong’s image repair on social and traditional media after his steroid-use revelation in 2013 and found two new strategies. They termed them conforming and retrospective regret. Conforming involved claiming the environment or culture of the sport forced the athlete to commit the wrong, and retrospective regret was when an athlete had thought over his or her past actions and was remorseful over the wrongful action (Hambrick, Fredrickson, & Sanderson, 2013).

Lastly, in 2015, Schmittel and Hull added yet another strategy they termed exposing critics in their study on the image repair of Richie Incognito after his involvement in the Miami Dolphins’ bullying scandal. This strategy involves showcasing attacks and the individuals who made those attacks on the athlete or sports organization, and it especially relates to social media. An example of its utilization would be retweeting Twitter users’ negative attacks (Schmittel & Hull, 2015).

Benoit’s Areas of Application

The strategies laid out in Benoit’s theory can be utilized by a wide range of individuals and groups that seek to repair their reputation, including governments, nonprofits, profitable organizations, celebrities and politicians. Benoit himself applied it to President Bush’s speech in 2008 where he addressed the criticism of how his administration handled the Hurricane Katrina

disaster. He found that the president employed bolstering, defeasibility and corrective action with little success. Showing the versatility of the theory, a year later he and two colleagues applied it to look at the rhetoric of Taiwanese media outlets in stories about Taiwanese-born pitcher, Wang Chien-wing, after he had a poor game (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Chien-wing pitched in the MLB in the U.S. and was runner-up for the top pitching award in 2007 while with the New York Yankees. Wen, Yu and Benoit found that while U.S. media outlets were critical of the pitcher when he had a bad game, the Taiwanese media engaged in image repair for their star, employing reducing offensiveness and evasion of responsibility, which helped maintain his heroic status in his home country (Wen, Yu, & Benoit, 2009).

In the second edition of his book, Benoit identifies five different situations where his theory of image reparation can, and has been, employed to perform a case study. The areas are corporate, political, international, third party and sports and entertainment image repair. Corporate crisis communications is one of the most widely studied areas. In the book, Benoit highlights case studies done on the corporations of AT&T, Dow Corning, USAir, Texaco, the Tobacco Institute, Firestone and British Petroleum. He then conducts two new case studies by analyzing the image repair rhetoric of British Petroleum after the major oil spill of 2010 and of Gruenthal when the company's drug thalidomide was found to be causing thousands of babies to be born with deformities (Benoit, 2015).

Politics is also a popular area where Benoit's theory is employed, and he covers this arena by first recapping studies done on President Ronald Reagan (which was the first study to "articulate and apply image repair theory"), Newt Gingrich, Judge Clarence Thomas, President Bill Clinton, Congressman Gary Condit, President George W. Bush, Democratic political candidates during the 2004 and 2008 elections and six different female politicians in

Scandinavia. He closes out the political section of the book by performing case studies on Senator David Vitter after he faced different accusations involving prostitutes and Congressman Anthony Weiner after he posted a photo of himself in his underwear on his Twitter account (Benoit, 2015).

Benoit starts his discussion of international image repair by summarizing studies done on Queen Elizabeth, Saudi Arabia, multiple studies on the United States, Israel, China, Taiwan and Japan. He then conducts new studies on non-U.S. corporations. He looks at Rupert Murdoch and *News of the World's* image repair after the company was involved in a phone-hacking scandal. Then he examines Apple's apology to China after the Chinese media criticized Apple's lack of response to warranty issues. Lastly, he summarizes an international diplomatic image repair study done on Benjamin Netanyahu and conducts his own study in the area on the U.S. when they responded to killing 24 Pakistani soldiers in a NATO airstrike (Benoit, 2015).

In examining third party image repair, Benoit recaps studies done involving Japanese use of "comfort women," Billy Jean King's same-sex relations while married and Taiwanese media defense of an athlete from their country playing in the U.S. He also conducts new studies on British Prime Minister David Cameron's apology for the "Bloody Sunday" massacre in Northern Ireland, an event for which he was not responsible as it took place before his time in office, and First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's defense of President Bush after he was criticized for many incidents over the course of his presidency (Benoit, 2015).

Benoit also includes a section that focuses mainly on image repair in sports, with limited discussion about the entertainment field as well. He starts by summarizing studies on tennis star Billie Jean King, figure skater Tonya Harding, actor Hugh Grant, director Oliver Stone, football star Terrell Owens, the Australasian men's rugby team the Canterbury Bulldogs, the Duke

lacrosse team and university, Michelin and the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), Vice President Dick Cheney, professional cyclist Floyd Landis, Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, basketball player LeBron James, golfer Tiger Woods and actor Ricky Gervais (Benoit, 2015). The key sports studies from this section will be expanded on later in this paper.

Benoit then analyzes the New Orleans Saints and Lance Armstrong in two new case studies. The New Orleans Saints organization was involved in a huge scandal when the team admitted that they had a bounty program that financially rewarded their players for hits on other opponents, especially ones that injured them and caused them to leave the game. After examining discourse from the parties involved in the incident, Benoit concluded that the head coach and general manager employed mortification and corrective action in their statements on the incident. The NFL released a statement that used corrective action as its image was also damaged by the scandal. The researcher found that while the correct strategies were employed, the magnitude of the wrong hindered the effectiveness of the image repair, and time will be required to allow full recovery (Benoit, 2015).

Lance Armstrong's interview with Oprah Winfrey was analyzed by Benoit to determine his apology methods. Armstrong is a cancer-survivor, the creator of the Livestrong Foundation and a former professional cyclist who won the prestigious Tour de France seven times. Sadly, his titles were voided when the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency issued a report that found him guilty of using performance enhancing drugs and repeatedly lying about his use. The agency also banned him from the sport. In his interview with Oprah, Armstrong used mortification, defeasibility, denial and differentiation. His repetitive lies over the course of many years hurt his use of mortification, and his flip-flopping between strategies and his weak arguments majorly damaged his image repair attempt. Overall, it was a failure (Benoit, 2015).

Application to Individual Athletes' Image Repair

When an athlete makes a mistake, finding and utilizing the correct image repair strategies to fix the damage to his or her reputation is paramount due to the major factors at risk: multi-million dollar endorsement deals, ticket sales, contracts, fan opinion and favor, personal freedom and character reputation, to name a few items (Blaney, 2013a). The athlete, and their public relations personnel, must repair their reputation “to preserve the economic and social value of the individual” (Blaney, 2013b, p. 2). Benoit’s image repair was created, and became the golden standard, to examine image repair discourse to determine what methods past individuals and organizations have employed. Researchers can then conclude which are most successful and should be utilized in the future. The theory is especially applicable to athletes’ image repair discourse because “as sports have become an increasingly important part of the American social fabric, athletes are often called upon to defend themselves” (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994, p. 428).

Benoit was the first to use his theory to analyze image repair in sports and called for researchers to apply his theory to athletics (Pfahl & Bates, 2008). In 1994, Benoit and his colleague, Hanczor, analyzed the image repair strategies employed by Olympic figure skater Tonya Harding. Her reputation took a major hit following a brutal attack on her main competitor, Nancy Kerrigan, in January 1994. Many claimed Harding was involved in the violent incident after it was revealed that her ex-husband and her bodyguard hired a man to try to break Kerrigan’s leg. The two men stated she was part of it. After breaking down the statements she made to reporter Connie Chung in an interview on *Eye-to-Eye*, the researchers determined that Harding mainly employed bolstering, denial and attacking her accuser. Benoit and Hanczor determined that while Harding did choose the appropriate techniques, she constructed her

defense poorly. As a result, her quest to repair her image was not successful. To this day, she is viewed in a negative light by the public (Benoit and Hanczor, 1994).

In 2008, Brazeal used Benoit's theory to examine the image repair of former NFL wide receiver Terrell Owens. Owens was greatly displeased when his team, the Philadelphia Eagles, failed to restructure his contract in 2005 and demonstrated his feelings by acting out with the media, criticizing his teammates and rebelling against coaches. The Eagles responded by deactivating him, and his behavior majorly damaged his reputation. In an attempt to rectify this, Owens and his agent held a press conference, the rhetoric of which Brazeal analyzed using Benoit's theory. The researcher determined Owens mainly employed mortification and bolstering, which was successful, but he also used blame shifting, which undermined his attempt. In addition, Owens never directly admitted he was wrong. His agent attacked the accusers and employed bolstering and mortification, but with an egotistical, hostile manner. Neither gave any indication of how Owens was going to fix the issue (they did not use corrective action) but instead claimed he was the victim. His attempt was deemed a massive failure overall. In stating the implications of this study, the researcher lauded the importance of athletes admitting wrongdoing, promising corrective action and embracing the values of their sports when apologizing (Brazeal, 2008).

Glantz studied Floyd Landis's reputation repair methods in 2009 using Benoit's theory. Landis was a professional cyclist who was stripped of his 2006 Tour de France title after it was discovered he used performance enhancing drugs. Glantz looked at interviews Landis gave on *Larry King Live*, the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America* and the *Early Show* a year after the incident and determined he utilized differentiation, denial, defeasibility, bolstering and attacking the accuser. Overall, Landis' attempts were deemed a failure. The researcher made three major

conclusions. He found that using the denial and differentiation strategies combined with evading responsibility is contradictory and hurts the success of the reputation repair. In addition, the success of bolstering can be significantly influenced by the credibility of the source, and lastly, attacking the accuser is a very limiting strategy that can backfire and cause even more damage to the person's reputation (Glantz, 2010).

That same year Walsh and McAllister-Spooner analyzed the crisis communications of Michael Phelps to determine his image repair strategies, as well as those of his sponsors and the swimming governing organizations. A picture had appeared of Phelps allegedly smoking marijuana from a bong. In his official statement and a later interview with the *Baltimore Sun*, Phelps used mortification and reduced the offensiveness through bolstering, corrective action and minimization. After analyzing statements from Phelps' sponsors, Speedo, Visa, Omega, Hilton, Kellogg Co., Subway and PureSport, it was determined that they utilized mainly bolstering and minimization. The major swimming governing organizations also employed bolstering and minimization in their statements. The campaign was deemed a success for Phelps, and it appeared that the other parties involved benefited by standing by him. The overall lesson the researchers concluded to take from this study was that when individuals are clearly in the wrong, they should apologize as soon as possible and be truthful when attempting to repair their image (Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2010).

In 2012, Brown, Dickhaus and Long conducted an examination of NBA player LeBron James and the success of his image repair strategies after he went through the public relations disaster of "The Decision." "The Decision" was an hour-long television special that James arranged to announce which team he would be signing with in free agency. The media and public reacted negatively to how he handled the announcement, especially because he chose to leave his

hometown team, and James was forced to try to repair his image. In conducting the study, the researchers surveyed college students from a large southeastern university, giving them three different questionnaires with a fake news story that contained a statement from James that utilized one of his main image repair strategies: mortification, shifting the blame or bolstering. The participants were asked to rate variables about James' image before and after reading the article using a modified Ethos Scale. After studying the results, James' use of mortification was deemed a success, while shifting the blame and bolstering actually further damaged his reputation (Brown, Dickhaus, & Long, 2012).

A study similar to this one titled "Image Repair Through TV: The Strategies of McGwire, Rodriguez and Bonds" was conducted in 2013 by Utsler and Epp. They assessed McGwire's, Bonds', and Rodriguez's image repair strategies in television interviews after each's reputation had been damaged and analyzed the success of those strategies. The authors chose these athletes because they all were accused of taking performance-enhancing drugs in the past six years and were prominent, accomplished figures in Major League Baseball. In addition, they all gave public television interviews where they discussed the steroid accusations (Utsler & Epp, 2013).

To assess their strategies, Utsler and Epp evaluated the athletes' statements in the primary interview or press conference they gave addressing the accusations. For McGwire, this was an interview with Bob Costas on MLB network. Rodriguez was interviewed by Peter Gammons on ESPN about his steroid use. Bonds never granted an interview to specifically discuss the steroid accusations; however, he did address them on in a conference about the upcoming spring training camp. Utsler and Epp developed a categorizing system based on Benoit's image repair theory to evaluate the statements each athlete gave during these three videos. They grouped them by Benoit's five main strategies as well as the twelve subcategories. They then utilized transcripts

and the organized data to perform a qualitative content analysis of the athlete's image repair strategies (Utsler & Epp, 2013).

In their analysis, Utsler and Epp discovered McGwire, Bonds and Rodriguez each used different image repair strategies in their statements. McGwire employed bolstering, mortification, blame shifting and, to a lesser extent, minimization. He reminded the audience of his "God-given talent" and success on the field, claimed he used steroids for "health purposes" due to injuries and expressed "how truly sorry" he was (Utsler & Epp, 2013, pp. 148-150). Rodriguez utilized bolstering, mortification and blame shifting, like McGwire, and briefly employed defeasibility and attacking his accuser. Throughout the interview, he concentrated on bolstering his reputation by pointing out his current honesty and displaying a sudden interest in helping children. He also admitted his usage, apologized and asked for forgiveness though he shifted blame to the pressure he felt and the culture at the time. During his press conference, Bonds used denial and attacking his accuser. He repeatedly, heatedly and confidently denied he ever used steroids with statements such as "What did I do?" and "They'll get the results and it will clear my name" (Utsler & Epp, 2013, p. 154). He attributed his success to hard work and accused the media of stealing his joy (Utsler & Epp, 2013).

Utsler and Epp also analyze the effects of each of the athletes' image repair strategies. McGwire's tactics almost mirrored Rodriguez's successful strategy from the previous year, which may have indicated he was simply trying to restore his image rather than truly apologize. He also avoided directly apologizing for using steroids, did not admit they affected his performance and would not reveal what he took or where he received the drugs, which left a negative impression. While Rodriguez's admission to steroid use was positive, the effect was mitigated by his denial of it just over a year before. His avoidance of an apology for actually

using steroids, contradictions, the timing of the interview and his naivety excuse also hurt his credibility. Bonds' denial, heated accusations and avoidance of talking about steroids caused him to appear arrogant, defensive, unlikeable and unconvincing. His strategy ultimately was unsuccessful because he was too aggressive. Overall, Utsler and Epp conclude that McGwire and Rodriguez's strategies, which included admitting and apologizing, were the most successful because their stories died down, and they were mostly forgiven. Bonds' denial strategy was not deemed a success as the media continued to cover and inquire about the validity of the steroid accusations (Utsler & Epp, 2013).

About the same time, Meng and Pan analyzed a trio of professional athletes involved in sexual scandals: golfer Tiger Woods, NBA player Kobe Bryant and NFL quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. In November 2009, Woods, arguably the greatest golfer of all-time, was accused of having multiple affairs. A car crash and other incidents caused the event to grow out of control in the media; Woods' image was damaged and he lost sponsors. Bryant was accused of sexual assault in 2003 when a hotel worker in Colorado claimed he forced her to have relations with him. The case was eventually dismissed and settled, but Bryant did admit that he had cheated on his wife and was dropped by many sponsors. Roethlisberger was also accused of sexual assault twice, in fall 2008 and spring 2010. While he was not charged in either case, the NFL did suspend him for four games and his reputation took a hit. The athletes were chosen because of the amount of media coverage each event generated (Meng & Pan, 2013).

One of the main research questions was which image-restoration strategies Woods, Bryant and Roethlisberger employed in their apologies. They analyzed news articles from *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post* covering each of the athletes' communications and coded their responses to determine and compare which image restoration

strategies they utilized. They found all three athletes used corrective action and mortification. None of the athletes employed denial. While Woods did not use either evasion of responsibility or reduction of offensiveness, Bryant used both, and Roethlisberger employed reduction of offensiveness. Meng and Pan concluded that using primarily mortification and corrective action in their apologies was a correct, successful strategy for all three athletes. They successfully returned to their careers and regained fan support, though with varying levels. For example, Roethlisberger was cheered by his team's fans when he first returned to the playing field. Overall, to some extent, each athlete was successful in repairing his image (Meng & Pan, 2013).

Also in 2013, a collection of image repair studies done on sports figures and organizations was published in a book titled "Repairing the Athlete's Image: Studies in Sports Image Restoration." The almost two dozen studies were organized into sections based on their subject. The first four categories—drugs, marital infidelity and sexual misconduct, social deviance, and integrity and on-field actions—contained studies on individual athletes that employed Benoit's Image Repair Theory (Blaney, Lippert, & Smith, 2013).

Five athletes involved in drug-related incidents were examined: MLB pitcher Roger Clemens, MLB player Mark McGwire, MLB player Barry Bonds, Olympic sprinter Marion Jones and Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps. Smith (2013c) analyzed the image repair of MLB pitcher and seven-time Cy Young winner Roger Clemens, who was accused in the Mitchell Report of using steroids during his playing days. Smith examined Clemens' rhetoric during his appearance on *60 Minutes* with Mike Wallace and his testimony in court. He found that Clemens repeatedly employed denial, bolstering, attack accuser and differentiation in his interview, and during his court appearance, he used again used denial and bolstering in addition to good intentions, shift the blame and defeasibility. The researcher then looked at news articles, TV

programming and public opinion polls to determine Clemens' success. While Clemens' methods on *60 Minutes* were effective in repairing his image in part, his strategies in Congress were not. After his testimony, the media and majority of the public believed he was lying. The study concluded that denial should only be used briefly as the more it is employed, the less believable the athlete becomes (Smith, 2013c).

Mark McGwire was also accused of and eventually admitted to using performance enhancing drugs. McGuire, Melton and Wanta (2013) examined his attempts to fix his reputation through the lens of Benoit when he first denied using steroids before the U.S. House in 2005, and then when he admitted he did use them in an interview with Bob Costas in 2010. Initially, McGwire employed evasion of responsibility, reduce offensiveness and corrective action. In 2010, he expanded his methods to mortification, reduce offensiveness, evasion of responsibility, denial and corrective action. Looking at Gallup poll favorable rating results, the researchers found that McGwire's image repair in 2005 was unsuccessful. His attempts in 2010 were also judged a failure after examining the media reaction. Overall, researchers believed his methods were unsuccessful because he never focused on using mortification and expressing regret and because of his delay in admitting the truth (McGuire, Melton, & Wanta, 2013).

Smith (2013b) conducted another study in this area on Barry Bonds and his image repair after he was accused of using steroids. After looking at the transcript of Bonds' annual spring training press conference in 2005, Smith concluded that Bonds employed attack the accuser, denial, transcendence and bolstering. The researcher then analyzed the success of Bonds' methods, taking into account that Bonds was an unpopular figure with the media and public even before the steroid accusations. Attacking the accusers (in this case the journalists who released sealed information) and deflection were especially successful strategies for Bonds, while denial

was partially a success and transcendence and bolstering were judged failures. Overall after examining media reports, Bonds' image repair was deemed effective as he avoided becoming the poster boy for the steroids era and kept media attention on his hostility toward reporters rather than the steroid accusations. Implications from the research include recognizing how an athlete's previous reputation can affect his image repair efforts and how transcendence can be unsuccessful when used by sports figures because of the trivial nature of sports (Smith, 2013b).

Marion Jones had to engage in reputation repair after she admitted to using performance-enhancing substances following repeated denials. Kramer (2013) utilized Benoit's theory to determine her methods. The researcher examined Jones' appearance on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and found Jones employed bolstering, differentiation and transcendence. While the strategies Jones selected were potentially correct and could have been successful, her poor execution made her appear inconsistent and unprepared (Kramer, 2013).

Troester and Johns (2013) used multiple theories, including Benoit's, to examine Michael Phelps' image repair after he was pictured in the British tabloid *News of the World* smoking what appeared to be marijuana. Looking at Phelps' official statement through the lens of Benoit's theory, the researchers determined that Phelps did not employ denial or evading responsibility, which was a correct choice because doing so would have made the situation worse. Instead, Phelps used corrective action and mortification by taking responsibility and apologizing. His statement and methods were deemed a success after looking at media reaction. In fact, researchers stated the media may have even helped his cause by employing minimization and bolstering on Phelps' behalf (Troester & Johns, 2013).

Benoit (2013) himself contributed a study to the book in the section on marital infidelity and sexual misconduct, analyzing Tiger Woods' image repair after his major scandal involving

multiple affairs in 2009. He categorized Woods' rhetoric (two statements on his website and a TV apology speech) based on his theory and found that he mainly employed mortification alongside transcendence and corrective action. While some feel Woods' behavior was too egregious to excuse no matter what methods he used, overall, his image repair was deemed a success. Benoit looked at polls that showed that more than half of people were ready to forgive him and accept him as an endorser for brands after his apologies (Benoit, 2013).

The section on social deviance and integrity contains three studies using Benoit's Image Repair Theory on NFL quarterback Michael Vick, NBA guard Gilbert Arenas and NFL wide receiver Plaxico Burress. The first was conducted by Smith (2013a) on Michael Vick after he was convicted of being involved in an illegal dog-fighting ring. The researcher applied Benoit's method to Vick's rhetoric after three major incidents: the search of his home that revealed the wrong-doing, his indictment and his agreement to a plea deal. After the first event, Vick employed denial, defeasibility, shift the blame and corrective action; after the second, denial and bolstering; and after the third, mortification, bolstering and corrective action. The researcher looked at media responses and polls conducted to gauge the public's feelings on Vick to determine the overall success of his strategies. Smith found Vick's first strategies helped him short-term but hurt him in the long run. His second responses were ineffective, but his third attempts were successful in part, thanks to the fact he finally admitted he was responsible and apologized. The major lesson from this study was that athletes who are guilty of a crime should immediately apologize and take responsibility for their actions (Scott Smith, 2013a).

Sheckels (2013) examined the image repair of NBA player Gilbert Arenas after he was involved in an incident with a teammate. His teammate threatened to shoot him in the knee over a card game dispute, and Arenas later responded by leaving four guns near the teammate's locker

with a note telling him to pick one. Sheckels used Benoit's theory to determine if Arenas' image repair strategies changed over time and if their effect also adjusted. The researcher found Arenas' methods did change as time progressed. Initially, Arenas used a combination of several strategies that often contradicted themselves and were very inconsistent, leading to a negative reaction in the media. Later, he employed mortification and corrective action; as his methods shifted, so did the tone of the media to a less negative attitude (Sheckels, 2013).

The third study was conducted by Glantz (2013) on Plaxico Burrese's attempt to recover his reputation after he shot himself in the thigh in a nightclub with an unlicensed gun. He faced criticism over the incident, accusations that he tried to cover it up and the fact that he would not be playing for his team in the near future. Glantz determined that Burrese's main communication addressing the accusations came in an interview on ESPN with Jeremy Schaap and analyzed the special to determine his methods using Benoit's theory. To address the first, Burrese employed many different strategies: accident, mortification, transcendence, differentiation, provocation and attacking the accuser. The first two were appropriate and expected, while the last methods were used to try to place the incident in a less negative light. Responding to the cover-up accusations, Burrese used denial and shifting the blame. He also employed mortification when talking about how he let his team down because of the incident. Reaction to Burrese's attempts were mixed, but his image recovery was helped by the fact that he was punished through the actual injury and extensive jail time, which is an important lesson to take from this study (Glantz, 2013).

Researchers also analyzed two athletes involved in serious, on-field incidents: Serena Williams and Elizabeth Lambert. Brazeal (2013) took a look at tennis player Serena Williams' on-court outburst at the 2009 U.S. Open during which she berated a line judge with profanity, made threats and displayed aggressive behavior. Her conduct drew a violation that ultimately

made her default the match to her opponent. The researcher looked at four different attempts by Williams to repair her reputation and the success of that rhetoric. During her first press conference, Williams mainly employed denial, corrective action and bolstering but did not utilize one crucial strategy, mortification, refusing to apologize. Because of this, Brazeal determined after looking at media reports that her attempt utterly failed. Williams also released a written statement, in which she continued to employ bolstering and slightly used corrective action, but this was also unsuccessful, so she finally released a second statement apology, using mortification in addition to bolstering and corrective action, the following day. Because it was two days after the incident, her remorse was met with skepticism. She had another press conference after a doubles match that same day, and when questioned about the incident, employed mortification, bolstering, corrective action, provocation and denial. Because of the delayed apology, overall, Williams' image repair was not deemed a success. Three key lessons were outlined in the conclusion: the timing of an apology is a key factor in whether it is received positively, athletes must know and embrace the values of their sport, and lastly, athletes should not revisit and give explicit details of their negative incidents to the media (Brazeal, 2013).

University of New Mexico soccer player Elizabeth Lambert became a major SportsCenter storyline in 2009 after she kicked, tackled, gave a forearm shiver to the back and pulled a girl down by her hair in a game versus Brigham Young University. Compton (2013) analyzed the image repair of Lambert and her university after this disturbing on-field incident. Lambert issued a statement and was interviewed by the New York Times after being suspended for her behavior and employed mortification, bolstering, corrective action and, to a lesser extent, minimization. Her school and her coach employed bolstering and defeasibility. The researcher determined that by apologizing, taking responsibility and working in the community to restore

her reputation, Lambert did help to minimize the damage to her and her school's image (Compton, 2013).

In 2014, Holdner and Kauffman conducted another study analyzing the image repair of Michael Vick, the NFL quarterback convicted of running an illegal dog-fighting operation. The researchers took a look at the one press conference Vick held in 2007 before he began a two-year prison term. Vick employed mortification and, to a limited extent, corrective action. Researchers determined that while his strategies were appropriate, he should have more fully established what corrective action he would take. Overall though, Vick was eventually successful in repairing his image and even returned to the NFL three years after the incident (Holdner & Kauffman, 2014).

Former college football star Manti Te'o was involved in a bizarre incident in which he was duped into believing he was dating a girl who did not exist. In 2014, Frederick, Burch, Sanderson and Hambrick analyzed his rhetorical attempts to repair his image using the Image Repair Theory. They viewed and transcribed a video on YouTube of the interview he gave to Katie Couric after the incident and found that Te'o consistently employed defeasibility, good intentions, bolstering, shifting blame and simple denial, in addition to a few other more recently discovered themes, victimization, stonewalling and retrospective regret. Overall, he came off as weak, inexperienced and apologetic, though some of his choices were more successful than others (Frederick et al., 2014).

Thomsen and Anderson (2015) studied former professional cyclist and LIVESTRONG founder Lance Armstrong's image reparation strategies after the U. S. Anti-Doping Agency reported that he had used steroids and stripped his seven Tour de France titles. The researchers studied his rhetoric in a television interview he gave in January 2013 to Oprah Winfrey. During the interview, Armstrong consistently utilized evasion of responsibility and never employed the

recommended strategy of corrective action. When he did employ mortification twice during the two-show special, he qualified his apologies, undermining their effectiveness. His attempts were deemed a massive failure as viewers saw his apology as fake and contrived (Thomsen & Anderson, 2015).

In 2015, Pfahl studied the image repair of Maurice Clarett, a former college football running back and star at The Ohio State University, who was arrested and served jail time for armed robbery shortly after being drafted by the NFL. While in prison, Clarett wrote a blog titled “The Mind of Maurice Clarett.” Pfahl examined this blog and discovered the former football player employed reducing the offensiveness and corrective action in his posts to try to fix his reputation. The study revealed how the computer-mediated communication platform of a blog can be used to create and implement a more complete image restoration strategy by allowing an athlete to create, change and finally end his campaign over a period of time (Pfahl, 2015).

During the 2013-14 NFL season, the Miami Dolphins found themselves at the center of a unique controversy when reports came out claiming they had fostered a hostile culture in their locker room and that several of their players had been grossly bullying another player, Jonathan Martin. One of the key players accused of engaging in this bullying behavior was Richie Incognito, and he became the main face of the negative side of the scandal. Schmittel and Hull (2015) employed Benoit’s theory to examine Incognito’s image repair strategies on social media through Twitter and in a TV interview with Fox Sports 1. They found he employed different strategies on the two platforms. Incognito used victimization, stonewalling, attacking the accuser and a new category they called exposing critics on Twitter while utilizing shifting blame, good intentions and bolstering on television. Ultimately, Schmittel and Hull discovered that his use of Twitter over time did the greatest good in repairing his image. The researchers also shared the

impact of using social media in image repair as it allows athletes to continually send out messages to keep their image restoration from ending when the media stops covering them. They highlighted how researchers need to realize the importance of social media in today's image restoration as athletes are turning more and more to first-person outlets to send their messages (Schmittel & Hull, 2015).

Other Applications to Sports

Benoit's theory has also been used to examine image repair in sports for organizations rather than individual athletes. In 2008, Bruce and Tini analyzed the crisis communications of the National Rugby League team, the Canterbury Bulldogs, after they were caught in a salary cap scandal. The researchers found that the team used denial, attacking the accuser, provocation, scapegoating, corrective action and eventually mortification in addition to a new strategy the researchers created called diversion, which the team utilized by diverting attention from management to the innocent players and fans. This last strategy was able to bring about successful image repair (Bruce & Tini, 2008).

Pfahl and Bates used the theory in 2008 to look at Formula One's reputation repair strategies after 14 of the 20 drivers in the 2005 U. S. Grand Prix voluntarily did not complete the race because they were using unsafe Michelin tires and a satisfactory solution had not been agreed upon prior to the race. The two main parties involved in the incident were Michelin and the Federation Internationale De L'Automobile (FIA). FIA used transcendence, attacking the accuser, compensation and mortification. Michelin employed transcendence, shifting the blame, corrective action and mortification. Both had mixed success (Pfahl & Bates, 2008).

That same year, Fortunato used Benoit's theory to summarize the strategies Duke University used to repair its image after the major lacrosse scandal of 2006. The author

determined that Duke's president, on behalf of the university, reduced the offensiveness through bolstering, used mortification by apologizing and employed corrective action by forming new committees to investigate (Fortunato, 2008). Two years later, Len-Rios studied the same incident and expanded on Fortunato's findings by looking at 54 public statements of the university. The researcher determined that Duke employed simple denial and mortification in defense of the lacrosse players and bolstering, corrective action, separation and attacking the accuser in defense of the school's image. A new category was also suggested, expression of disappointment, which would be associated with separation. Attacking the accuser was determined to be the most successful strategy in this case (Len-Rios, 2010).

"Repairing the Athlete's Image: Studies in Sports Image Restoration" also contained three studies involving athletic organizations that employed Benoit's theory (Blaney, Lippert & Smith, 2013). Meyer and Cutbirth (2013) examined the methods employed by Major League Baseball (MLB) and the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) after the reputations of each were damaged by the 2002 labor negotiations. The researchers found that the MLB used denial, bolstering, transcendence, differentiation, denial and corrective action, and the MLBPA also utilized differentiation, denial and corrective action. However, they also deemed existing image repair theories, including Benoit's, inadequate to fully examine organizational image repair, even stating that Benoit himself discouraged using his theory to study an entire sports organization. They believed Benoit's theory focused too much on the accused's rhetoric and should be expanded to include the audience's response (Meyer & Cutbirth, 2013). Jerome (2013) employed the Image Repair Theory to analyze the communications of Teresa Earnhardt and Dale Earnhardt, Inc., after both parties' images were damaged following an ownership battle between Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Teresa. Teresa and other company leaders used bolstering and

minimization in statements to fix their image, but neither Teresa nor the company has ever fully recovered its reputation (Jerome, 2013). The National Hockey League's (NHL) image repair methods during and after the 2004-2005 lockout were examined through the lens of Benoit's theory by DiSanza, Legge, Allen and Wilde (2013). The NHL initiated the lockout, which angered fans, sponsors and employees, hurt other businesses, put its TV contracts into jeopardy, damaged the sport and badly injured the reputation of the league. To repair this, the NHL engaged in mortification, transcendence, blame shifting and bolstering. These tactics were initially ineffective, and the league only began to recover once the product on the ice started to improve (DiSanza et al., 2013).

In 2013, J. Compton and J. L. Compton looked at the strategies that college coaches used in open letters to fans that addressed teams who had poor, losing seasons. They focused on letters from Kevin O'Neill (USC Trojans), Kevin Anderson and Randy Edsall (Maryland Terrapins) and Pete Boon (Ole Miss Rebels). Using Benoit's Image Repair Theory to analyze the communications, they determined the three main methods employed were evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness and corrective action. The researchers also discussed corrective action's value and, conversely, how detrimental attacking the accusers can be in sports communication. Lastly, they showed the unique value of transcendence in the context of sports when teams use it to highlight the higher values that athletics seek to represent and reinforce in the minds of their fans (J. Compton & J. L. Compton, 2013).

Two studies have been conducted about the impact of race and gender on image restoration. In 2015, Brown, Billings, Mastro and Brown-Devlin polled 287 online participants in an empirical study. They confirmed earlier research that mortification is more effective than reducing offensiveness and found this held true regardless of race and gender. They also

discovered apologizing African American athletes were consistently ranked more positively than Caucasian ones. Regarding gender, no significant differences were discovered (Brown et al., 2015). A year later, Brown, Billings and Devlin performed another study on the effects of race in image repair. This study confirmed and extended previous results, finding that for all races mortification is more successful than reducing offensiveness or evading responsibility and that Caucasian athletes are perceived as less successful than Asian, African American, Hispanic and Middle Eastern athletes when attempting reputation restoration (Brown, Billings, & Devlin, 2016).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This study set out to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Which image reparation strategies did Johnny Manziel employ in his crisis communications after each of his reputation-damaging incidents?
- 2) Did Manziel's image repair strategies change over time?
- 3) Which strategies were successful?

Determining the Strategies

To complete this research, a qualitative rhetorical analysis was conducted by examining Manziel's crisis communication responses after each of his incidents by applying Benoit's Image Repair Theory. First, a detailed timeline was constructed of Manziel's reputation damaging incidents by searching news sites. See "Appendix A: Manziel Incident and Rhetoric Timeline" for the complete list. Next, news sources and Manziel's social media accounts were searched to identify Manziel's rhetorical responses to each of the incidents, if he chose to address them. Manziel's main rhetorical platforms were interviews, official statements and social media posts.

After the interview videos were located, transcripts were found or created from the videos and double-checked for accuracy when possible. For a few incidents, neither videos nor transcripts were available of Manziel's interview or press conference. In these cases, quotes and paraphrases of his statements were compiled from multiple news articles. The official statements were recorded from the initial source. His primary social media accounts were Twitter and Instagram; his Instagram feed was linked to his Twitter account, so all of Manziel's Instagram posts appeared on his Twitter feed. Therefore, this study examined his Twitter account. His tweets after each incident were compiled using ExportTweet.

Manziel's first press conference was held on November 27, 2012, at the end of his redshirt-freshman season at Texas A&M. It was set up and hosted by Texas A&M in the Hagner Auditorium at the Bright Complex in College Station, TX. He did not address the media previously because freshmen were not allowed to talk to the media per school policy. During this press conference, Manziel was asked about and briefly addressed his arrest the previous June. The video of this press conference, which is 28:12 long, was located on the official Texas A&M Athletics YouTube page and can be found titled "Johnny Manziel Press Conference" (Texas A&M Athletics, 2012). The questions regarding Manziel's image repair and arrest were transcribed from the video.

After receiving scrutiny for his numerous appearances courtside at sporting events and with celebrities, Manziel responded via Twitter on December 20, 2012 (JManziel2, 2012). When he was criticized again for a photo in a casino, Manziel again tweeted his response with two posts on January 11, 2013 (JManziel2, 2013a) (JManziel2, 2013b). He also responded to the casino picture and reports of him partying when he met with the media on January 6, 2013, in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, at the Discover BCS Bowl 2013. A video (3:30 in length) was located of his press conference on *AL.com* titled "Johnny Manziel meets the media in Miami," and a transcript was made of his rhetoric from the clip (Scalici, 2013).

At the beginning of February, Manziel received criticism for his online-only class schedule. On February 17, 2013, Manziel addressed this situation as well as overall criticism of his behavior while meeting with reporters at the Davey O'Brien Award dinner in Fort Worth, TX. Unfortunately, no video or transcripts were available of this interview. To reconstruct his rhetoric, numerous news articles containing quotes and paraphrases were reviewed, and two with unique comments, one from the *Associated Press's The Big Story* site titled "Texas A&M QB

Manziel accepts O'Brien" and another from *SportsDay* titled "Texas A&M's Manziel opens up at Davey O'Brien Award dinner" were cited to piece together his words (Hawkins, 2013) (Hairoopoulos, 2013).

Manziel replied to criticism about his partying in Cabo, Mexico, over spring break and a picture of him with a Texas Longhorn's logo tattoo with a tweet on March 12, 2013 (JManziel2, 2013c). He was reproached by the media eleven days later after shoving a graduate assistant in practice and responded in an interview with Brent Zwerneman of the *San Antonio Express-News* on March 28, 2013. The original news article titled "Aggies' Johnny Manziel offline, focusing on field" was reviewed from the news site's website to record Manziel's quotes and other rhetoric addressing the incident and his off-field actions (Zwerneman, 2013). He further addressed his spring break trip and celebrity lifestyle in a radio interview with *Richie & Greggo on 105.3 The Fan* on April 12, 2013. A news article titled "Aggies QB, Heisman Winner Johnny Manziel Embraces His RAGE" with audio of the interview was located on *CBS Dallas / Fort Worth* and a transcript was created from the audio ("Aggies QB," 2013).

In June, 2013, Manziel sent out a tweet about how he could not wait to leave College Station. The same month he was kicked out of a fraternity party and left a prestigious passing academy early under mysterious circumstances. The mass amounts of criticism he received were addressed on July 17, 2013, in a one-on-one interview with *ESPN's* Joe Tessitore designed to fix his image on *College Football Live* from the SEC media days in Hoover, AL. A YouTube video of the interview segment titled "SEE Johnny Manziel Addresses Criticism" and 6:34 in length was located, and a transcript was created (Souza, 2013). He addressed the same negativity in his press conference with the media that day as part of the SEC media days. A full transcript was

found on *SBNation's Good Bull Hunting* website titled "Transcript: Johnny Manziel Q&A at SEC Media Days" and verified, then recorded (cuppycup, 2013).

He addressed being kicked out of another fraternity party via two tweets on July 28, 2013. The tweets were located and recorded for examination (JManziel2, 2013d) (JManziel2, 2013e).

His next major incident was the NCAA investigation of his autograph scandal. Manziel briefly addressed the topic in an interview on the *ESPN Radio* show *SVP & Russillo*. An overview of this interview was located on *SportsDay* and recorded (SportsDayDFW.com, 2013).

During the New Year holiday, Manziel partied and socialized with multiple celebrities. He addressed his overall behavior and public image during introductory media sessions after he was drafted by the Cleveland Browns. The Browns held a press conference for him and a teammate on May 9, 2014, at their facility in Cleveland, OH. A transcript of the press conference was located for study on *ESPNCleveland.com* in a news article titled "Transcript: DB Justin Gilbert and QB Johnny Manziel introductory press conference" ("Transcript: DB," 2014). Manziel also spoke to the media on a conference call on May 9. A transcript of this session was found on the *Akron Beacon Journal's* website in a news article titled "2014 NFL Draft: Transcript of first-round pick Johnny Manziel's press conference with reporters" (Lewis, 2014).

In May, several iconic photos of Manziel partying with celebrities appeared. Manziel first addressed the criticism in a post-practice interview with the media at the Browns facilities on May 28, 2014. A video of the interview titled "Johnny Manziel: Learning More Every Day" and 9:32 long was located on the official Cleveland Browns website and then transcribed for examination ("Johnny Manziel: Learning," 2014). He again addressed his off-field behavior at the NFL Play 60 event in Berea, OH, on June 27, 2013. A transcript of the media session was

created from a video found on *Cleveland.com* titled “Johnny Manziel: 'I'm not going to change for anybody, I don't think I'm doing anything wrong'” that was 5:23 in length (Cabot, 2014a).

A picture of Manziel possibly doing drugs in a bathroom appeared the beginning of July and did further damage to Manziel’s image. He addressed the photo briefly on July 25, 2014, after the first day of the Browns’ training camp at a press conference at the Browns’ facility in Cleveland, OH. A full transcript of the press conference was located on *KennyRoda.com* in an article titled “Transcript of Jonny [sic] Manziel’s press conference following the 1st day of Browns training,” but it was missing a few key questions (Roda, 2014a). The missing sections were located in an article on *Around the NFL* titled “Johnny Manziel: ‘I made some rookie mistakes’” (Hanzus, 2014).

Manziel was fined for being late to a team meeting in August and addressed the incident in a post-practice press conference at the Cleveland Browns’ practice facility on August 16, 2014. A transcript of the media session was located on *KennyRoda.com* in an article titled “Johnny Manziel Post-Practice Press Conference Transcript 8-16-14” (Roda, 2014b). Manziel gave the middle finger to the Washington Redskins’ bench in a preseason game two days later. He spoke about the gesture in a press conference the following day, August 19, 2014. No transcript or video of the media session was available, but his rhetoric was constructed from an article on *Cleveland.com* titled “Johnny Manziel flipping the bird 'doesn't sit well' with Mike Pettine and Manziel needs ‘to hold my composure better’” (Cabot, 2014b).

At the end of November, Manziel was involved in a fight with a fan at a downtown Cleveland hotel. On November 28, 2014, Manziel addressed the incident in an interview with the media post-practice. A 4-minute, 20-second video of the press conference was available on *Cleveland.com* in an article titled “Johnny Manziel says ‘a very intoxicated, very aggressive

person' put his hands on him and sparked the Friday night incident," and a transcript was created from the video to study (Cabot, 2014c).

Manziel addressed his image and behavior problems again near the end of the season in a press conference on December 23, 2014. A video and quotes from the interview were available in an article on the Cleveland Brown's website. A full transcript was compiled for research from the article titled "Johnny Manziel: I want to be the guy here" (Gribble, 2014). A few days later, reports of Manziel missing a team walk-through and injury treatment due to a late-night party surfaced. At his end-of-season interview on December 29, 2014, Manziel addressed the latest incident and his behavior as a whole; an article titled "Johnny Manziel: 'It's about being accountable instead of looking like a jack---'" contained a video of the interview, which was 4:44 long, and a transcript was compiled from the video (Cabot, 2014e).

After a few more partying incidents, Manziel entered rehab for undisclosed treatment (but rumored to be alcohol or drugs) on January 28, 2015. He engaged in image repair in a post-rehab press conference on June 17, 2015, after the second day of the Browns mini-camp set up by the team on their practice fields. A full video and transcript of the press conference was provided by the Cleveland Browns on their official website titled "Browns QB Johnny Manziel transcript - June 17, 2015" ("Browns QB Johnny," 2015).

The following October, Manziel was involved in an incident with his girlfriend at the time. The police were called when witnesses saw him driving recklessly and possibly engaging in domestic violence. In response to the incident, Manziel first released a statement on October 16, 2015, via Twitter. The tweets were found and recorded (JManziel2, 2015a) (JManziel2, 2015b) (JManziel2, 2015c). On October 25, 2015, Manziel spoke to the media for the first time about the incident in a post-game interview after a loss to the Rams. A short clip of the interview

as well as multiple quotes and paraphrases of Manziel's rhetoric were located on the *Akron Beacon Journal's* website as a full transcript was not available (Ridenour & Ulrich, 2015). After the NFL concluded its investigation, Manziel released a final statement via the Cleveland Browns website on the incident on November 17, 2015 ("Statement from," 2015).

Manziel was caught on video partying with college co-eds in the beginning of November and again two weeks later in Austin during the Browns bye week. He spoke about the videos at a Thanksgiving week charity event on November 23, 2015, and a video as well as quotes from the press conference were located on *Cleveland.com* (Cabot, 2015c). Later it was reported that Manziel lied to his coaches about the videos. He addressed his deceit and the videos again in a post-practice press conference on December 9, 2015. A video of the press conference that was 8:46 long was made available on the official Cleveland Browns website as well as a transcript of the session ("Johnny Manziel press," 2015).

At the beginning of January, 2016, Manziel was pulled over for driving with expired plates and spotted in disguise in Las Vegas. Manziel responded with an Instagram post. It was found on his account and recorded (jmanziel2, 2016).

A serious incident occurred at the end of January when Manziel was involved in alleged domestic violence against his ex-girlfriend. *TMZ Sports* reached Manziel and asked him about the incident. Manziel's rhetoric on the topic was pieced together from the article on *TMZ Sports* (TMZ Staff, 2016c). He continued to party the next month, and on March 11, 2016, Manziel was waived by the Cleveland Browns. Manziel released a statement thanking his fans. The statement was located on *Cleveland.com* and recorded for study (Cabot, 2016k).

Manziel spoke to a *TMZ* photographer on April 8, 2016, as he left Le Jardin in Hollywood in the early morning hours about his current lifestyle. Video of the encounter was

found on the *TMZ Sports* site in an article titled “Johnny Manziel I’m Not Drinking ‘I’m Staying On Track,’” and a transcript was created (TMZ Staff, 2016e). A third video of Manziel addressing his image problems and living situation to a *TMZ* photographer as he again left The Nice Guy night club was located on *TMZ*’s site. It was titled “Johnny Manziel I Got A New Roommate,” and the video was transcribed to study Manziel’s rhetoric (TMZ Staff, 2016f). Manziel finally released an official statement to *USA TODAY* on April 19 regarding his recent troubles. The statement was located on their website in an article titled “Johnny Manziel: I hope to ‘take care of the issues,’ play next year” and recorded for study (Perez, 2016a).

In each case, the interview, press conference, statement or social media post was saved in a rhetoric file categorized by the incident Manziel was addressing.

A coding sheet was then created with Benoit’s Image Repair Theory Strategies. See “Appendix B: Benoit’s Image Repair Theory Coding Sheet” for the coding system. The strategies were first identified from information about the theory, and the different the strategies were typed up along with brief descriptions about each image repair strategy. Then, the five main categories and twelve subcategories were assigned appropriate numbers. The main category denial was assigned (1), and its subcategories, simple denial and blame shifting, were labeled (1a) and (1b). Evasion was assigned (2), and its subcategories, provocation, defeasibility, accident and something good, were labeled (2a), (2b), (2c) and (2d), respectively. Reduce offensiveness was assigned (3), and its subcategories, bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, counterattack and compensation, were labeled (3a), (3b), (3c), (3d), (3e) and (3f). Corrective action was assigned (4), and lastly, mortification was assigned (5).

Manziel’s initial statements in response to each of the major incidents were then analyzed to determine which image repair methods Manziel employed, using the chart of social media

posts, copies of the official statements, transcripts of his interview statements and the coding sheet with Benoit's image repair strategies. This study conducted a qualitative content analysis of Manziel's rhetorical statements. The social media and interview statements were broken down into sections with each phrase, sentence or set of sentences containing one main idea. The phrases that contained an image repair strategy were then assigned numbers that matched the corresponding strategy on the image repair strategy coding sheet. Each section with the same number was then arranged into groups. Each group was then analyzed and compared to find the frequency. The strategies that he used were identified and categorized as either a major strategy used or minor strategy used depending on how often it was identified among Manziel's comments.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Manziel's Image Repair Strategies*Rhetoric on Arrest - 11/27/12 Press Conference at Texas A&M*

At Manziel's very first press conference at Texas A&M, he employed two different strategies addressing his arrest from the previous June. Manziel utilized (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. In two instances, Manziel incorporated statements such as "I've had to make a lot of changes in my life," I'm "really more aware of my surroundings and what goes on in my life," and "I've had to surround myself with a great group of people," which qualify as (4) corrective action. Twice, Manziel employed (5) mortification by deeming the incident "a critical mistake in my life," "a truly critical error in judgement on my part" and "one of the biggest mistakes of my life." He also talked about how many people he had let down through his actions.

Rhetoric on Courtside Tour - 12/20/12 Tweet

After receiving criticism for his appearances courtside at professional sporting events and posting photos with celebrities, Manziel tweeted a rhetorical response. Manziel's statement of "Bought myself a little birthday present tonight" was (1a) simple denial and (3b) minimization. His inclusion of the words "stop hating" at the end of the tweet was a minor (3e) counterattack.

*Rhetoric on Casino Picture & Celebrity Lifestyle - 1/5/13 Tweet & 1/6/13 Press Conference at**Discover BCS Bowl*

Manziel first addressed backlash from his casino picture and celebrity lifestyle with two tweets. In the tweets, he employed (1a) simple denial, (4) minimization and, to a small extent, (3e) counterattack. He utilized the first two by stating, "Hopefully this picture passes compliance" and that there was "nothing illegal about being 18+ in a casino and winning money." He finished with a weak (3e) counterattack by stating, "KEEP HATING!"

He also addressed both topics in a press conference at the Discover BCS Bowl. At the press conference, Manziel tried to repair his image through mainly (4) corrective action and, to a lesser extent, (1a) simple denial, (1b) blame shifting, (3b) minimization and (5) mortification. He stated, “My whole thought on it is I’m not doing anything wrong. I’m not breaking any rules,” which is (1a) simple denial and (3b) minimization. (1b) Blame shifting was used slightly by blaming others for caring about his actions since he was now well-known. He used (4) corrective action in three instances by stating that he needed to be careful and think about his actions, that he was still learning every day and that he has had to grow up quite a bit. Lastly, he employed (5) mortification by admitting that maybe there were instances when he should “zip it up” to save himself the criticism and trouble.

Rhetoric on Online Class Schedule & Lifestyle - 2/18/13 Press Conference at Davey O’Brien Award Ceremony

At the Davey O’Brien Award Ceremony, Manziel addressed the criticism about his online-only schedule and lifestyle. His major strategy was (3b) minimization, but he also employed (1a) simple denial and (3c) differentiation. (3b) Minimization was employed four times through statements like “I didn’t think anything of it” and “People think that I’m going wild with it when it’s not like that.” Manziel utilized (1a) simple denial when he stated that “by now if I was doing something wrong, compliance would have definitely figured something out.” He used a new strategy, (3c) differentiation, when he stated he was not the only one partying, relaying, “There’s college kids doing what I’m doing all around the country,” and he knew plenty of friends and other college football guys who went to Mardi Gras and the Super Bowl in New Orleans.

Rhetoric on Longhorn Tattoo - 3/12/13 Tweet

Manziel addressed criticism of a photo of himself with a tattoo of the Texas Longhorn's logo (Texas A&M's major rival) through Twitter. He employed (1a) simple denial in the tweet, stating the tattoo was fake.

Rhetoric on Shoving GA & Lifestyle - 3/28/13 Interview with San Antonio Express-News

Manziel talked about an incident where he shoved a graduate assistant (GA) in practice and his overall lifestyle in an interview with the *San Antonio Express-News*. He used (2a) provocation, (3b) minimization and, to a minimal extent, (5) mortification when addressing the shove, and (3b) minimization when talking about his behavior. (2a) Provocation was employed by stating that the GA shoved him first, and (3b) minimization was employed when he said, "It wasn't anything serious;" the GA was not a coach, and he was not trying to disrespect him. He did admit that he shoved him, which is a shallow version of (5) mortification.

Rhetoric on Lifestyle, Cabo Trip, Twitter Use & Tattoo - 4/12/13 Interview with Richie and Greggo

In a radio interview on *Richie and Greggo*, Manziel chatted about his lifestyle, trip to Cabo, Twitter use and his fake tattoo. He employed (3e) counterattack and (4) corrective action when addressing his behavior and the trip, (3b) minimization and (4) corrective action when talking about Twitter, and (3b) minimization and (5) mortification regarding his tattoo. His (3e) counterattack involved calling those criticizing his lifestyle and vacation "haters." Manziel also stated he was trying to be the person his parents raised him to be, which is (4) corrective action. He said people were blowing his return to Twitter "out of proportion," calling it "no news," which is (3b) minimization, and employed (4) corrective action by saying he needed to "be smart with it" in the future. (3b) Minimization was used regarding his fake Longhorn tattoo when he said it was a joke, kind of a dare, and he thought, "What's it going to hurt?" He did admit he

“should have known better that it would have got blown out and put out everywhere,” which is (5) mortification.

Rhetoric on Leaving Manning Passing Academy & Lifestyle - 7/17/13 Interview with College Game Day & Press Conference at SEC Media Days

Manziel employed many different strategies in his interview with *College Game Day* on *ESPN* and press conference at the SEC Media Days when addressing leaving the Manning Passing Academy early and his lifestyle. In his interview, he used (1a) simple denial, (2b) defeasibility, (2c) accident, (3b) minimization, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. At the press conference, (1a) simple denial, (2b) defeasibility, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification were used.

While appearing on *College Game Day* at the SEC Media Days, Manziel employed (1a) simple denial that his missing a meeting was due to anything “the night prior” and said he was “absolutely not” hung over. He also used it when he said, “I haven’t done anything criminal this off-season.” (2b) Defeasibility was used when he twice blamed his misbehavior on his crazy travel schedule the past couple of weeks and his busy summer. He also said “it was just simply - phone died - overslept” and called missing the meeting an accident, which is (2c) accident. Manziel also utilized (3b) minimization in a few instances saying he “felt like the deal really got blown out of proportion” and insisting “I haven’t done anything criminal this off-season. I haven’t done anything like that.” (4) Corrective action was used when he admitted he had had his fun in the off-season and needed to refocus on football. He also said he had learned “a lot” from his mistakes and needed to avoid repeating them.

Lastly, the biggest strategy Manziel employed was (5) mortification. He employed it in about half a dozen instances. He admitted, “I made a mistake and did not wake up on time when

I should have.” He apologized for his mistake and stated he never meant to make Manning or Texas A&M look bad or to disappoint them. Manziel used rhetoric like “I was upset with myself...there’s no excuse for it. It’s absolutely my fault. I take full responsibility for that.” In addition, he admitted he had probably brought some of the scrutiny on himself by rubbing people the wrong way and with how he portrays himself.

Manziel also used (1a) simple denial during his press conference with the media, denying that his missing the meeting and leaving the camp had anything to do with his activities the night before, saying it was “absolutely not the case.” He was “absolutely not” asked to leave; instead it was a mutual decision between him and the Mannings, the camp hosts. (2b) Defeasibility was employed when he again referenced his busy schedule and “bit[ing] off a little more than [he] could chew.” Manziel repeatedly mentioned how he was 115% prepared for the football season and how his teammates know his heart and love him, which is (3a) bolstering. In addition, he made sure the media knew he was invited back next year, and there were no hard feelings.

Manziel used (3b) minimization by calling the incident “blown a little bit out of proportion” and referring to his actions as things he did simply trying to have fun. He said he was a 20-year-old college student enjoying his life, and “I haven’t done anything I feel is catastrophic.” His incidents were simply “bumps in the road.” (4) Corrective action was used when Manziel admitted he was continuing to learn and grow up and needed to not make the same mistake twice. He was adapting and grinding, working hard to get better. Manziel did admit he had made his mistakes, which is (5) mortification. He used this in multiple instances, also admitting, “I’m disappointed in my own actions and disappointed in myself.” He owned up, saying missing the meeting was “[his] fault 115-120%.”

Rhetoric on Fraternity Party - 7/28/13 Tweets

After getting kicked out of a fraternity party, Manziel responded to backlash with two tweets. He employed (3a) bolstering and (3b) minimization in the tweets. His statement that “Last time I checked double digit win columns and championships are what matters” and his focus on winning in his second tweet was (3a) bolstering and, to a lesser extent, (3b) minimization.

Rhetoric on Autograph Investigation - 12/12/13 Interview on SVP & Russillo

Manziel did not directly address the NCAA’s autograph investigation with the media, but he indirectly talked about the situation on the radio with *ESPN’s* SVP and Russillo. In that interview, he used (3b) minimization by referring to it as “outside noise.”

Rhetoric on Lifestyle - 5/9/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility & Conference Call with media

After he was drafted by the Cleveland Browns, Manziel again addressed his lifestyle in his introductory press conference and initial conference call with the media. During his press conference, Manziel employed (1a) simple denial, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. (1a) Simple denial was used when Manziel stated he was 21 years old, so there was not anything wrong with him celebrating his selection in the draft by partying and drinking champagne. It was warranted and a time to celebrate. He also talked about all of his hard work, how much heart and passion he has and how much time he puts into football, which is (3a) bolstering. (3b) Minimization was employed when Manziel referred to his issues as “off-the-field things” that never cut into his work time and his partying as simply a celebration. He did briefly use (5) mortification when he admitted he had made mistakes in the past on social media.

In his conference call, Manziel employed (1a) simple denial and (3a) bolstering. He used (1a) simple denial by alluding that some of the media reports were not true. (3a) Bolstering was employed when he talked about his character and how the Browns would find out who he truly was.

Rhetoric on Partying Pictures & Lifestyle - 5/28/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility

Manziel received backlash after photos of his partying appeared and addressed them in a post-practice press conference. He mainly employed (3b) minimization when talking about the incidents and, to a lesser extent, (3a) bolstering and (5) mortification. (3b) Minimization was utilized when he said he was “very surprised it is a story,” he was simply “having some fun” and “just living a normal life.” Manziel also could not understand why his lifestyle was magnified to the extent it is and “thought it was funny...didn’t put much into it.” He used (3a) bolstering by talking about the work that he has put in and (5) mortification by admitting that he knew that people would be taking photos and tweeting about his actions.

Rhetoric on Partying & Lifestyle - 6/27/14 Press Conference at NFL Play60 Event

After facing more criticism for partying videos and reports, Manziel addressed the incidents at a press conference at an NFL Play60 event. The main strategies he employed were (1a) simple denial, (1b) blame shifting and (3a) bolstering. Manziel used (1a) simple denial when he said he did not think he was doing anything wrong or anything that was harming the team or his performance. He also passively blamed the media for not reporting on his focus on football and individuals constantly recording the small part of his life that is not football-focused and posting it on social media, which is (1b) blame shifting. (3a) Bolstering was used when he repeatedly referred to his commitment to football and the hard work he had put in “here at this building going through my playbook and working out just like every other rookie is.”

Manziel also employed (3b) minimization by referring to the money video as “just in the past” and (3c) differentiation by stating repeatedly that “Everybody goes out on the weekends and enjoys their life.” (4) Corrective action was utilized when he said, “I’m growing up and continuing to learn from my mistakes and trying not to make the same ones over.” He very briefly used (5) mortification when he referred to “my mistakes.”

Rhetoric on Picture Rolling Money & Lifestyle - 7/25/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility

Manziel addressed the photo of himself rolling a dollar bill in a club bathroom along with his lifestyle at a press conference after Browns’ organized team activities. He employed six different image repair strategies: (1a) simple denial, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (3c) differentiation, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. He used (1a) simple denial by stating that he did not think there was anything wrong with him having a nightlife and a social life. (3a) Bolstering was employed when he talked about how much passion he played with at Texas A&M, and (3b) minimization was used when he referred to his partying and issues as simply going out and having a social life. Manziel utilized (3c) differentiation when he stated “there are other guys throughout the league that are doing that” (partying).

The first of the two biggest strategies was (4) corrective action when he talked about how he was moving forward and “going to try and mature and get better and handle myself better as a professional” and “represent this organization in a positive manner.” The second, (5) mortification, was employed when he said “I need to mature, and I have done some immature things” and admitted he had made some mistakes and wished he could do things in his past differently.

Rhetoric on Late to Team Meeting - 8/16/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility

When Manziel was cast in a negative light for being late to a team meeting, he addressed it in a regular team press conference. He employed (2c) accident, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. He said it was an (2c) accident when he stated that he “misread the schedule” and “it was just a misinterpretation.” (4) Corrective action was employed by stating it was “something that I need to learn from and make sure that it doesn’t happen again,” and he needs to do a better job of reading the schedule in the future. He did admit “it was an honest mistake,” which is (5) mortification.

Rhetoric on Middle Finger - 8/19/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility

After being caught giving the middle finger to the Redskins’ bench on national television, Manziel responded to the criticism in a standard Browns’ press conference. He employed mainly (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. The minor strategies he used were (2b) defeasibility and (3b) minimization. Manziel stated he needs to be “smarter” and “I need to hold my composure better,” which is (4) corrective action. He also acknowledged he should not have made the gesture and it was a lapse of judgment on his part, which is (5) mortification. (2b) Manziel employed defeasibility to a slight extent by stating that the cameras were on him since it was a Monday Night Football game, and (3b) minimization was used when he said it was a “slip up” and “not a big deal to me.”

Rhetoric on Fight with Fan - 11/28/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility

In a press conference at the Browns’ facility, Manziel addressed his fight with a fan in the early hours of the morning at a downtown Cleveland hotel. During his media session, Manziel employed (1a) simple denial, (1b) blame shifting, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (3c) differentiation and (3e) counterattack. He utilized (1a) simple denial when said there was no evidence to support the fan’s claims that an individual had “smashed him in the face, smashed

him, smashed him” as he had reported. He called it “just one of the many untruths and kind of things that have blown around a little bit with this story.” Manziel also stated that he felt like his decision to go out and stay out late was okay, and he was not in any kind of trouble. (1b) Blame shifting was also used when Manziel claimed the fan had charged his roommate. He called him “a very intoxicated, very aggressive person that approached me in the lobby” and said, “This man kept attempting to come at me, being extremely aggressive.” In addition, Manziel blamed the fan for incident making the news, claiming his group was trying to keep it under the radar.

Manziel’s claims of the individual coming at him and his roommate, in addition to his statement that the man put “his hands on me, kind of toying with me” are examples of (2a) provocation. In addition, Manziel briefly employed (3a) bolstering when he touted, “My lifestyle has changed dramatically...I don’t venture out much.” He used (3b) minimization by saying it was only him and a friend involved, not a huge posse as reported, and calling the incident “a little bit out of control.” Manziel added the situation had been “blown out of proportion,” and he “was really shocked that it came out this way.” (3c) Differentiation was utilized when Manziel stated, “I know there’s [sic] other guys around the league and other guys in this locker room that do the same thing and enjoy their time when they’re out of the building.” He mounted a (3e) counterattack on the individual by calling into question the truth of his report and describing him as “very intoxicated” and “very aggressive.”

Rhetoric on Behavior & Lifestyle - 12/24/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility

During another press conference at the Browns’ facility, Manziel addressed his overall lifestyle and behavior near the end of the season. He used (1a) simple denial, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification to try to repair his image. Manziel employed (1a) simple denial when he stated that he did not believe his behavior had a negative

effect on him and that he did not regret flashing the money sign. (3a) Bolstering was used multiple times when he elaborated on how much he had grown up in the past year, how hard he works and how he is 100 percent dedicated and committed to football. He used (3b) minimization when he deemed some of his behavior as simply having fun and downplaying any negative effects. (4) Manziel utilized corrective action when he stated he has “to take this a lot more seriously than maybe I did at first” and needs to put in the time to improve. Lastly, Manziel employed (5) mortification when he admitted “I haven't painted the greatest picture of me being in here and staying on top of my stuff.” He also confessed to doing things off the field that negatively affected people’s views of him and called himself “a kid who still had a college mindset a bit.”

Rhetoric on Missing Treatment, Partying & Lifestyle - 12/29/14 Press Conference at Browns Facility

In his last session with the media at the close of the Browns 2014-15 NFL season, Manziel responded to missing mandatory injury treatment and his lifestyle choices. (1a) Simple denial, (2c) accident, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification were all employed by Manziel during his press conference. Manziel employed (1a) simple denial when he stated reports of him throwing a party were “100% false” and “completely untrue.” He also denied tweeting during the game. In addition Manziel claimed the tweet was an (2c) accident. (3a) Bolstering was used when Manziel deemed himself a competitive person who knew what he wanted to do with his life. He called his issues bumps which is a form of (3b) minimization. Manziel utilized (4) corrective action when he stated that he either needed to learn from his mistakes or he would be “finding something else to do.” He said “now it is time to come in here, look at myself in the mirror and hold myself accountable and start making some deals

with myself.” Manziel also stated, “I need to start doing every single thing and everything the right way, and if I don’t I’m going to be exposed.”

By far the most prevalent strategy Manziel employed was (5) mortification. He apologized to his teammates, especially the veterans, and took responsibility for partying too late and not waking up the next morning, causing him to miss treatment. He admitted to making mistakes (including missing the mandatory treatment), letting his team down and “looking like a jack---.” In addition he alluded to his comments in the press conference a few days prior about how he was planning to make changes and how he had then gone out and acted completely contrary to that. Manziel admitted that when your actions do not reflect your words it causes a lot of trouble and he had caused the trouble and brought it on himself. He said, “I brought these cameras and all the people that are in this locker room right now.” In addition, he was upset with how he had handled things at times and called himself a “work in progress.” He said “I took two steps forward and one step back.”

Rhetoric on Rehab & Lifestyle - 6/7/15 Press Conference at Browns Facility

After Manziel attempted to repair his life in rehab, he began his image repair in a press conference after the Browns OTAs. In his press conference, Manziel employed (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. He used (3a) bolstering when he highlighted the positive things he had done that offseason. He also talked about how much time he spent working at the Browns facility and how he was trying to contribute to the team however he could. (3b) Minimization was employed briefly when he referred to his problem as “it is what it is” and dismissed talking about his private issues.

The strategy Manziel utilized the most during his press conference was (4) corrective action, employing it in just under a dozen circumstances. He stated that he was trying to close a

chapter of his life and move on, building on the positive growth he had made in rehab and since his release. Manziel said he needed to “continue to do the right thing, continue to do [his] best out [there], putting in the extra time and really just trying to learn.” He outlined some of the changes he had made to correct his problems:

I think I’ve done a good job throughout this offseason of really trying to get back to my roots and who I really am as a person. I moved out of – obviously, as you guys know, I moved. I got back to doing some things that I grew up doing that I really enjoy that are quiet, that occupy my time in a better way other than traveling or anything else of that sort.

Manziel was also attempting to spend as much time as possible at the Browns facility learning and becoming a better football player. He wanted to minimize any focus on his off-field behavior and celebrity personality. He said, “One thing that I wanted to do moving forward in this offseason is just try and quiet that to the best of my ability, whatever I can do to help quiet the noise that has surrounded this team and surrounded myself.” As part of that, Manziel stated he would be ending his traditional money sign celebration.

(5) Mortification was the second most frequent strategy he used. He admitted his off-the-field actions were a distraction and that he felt bad about it. Manziel stated he felt bad his teammates had to answer questions about his behavior so frequently, that it was not fair to them. He said “[Last year] was what it was, and it was not very good.” It was a “chapter in my life – not one that I’m very proud of, not one that I want to look back on very much and draw back on, that’s for sure.” He admitted that

at times, Johnny Football probably took over me a little bit, too, and I bought into that.

Like I said, I think I didn’t do my best to hush things down, push down the hype. I think,

at times, I welcomed it with immaturity and just accepted that a little bit. That's my fault. At the end of the day, everything that happened last year is not on anybody else but myself. I guess I wasn't prepared to handle the type of spotlight that I got and all the hype that came with it.

Rhetoric on Incident in Car with Crowley - 10/16/15 Tweets, 10/25/15 Interview at Rams Facility & 11/17/15 Statement on ClevelandBrowns.com

Manziel addressed the incident that took place in his car with his girlfriend at the time, Crowley, on three separate instances: first in a series of tweets, second in a post-game interview and third in a statement on *ClevelandBrowns.com*. In the tweets, Manziel employed (3b) minimization and (5) mortification. He called the incident a "dumb public argument" that was "embarrassing but not serious," insisting "everything was fine," which is (3b) minimization. His admission that it was "embarrassing" was (5) mortification to a small extent.

At the post-game interview, Manziel used the (3a) bolstering and (4) corrective action strategies. (3a) Bolstering was used when Manziel promoted how cooperative he has been with the Avon police, the Browns and "anybody that's asked me anything." He employed (4) corrective action by saying that he was "trying to do the right things on the field, just trying to keep my head down and just keep plugging and keep pushing."

In his final statement on the incident, (3a) bolstering, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification were employed by Manziel. He again pushed his cooperation with the NFL's investigation, which is (3a) bolstering. (4) Corrective action was used by talking about how he was focused on the Browns' next game and winning that next matchup with the Ravens. Finally, Manziel admitted again that the situation was embarrassing, employing (5) mortification.

Rhetoric on Partying Videos & Lifestyle - 11/23/15 Press Conference at Charity Event

When Manziel first faced backlash over videos of him partying during the Browns' bye-week, he responded at a press conference at a Thanksgiving charity event. Manziel employed (1a) simple denial and (3a) bolstering during the press conference. He used (1a) simple denial by repeating he had not seen or heard anything and saying, "Videos can be old... videos can be all kinds of different things." (3a) Bolstering was used when he referred to "the things that are really important" that he was doing, like his work in the community at the charity event and to prepare for his next football game.

Rhetoric on Lying about Videos & Lifestyle - 12/9/15 Press Conference at Browns Facility

After reports came out that Manziel lied to his bosses about the videos, Manziel addressed the media at a press conference at the Browns' facility. During the press conference, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization, (4) corrective action and (5) mortification were employed. He used bolstering by stating that he was proud of where he was at with his lifestyle and majorly improved from the last year "all the way around from the way I've conducted myself in the building and for the majority of the time, the way I have conducted myself off the field." He employed (3b) minimization of his wrongdoing by saying his partying was simply "a lapse of judgment" and the photo of him doing a money sign on his birthday was a "non-factor." (4) Corrective action was utilized when he admitted he had learned a lesson the hard way and needed to realize the prestigious position he was in as an NFL quarterback and act accordingly. Lastly, Manziel expressed (5) mortification by saying there were obviously times when he needed to improve his behavior and admitting poor judgment.

Rhetoric on Partying in Vegas - 1/2/16 Instagram Post

When reports came out that Manziel was partying in Las Vegas the night before the Browns' last regular season game, he responded to the negative attention via Instagram. Manziel

used (1a) simple denial by posting a photo of himself with his dog in his apartment captioned “#SaturdayNights” and later geotagging it in Akron, OH.

Rhetoric on Alleged Domestic Violence - 2/4/16 Interview with TMZ Sports

While Manziel has yet to officially release any statements about his alleged domestic violence incident, *TMZ* did reach Manziel by phone and conduct an interview on the topic. In it, Manziel employed (1a) simple denial, (3a) bolstering, (4) corrective action and (5) minimization. He used (1a) simple denial by stating, “It didn’t happen,” when asked about striking Crowley. Manziel also denied being suicidal or threatening to end his life. (3a) Bolstering was utilized when he talked about being completely stable, safe and secure. He claimed that he had “great things coming ahead” and was “100% committed to playing football.” He used corrective action by admitting he needs to get his body right and talking about his commitment to football. Lastly, Manziel did admit he knew he had been “having fun” but needed to refocus on football, which is a weak attempt at mortification.

Rhetoric on Being Cut by Browns - 3/11/16 Statement via Publicist

When Manziel was cut by the Browns, he released a statement thanking the organization and fans through his publicist. The statement also contained rhetoric stating he had hoped that they were building a championship team for the city of Cleveland. In a minimal way, this second part of the statement could be categorized as (2d) something good, (3a) bolstering and (3d) transcendence.

Rhetoric on Partying & Lifestyle - 4/8/16 Interview with TMZ Sports

Talking with a *TMZ* photographer outside a club, Manziel addressed his partying. He employed (1a) simple denial, (3b) minimization and (4) corrective action in the interview. He used (1a) simple denial by saying “I’m not really partying,” “I’m not doing anything crazy,” and

“I’m just having a good time with my boys and not drinking.” He repeated that he was not drinking and was being smart. (3b) Minimization was used when he said he was simply hanging with some buddies, which he would not term partying. Lastly, Manziel employed (4) corrective action when he said he was staying on the right track with his life.

Rhetoric on Partying & Lifestyle - 4/10/16 Interview with TMZ Sports

Manziel addressed his partying and lifestyle in another impromptu, bizarre interview with a *TMZ* photographer. He employed (1a) simple denial, (3a) bolstering, (3b) minimization and (4) corrective action during the short video clip. He repeatedly stated “I’m not drunk” and said “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with partying bro,” in addition to claiming that he was not out of control, which is (1a) simple denial. Manziel touted how “chill” and “cool” he was in the five or six nights in a row that he had been out, which is (3a) bolstering to a small extent. He greatly employed (3b) minimization of his issues by dismissing and scoffing at the suggestion of his “image problems” and saying he did not believe partying was a problem. He did briefly suggest he was working on getting his life together, which is (4) corrective action.

Rhetoric on Problems - 4/19/16 Statement to USA TODAY

After weeks of repeated partying, Manziel released a statement to *USA TODAY* regarding his behavior and recent troubles. In the two sentences of rhetoric, he employed weak attempts at (4) corrective action and (5) mortification. He told the news outlet that he was “hoping to take care of the issues in front of me so I can focus on what I have to do if I want to play in 2016,” which is (4) corrective action. In addition, using the term “issues” was a brief attempt at (5) mortification.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Discussion

Over the years, Manziel has made innumerable attempts to try to repair his public image, and the number of strategies he has tried seems to be just as large. During his about 30 press conference, interviews, statements and social media posts regarding his image, Manziel has employed almost all of Benoit's image repair strategies. However, in each case, there were certain ones employed more frequently and with greater prominence. In addition, certain tactics did appear to work much better than others.

In his first interview addressing his arrest, Manziel only employed two strategies, corrective action and mortification, and he utilized both equally. In this situation, the decision to use each of them was quite wise. It had been several months since his arrest, and it was not much of a news story at the time. His best option was to address it quickly and express appropriate remorse to make the story disappear again. Manziel was clearly in the wrong as he was charged and found guilty by the police, so it was impossible for him to use denial in regard to the incident. Trying to blame another party would have made him look irresponsible and childish. His use of corrective action and mortification appeared to be successful as the incident died with the news cycle, and for the next period, there was little negativity tied to his name other than his flashy play.

Manziel used completely different tactics in his next public statements addressing backlash he received from hanging with celebrities and sitting courtside at sporting events. Instead of addressing the criticism in a mature manner and explaining himself, he chose to deny his behavior was hurting anyone, minimize his behavior as simply a birthday present and then counterattack his naysayers by accusing them of hating on him. He used the same three strategies

a month later when replying to negativity resulting from the photo he posted of himself in a casino holding money he had won. He denied his actions were illegal or harmful and minimized the situation by making light of it through posting a photo of himself with a child holding fake money with a sarcastic caption. Manziel used the same counterattack by again accusing his critics of hating.

While Manziel was ultimately right that his hanging with celebrities, sitting courtside at basketball games and visiting a casino legally were not a big deal or causing any harm, unfortunately he turned it into a much larger deal through his responses. He could have maturely explained his family's financial situation and behavior and diffused the negativity, but instead, he chose to add to it. The media and public did not respond positively to his use of social media to address the situations, nor the rhetoric he chose to use. This was beginning of his image turning from a positive football star to a negative celebrity persona.

Manziel righted the ship to a small extent the day after his fake money photo tweets when he addressed the media. While he did again employ simple denial and minimization, and used another denial tactic of blame shifting, the main strategy he used was corrective action. He repeatedly admitted he does need to grow up and be careful with his actions. He said he was still learning each day. Manziel also threw in a bit of mortification, admitting he probably should be more careful and well-behaved in the future to avoid these type of headlines. This focus on accepting responsibility and moving forward was well received, and Manziel moved back into a more positive spotlight for a time.

Unfortunately in his next few public statements, Manziel took a step backward by reverting to less successful image repair strategies. He minimized the seriousness of his actions at a press conference repeatedly by implying it was not a big deal and he really was not acting

that wildly. He denied he was doing anything wrong and used the age-old excuse that ‘every college kid is doing it,’ including other football players. A few weeks later, Manziel denied he had gotten a tattoo of his school’s biggest rival’s logo via Twitter, claiming it was fake. In an interview, he addressed reports of his shoving a coach in practice by claiming he had been shoved first (provocation), it was not a serious situation (minimization) and the individual was not actually a coach but only a grad assistant (minimization). He did admit to shoving him (mortification), but only as a side note. In a second interview on the radio, Manziel again counterattacked by called those criticizing his vacation and lifestyle “haters” and minimized his recent behavior, including getting the fake tattoo. He did use corrective action to a small extent by saying he was trying to be the good person his parents raised him to be and be smarter in the future, and Manziel utilized a bit of mortification by admitting he should have anticipated the negative reaction. Overall though, the interview focused more on football and did not do much to improve his reputation.

Since the incidents were not that big of a deal, he did not damage his incident too much more with these comments, but he also did nothing to help it. Manziel could have taken responsibility for his actions by admitting the fake tattoo was probably a bad idea since he knew it would offend fans and apologizing for losing his temper and shoving the grad assistant. He could have conceded he had been having fun with friends on a trip in Mexico but tried to alleviate the negativity by assuring the media he had been doing so in a responsible manner. Unfortunately he did none of the above, and by now, while Manziel had technically done nothing wrong, the number of incidents of him acting in a less-than-positive manner was beginning to increase to a worrisome amount.

Everything came to a head when it was reported he was kicked out of the prestigious Manning Passing Academy. Manziel chose to appear on *College Game Day* in addition to holding his regular press conference at the SEC Media Days to do major damage control. Manziel used seven strategies in the two press sessions. He primarily leaned on minimization, mortification and corrective action, which have proven to be successful strategies for other athletes, including himself in the past. He also mixed in a few other strategies. Addressing his departure from the camp, Manziel denied he had been kicked out of the camp or was hung over. He provided a plausible excuse for missing the meeting, saying his phone died so his alarm did not go off, and he overslept, so it was an accident. He also played up his exhaustion due to his busy schedule. To shift the narrative to the positive, he assured his audience he would be more than prepared for the season. Manziel refused to answer whether or not he had been drinking, which is another interesting tactic, though not one Benoit's initial categories.

Manziel minimized the seriousness of his frequent partying behavior from the offseason by repeating his previous statements that he had not done anything criminal, which was true. Smartly, he fully accepted responsibility for the mistakes he had made and owned up to the fact he had probably brought some of the negative attention on himself with how public of a lifestyle he had been living. He also focused on the lessons he had learned and how he was going to move on from this and start grinding on the football field.

While some of the other strategies he used on their own are not advisable, using them alongside heavy doses of mortification and corrective action proved to be successful. Manziel did provide an adequate explanation for his departure from the camp. Because of the number of incidents Manziel had been involved in, people had become a bit skeptical of his words, even when he was saying the right things and using strategies proven successful in the past. Overall,

Manziel moved on from the interviews with people wary of his past behavior but also looking at him in a more positive light. Many were willing to give him a second chance.

Unfortunately, he reverted back to unwise tactics a couple of weeks later when he employed bolstering, and minimization to a lesser extent, in response to backlash over him being at a fraternity party and getting kicked out of it. He responded to his “haters” by boasting about his victories on the football field, which did not successfully improve his image. When another serious incident took place with the NCAA investigation of his autograph scandal, Manziel again employed the unofficial tactic of avoidance. He only addressed it indirectly and minimized the incident when he did. He did deny wrongdoing and imply it was a misunderstanding (an accident) that caused his autograph memorabilia to go up for sale to the NCAA investigators. This lack of public address and poor choice of strategy when he addressed it privately by providing an improbable explanation further damaged rather than improved his image.

Manziel stayed quiet until he was drafted by the Cleveland Browns on May 9, 2014. He participated in the traditional introductory media sessions. In the press conference and conference call, Manziel again denied he was doing anything wrong and even claimed some of the media reports were untrue. While he did admit he had made some mistakes in the past on social media, he dismissed the incidents and their severity and instead focused on making himself look good. He mostly abandoned the corrective action and mortification strategies that had been successful for him in the past. While his rhetoric did not further damage his image rhetoric, it also did not significantly improve people’s views of him.

This trend continued when he addressed photos of himself partying later that month. Manziel completely dismissed the incident as him simply having fun and living life and called the prevalence of stories in the media about his personal life funny. He only employed

mortification once to a slight extent by admitting he knew it would become a story. Instead his defense centered on repeated use of minimization and even bolstering to a minor extent. At the NFL Play60 event, Manziel addressed the media and again focused on minimizing that he was doing anything wrong and bolstering his image by sharing how hard he had been working numerous times. He claimed everyone acts like he does and tried to blame the media for not reporting about his hard work and the public for caring about his personal life and documenting it on social media. He only briefly used mortification by once using the words “my mistakes” and saying he was growing up and learning from them. Manziel also avoided answering any direct questions about some of the videos of his partying, instead dismissing the incidents as “in the past.” After this media session, the headlines centered on how Manziel was not going to change his wild lifestyle, so instead of repairing his image through his rhetoric, Manziel actually further damaged it.

About a month later after the most serious picture of him partying, one appearing to show him preparing to do drugs, appeared online, Manziel briefly addressed the photo in a press conference after the Browns second day of OTAs. He avoided directly talking about the incident. Indirectly, Manziel did try to go back to his more successful strategies of corrective action and mortification. He stated he was going to try to be more professional and represent the organization in a more positive light in the future and admitted he had make rookie mistakes and wished he could have handled some things differently. While he was successful at putting the issue to rest, by not directly accounting for or apologizing for what happened in the photo, he did nothing to help repair the damage he had done to his reputation.

Manziel’s next two incidents were football-related, and he addressed each in the Browns’ regular media sessions. He missed a team meeting, and while he did claim it was an accident, he

admitted he made a mistake and outlined how he was going to make sure it did not happen again. He also gave the middle finger to the opposing team's bench during a Monday Night Football preseason game. Again he employed corrective action by saying he needed to be smarter and hold his composure better and used mortification by admitting he should not have made the gesture; it was a lapse in judgment. Manziel briefly minimized the incident by saying it was not a big deal to him and slightly blamed the fact it was a national televised game, but these strategies were not his primary focus. Overall, his tactics proved effective as the stories died down and were not given too much more thought. He dispersed the situation, stopped any further damage and even repaired it a touch, or as much as he could at this point with people's views on him based on his past record.

Manziel stayed out of the spotlight and avoided doing further damage to his reputation for the next few months, until reports came out that he was involved in a fight with a fan at a downtown Cleveland hotel in the early hours of the morning. When addressing the incident at a press conference, Manziel completely failed to use mortification or corrective action. Instead he repeatedly placed blame on the individual, denied he did anything wrong and tried to minimize the seriousness of the issue. To a small extent, he also claimed he was provoked, counterattacked the fan, bolstered his image and used differentiation by claiming there are plenty of other guys (even teammates) who go out late like he did.

While the fan later recanted to an extent, and it does not appear Manziel did anything criminally wrong, he came off very poorly regarding the incident and the press conference. Manziel could have owned up to the part he played (even if it was small) and outlined steps he planned to take to ensure it did not happen again. In addition, he could have acknowledged the fact it was (or could have turned into) a major problem and something he needed to take

seriously. He did none of the above and therefore did nothing to fix his image, instead letting the articles continue with their negative tone.

Near the end of the season, Manziel addressed his image and lifestyle in two team media sessions. In the first, he did a good job of admitting his past mistakes and that he needed to take things more seriously and put in the time to improve in the future. He realized his role in creating his negative public persona and confessed it did not portray that he was really applying himself to his job. He did employ bolstering and minimization to a smaller extent, but in conjunction with the other two tactics, it did not come across negatively. He briefly employed simple denial, which was unwise, but his focus on the other strategies overcame that. Sentiment coming off that interview was mildly hopeful Manziel had finally taken responsibility for his actions and was turning his life around.

Unfortunately, a few days later, Manziel missed a mandatory injury treatment session, reportedly due to partying late the night before, and took two steps backward again, undoing the progress he had made. He employed simple denial in stating he had not thrown a huge party like some reports had stated and tried to briefly bolster his image and minimize the incident as a “bump” in his life. However, he did revert back to focusing on how he needed to correct the problem to keep his job and start doing things the right way. By far his most prevalent tactic was mortification, which was a very wise choice. About a dozen times, Manziel provided rhetoric apologizing to teammates, confessing his mistakes and admitting he needed to focus on making his actions reflect his words. At this point in time, it was useless for Manziel to try to do anything other than apologize and admit his responsibility. He was clearly in the wrong, and his reputation had taken such a repetitive beating he simply needed to own up to his mistakes and try

to convince the world he was moving on and focusing on becoming a better person. He was successful to a limited extent, due to the abundant skepticism now surrounding him.

His good behavior did not last long as he hit the party circuit soon after, but a month later, Manziel finally took a definitive step toward improving himself as a person when he entered rehab. He was in treatment for over two months and made his first public statements a couple of months later in June after the second day of offseason activities for the Browns. He addressed the media with a short statement and then took questions. He briefly talked about the positive actions he had been taking: spending time at the facility and putting in work to become a better quarterback. However, the majority of his rhetoric was dedicated to mortification and corrective action. Manziel admitted being a distraction with his off-the-field incidents and said he felt bad about it. In addition, he confessed the Johnny Football persona had overtaken him at times and controlled his decision making. He fully owned up to his immaturity the past year and acknowledged everything that happened was his fault. In about ten different instances, Manziel employed corrective action. He talked about how he was closing that chapter in his life, learning from it and moving on. Getting back to his roots, finding quieter, local hobbies and ditching the money sign were a few steps he had taken to try to better himself. He was trying to quiet the noise about non-football matters and truly move forward.

The strategies Manziel focused on during this press conference were wisely chosen for the situation and came across in a very sincere, positive manner. In addition by going to rehab, the media and public could see, and truly believed, Manziel was serious about making changes in his life and trying to put his troubled past behind him. Manziel's image repair strategies, coupled with his actions, caused a positive spike in how others viewed him. Overall, his press conference was a success.

Manziel appeared to stay on the straight and narrow in the ensuing months, staying off of page six and keeping his focus on the field. However, all the good will he had begun to accumulate came to a crash landing when reports of his involvement in an incident with his then-girlfriend Crowley came to light. Multiple people had called 911 due to his reckless driving and possible violence against Crowley during a heated argument. Manziel publicly addressed the incident three times and privately spoke to the police about the occurrence. He employed bolstering by focusing on his cooperation with the authorities and minimized the incident by calling it a dumb public argument, rather than treating it with the seriousness it deserved. He did admit it was embarrassing and outlined how he was moving forward and focusing on football matters. Overall, he failed to take advantage of the opportunity to take responsibility and apologize for his role in the incident. To police he deflected the charges onto Crowley, who was intoxicated and uncooperative, through denial and evasion. Though he was not charged with anything, with the evidence available, Manziel at minimum was involved in a huge argument while driving fast and recklessly, putting himself, Crowley and others in danger. He really never admitted any wrongdoing on his part, which was a poor choice. He moved on from the incident with another major dent in his image.

About a month later, videos of Manziel partying during the Browns' bye week appeared on social media after he promised coaches he would do nothing to embarrass the organization during the break. Initially Manziel addressed the videos in a press conference, avoiding directly answering about their legitimacy, but implying they were old, using denial. He instead spoke about his positive actions in the community and in relation to football. A few days later, when reports came out that not only were the videos legitimate, but Manziel had lied to the coaching staff about them, he again used bolstering and added a bit of minimization, terming it simply a

lapse in judgment. However, he was forced to also outline a bit of corrective action, and half-heartedly admit he had made a mental slip. Eventually he switched to avoidance and refused to answer further questions on the topic. Lying to bosses and losing a job as a result is obviously a seriously reputation-damaging incident. While Manziel did briefly attempt to express mortification and corrective action, he did not take it to the level he could have. By combining it with other less successful strategies and because of his past insincere record, he was mostly unsuccessful in fixing any damage.

He continued on his path of not appearing to learn from his mistakes when he reportedly visited Las Vegas wearing a disguise the night before the team's last game and missed a mandatory injury treatment session the morning before the game. He did not address the incident in an interview, but instead posted a photo to Instagram, subtly denying the reports and claiming he was instead at home in Akron, OH, a tactic that completely failed.

One month after the Browns', and Johnny's, disastrous season came to an end, Manziel was involved in what was by far the most serious incident of his life, when he was accused of domestic violence against his ex-girlfriend, Crowley. Manziel's only rhetoric to date directly addressing the incident was given in a phone call interview with *TMZ Sports*. According to the site, Manziel directly denied hitting his ex-girlfriend or threatening suicide during their argument. He instead bolstered his image by claiming he had great things ahead and was stable, safe and secure. In addition, he did briefly (but weakly) employ mortification and corrective action by admitting he had been having fun and needed to get his body right and focus on football.

Because of the great depth and disturbing details provided in the police report, to repair his image, Manziel needed to go much deeper with his rhetoric. In addition the news site Manziel

had chosen to speak to (a gossip media outlet) undermined any chance he had of correcting his image. His image repair tactics did nothing to help his reputation, and instead harmed it further.

Manziel was cut by the Browns a month after the incident and released his a statement on his change of status. In it, Manziel claimed he had been trying to do something good for Cleveland by creating a championship team the past two years, which also loosely qualifies as bolstering and transcendence.

In the ensuing weeks, Manziel talked several more times with *TMZ*, each time when one of their photographers caught him entering or leaving a night club. In two instances, he addressed his lifestyle and behavior. During these encounters, Manziel denied he was drinking or partying and minimized that his behavior was in any way negative. He also dismissed his image problem by scoffing at the idea he had one and instead tried to bolster his image by insisting how cool and chill he had been acting. He did claim he was staying on the right track and getting his life together, but his actions clearly showed otherwise. The state Manziel was in during these interviews, the location in which they took place, the media outlet to which he was speaking and, ultimately, the words and strategies he chose to employ all combined to completely annihilate any chance Manziel had of repairing his image. He only slid further into the seriously troubled, immature and reckless public persona he had been slowly creating for himself, starting with that first arrest four years earlier.

Manziel finally released an official statement on April 19 to *USA TODAY*. The two-sentence statement sounded like it was crafted by his publicist though it was a step in the right direction strategy-wise. He admitted to having “issues in front of [him],” which was more than he had done in recent months. While he did not lay out the exact steps of how he was planning on fixing his problems, he did attempt to use corrective action by saying that he wanted to take

care of his problems, so he could work on returning to the NFL in 2016. Because of the brevity of his statement, the lack of specifics and the fact he was seen partying the night after, Manziel's weak attempt at image repair fell completely flat. His reputation was so damaged; one wondered if it was ever possible for him to recover.

Limitations

As with any research, this study faced several limitations. The biggest limitation the researcher encountered was the timeline of events. Research for this study began in February 2015, right after Manziel entered a rehabilitation center. It intended to end with Manziel's post-rehab comments and an analysis of how he had repaired his image after his treatment. In the months after his comments, Manziel appeared to have completely altered his lifestyle and had no serious behavioral issues.

Unfortunately though, the timeline for this research had to be extended when Manziel's life began to spiral back downward, and he was involved in a major incident involving multiple 911 calls and the police in October 2015. The end-date for the research was then set to coincide with the end of the Cleveland Browns season. This date again had to be altered when Manziel was involved in yet another serious incident on January 30, 2016, when police were called about an alleged domestic violence incident and an investigation into Manziel's behavior began. Unfortunately, due to publication deadlines, this study does not contain a final resolution to this serious occurrence. At the time of publication, Manziel's domestic violence case was still in progress as Manziel was waiting for his case to be heard in court. In addition, new minor incidents were appearing daily.

In looking at Manziel's rhetoric, there were also a few challenges. In some cases, Manziel did not respond to the incident. He avoided directly addressing the image-damaging

occurrences. In addition, a few of Manziel's rhetorical responses were not fully available to examine. The original transcript and/or video of his media sessions could not be obtained for review. In these cases, the researcher had to reconstruct statements from multiple news articles containing quotes and paraphrases of his rhetoric.

Conclusions

Johnny Manziel's image is an interesting topic to examine, not because it was damaged through a single negative incident, like a failed drug test or extramarital affair, but because it was repeatedly chipped at over a multi-year period by continual misbehavior. Aside from his very serious alleged domestic violence issue, each incident taken individually would be no more than a short-lived blimp on the radar, passing with the next news cycle. The combination of all of his incidents is what has proved so costly and damaging to his image.

Initially in his major, more formal, media sessions, Manziel focused on admitting his mistakes and assured his audience he was growing and learning from them. He owned up to his misbehavior and that he needed to take steps to ensure they would not happen again.

Unfortunately in his statements on social media and during more informal media availability, Manziel often abandoned these successful strategies and employed denial, minimization or other damaging strategies. Overall though, Manziel did initially repair his image because his use of mortification and corrective action in major media sessions were successful.

However, as the incidents continued to pile up, Manziel strayed from the strategies that had served him well in the past and started to do further damage to his image through his rhetoric. Even when Manziel tried to employ the previously successful tactics, those strategies did not repair his reputation because his actions did not back up his words. Eventually, he seemed to completely give up and revert to brash, arrogant responses minimizing the seriousness

of his situation. With this change of tactics, combined with his reckless behavior, any shred of positive reputation he had left vanished. The name Manziel became synonymous with a partying, irresponsible former football player with serious issues who may not live to see his next birthday.

There were a few other interesting conclusions from this study. In multiple cases, Manziel either avoided or directly refused to answer questions about his negative behavior. Avoidance is a strategy that proved successful in a few instances as it allowed the negative report to blow over quickly. These cases though involved incidents that were small and not serious. In cases where the occurrence is severely damaging to Manziel's, or any athlete's, reputation, it can backfire and allow the story to continue to live because he has not tried to set things right nor taken any sort of responsibility. This is an interesting technique, though Benoit does not include it in his image repair strategies. One previous study did identify a similar tactic the researchers called stonewalling.

This study also came across an interesting, unintentional finding. When Manziel used social media to engage in image repair, overall, he seemed to be much more aggressive and less successful. For the most part, his social media responses came across as instant, hot-headed mind casting instead of well-thought out, level-headed responses. While there is no doubt that social media can be used successfully to engage in image repair, this study shows that in order for it to be successful, the same thought and care needs to be put into it as that of a carefully crafted public relations statement.

Ultimately, hidden in Manziel's rhetoric is the key to his image repair. "I think it's actions. Actions speak way louder than words." He knows the secret. All he has to do is follow his own advice.

Areas for Further Study

A few areas of further study presented themselves throughout the course of this research. First, Manziel's stark contrast in strategies when using social media verses traditional media presents an interesting topic to explore. Researchers could compare athletes' use of social media and traditional media when engaging in image repair to determine which strategies were most prevalent on each type of medium and which medium has overall proven more successful for athletes.

Another area of study the researcher hopes to explore in more depth in the future is how to concretely determine the success of the image repair strategies employed by Manziel. It would be interesting to explore news outlets as well as social media sites to truly gage the media and the public's opinion on Manziel after each of his attempts to repair his reputation. This would produce more solid proof of whether or not each individual tactic was successful rather than purely relying on the researcher's own judgment and knowledge.

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Appendix A: Manziel Incident & Rhetorical Response Timeline

Date	Incident	Date	Rhetoric
6/29/2012	Arrested for disorderly conduct, failure to identify and possession of false ID cards; Suspended from football team		
10/31/2012	Appeared on social media at Halloween party in Scooby Doo onesie drinking and dancing with scantily clad women		
		11/27/2012	Press Conference at Texas A&M - Rhetoric on Arrest
12/20/2012	Appeared courtside at Rockets and Mavericks games and in photos with famous athletes; Backlash began on how college kid could afford lifestyle		
		12/20/2012	Tweet - Rhetoric on Courtside Tour
1/5/2013	Posted picture showing cash won at casino on Twitter		
1/6/2013	Pictured on <i>TMZ</i> at nightclub with champagne bottle		
		1/5/2013	Tweet - Rhetoric on Casino Picture & Celebrity Lifestyle
		1/6/2013	Press Conference at Discover BCS Bowl - Rhetoric on Casino Picture & Celebrity Lifestyle
2/9/2013	Appeared on social media partying with celebrities in New Orleans at Mardi Gras and Super Bowl		
2/18/2013	Received backlash for being full-time online student		
		2/18/2013	Press Conference at Davey O'Brien Award Ceremony - Rhetoric on Online Class Schedule & Lifestyle

3/10/2013	Spent spring break attending Drake concert in Toronto and partying (and drinking) with friends in Cabo, Mexico; Photos appeared of him with Texas Longhorns tattoo and flashing their hand signal		
		3/12/2013	Tweet - Rhetoric on Longhorn Tattoo
3/23/2013	Shoved graduate assistant during spring practice		
		3/28/2013	Interview with <i>San Antonio Express-News</i> - Rhetoric on Shoving GA & Lifestyle
		4/12/2013	Interview with <i>Richie and Greggo</i> - Rhetoric on Lifestyle, Cabo Trip, Twitter Use & Tattoo
6/16/2013	Tweeted about how he could not wait to leave College Station		
6/27/2013	Asked to leave University of Texas frat party due to underage drinking		
7/13/2013	Left Manning Passing Academy early, reportedly due to partying		
		7/17/2013	Interview with <i>College Game Day</i> & Press Conference at SEC Media Days - Rhetoric on Leaving Manning Passing Academy & Lifestyle
7/27/2013	Kicked out of fraternity party at University of Texas		
7/28/2013	Spotted at another fraternity party wearing Tebow jersey		
		7/28/2013	Tweets - Rhetoric on Fraternity Party
8/4/2013	Investigated by NCAA regarding autographed memorabilia being sold		
		12/13/2013	Interview on <i>SVP & Russillo</i> - Rhetoric on Autograph Investigation

8/31/2013	Benched by coach in 4th quarter during season opener for taunting opponents after serving first half suspension for autograph scandal		
12/6/2013	Took trip to Las Vegas casino to celebrate 21st birthday with Drake		
1/1-2/14	Kicked off New Year by partying with Drake and taking in Heat-Warriors game courtside in Miami		
1/5-6/14	Partied at BCS National Championship in Los Angeles clubs		
		5/9/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility & Conference Call with media - Rhetoric on Lifestyle
5/10/2014	Partied post-draft with plenty of champagne and celebrities		
5/26/2014	Appeared at Las Vegas pool party with notorious partier Rob Gronkowski		
6/9/2014	Pictured at Austin X Games in a club lying on an inflatable swan drinking champagne		
6/16/2014	Appeared in video using an enormous stack of money as a cell phone at Drake's Houston Appreciation Weekend		
		5/28/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Partying Pictures & Lifestyle
		6/27/2014	Press Conference at NFL Play60 Event - Rhetoric on Partying & Lifestyle
7/5/2014	Appeared in photo tightly rolling \$20 bill in bathroom in club		

		7/25/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Picture Rolling Money & Lifestyle
8/11/2014	Fined for being late to a Browns' team meeting		
		8/16/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Late to Team Meeting
8/18/2014	Gave middle finger to Redskins in preseason game; Fined for gesture and lost starting QB battle		
		8/19/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Middle Finger
11/22/2014	Involved in altercation with intoxicated fan in Cleveland hotel at 2:36 a.m.; Fan accused Manziel of injuring him		
		11/28/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Fight with Fan
		12/23/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Behavior & Lifestyle
12/27/2014	Missed mandatory walk-through and injury treatment at Browns' facility, reportedly after throwing party night before		
		12/29/2014	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Missing Treatment, Partying & Lifestyle
12/30/2014	Partied in South Beach with friends; Wished LeBron James happy birthday via Instagram		
1/1/2015	Rang in New Year poolside with cocktails at posh Miami hotel		
1/5/2015	Partied in Houston nightclub; Gave hecklers middle finger; Had drinks tossed at him		

1/10/2015	Partied in Aspen, Colorado, with teammate Josh Gordon		
1/28/2015	Entered rehabilitation center for undisclosed treatment		
5/30/2015	Threw water bottle at fan at golf tournament		
		6/17/2015	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Rehab & Lifestyle
10/12/2015	Involved in roadside incident and argument with girlfriend Colleen Crowley; Police were involved		
		10/16/2015	Tweets - Rhetoric on Incident in Car with Crowley
		10/25/2015	Interview at Rams Facility - Rhetoric on Incident in Car with Crowley
11/9/2015	Partied and drank with college co-eds in College Station		
		11/17/2015	Statement on <i>ClevelandBrowns.com</i> - Rhetoric on Incident in Car with Crowley
11/23/2015	Partied in Austin during bye-week; Videos surfaced of him with champagne and singing along to hip-hop song		
		11/23/2015	Press Conference at Charity Event - Rhetoric on Partying Videos & Lifestyle
11/26/2015	Lied about videos to Browns; Tried to get friends to cover up his partying; Lost starting job		
11/29/2015	Appeared in video singing along to Future in private residence		
		12/9/2015	Press Conference at Browns Facility - Rhetoric on Lying about Videos & Lifestyle

12/13/2015	Signed \$100 bill before game versus 49ers		
12/30/2015	Arrived at Browns facility complaining of concussion symptoms; Later reported he was hung over, possibly drunk and sent home by Browns		
1/2/2016	Pulled over by police for driving with expired plates		
1/2/2016	Flew to Las Vegas and partied at a night club and a casino night before Browns' last game; Spotted in disguise of mustache and blonde wig		
		1/2/2016	Instagram Post - Rhetoric on Partying in Vegas
1/3/2016	Missed Browns' last game and mandatory injury treatment; Browns could not locate		
1/4/2016	Reports released he was drunk and sent home by Browns previous week		
1/5/2016	Spotted by TMZ buying alcohol		
1/7/2016	Dropped by LeBron's marketing agency		
1/21/2016	Fined by Browns for missing treatment		
1/21/2016	Partied in Dallas with Chandler Parsons, other professional athletes		
1/26/2016	Partied with college girls in Dallas; Reported breakup with Crowley		
1/30/2016	Involved in alleged domestic violence incident with ex-girlfriend; Searched for with helicopter after fleeing on foot after reportedly kidnapping, striking and threatening to kill Crowley		
2/3/2016	Appeared at Mavericks game		

2/4/2016	Police report of alleged domestic violence incident released as well as Crowley statement, but case closed		
		2/4/2016	Interview with <i>TMZ Sports</i> - Rhetoric on Alleged Domestic Violence
2/5/2016	Dropped by agent		
2/5/2016	Crowley received restraining order against him		
2/6/2016	Dallas police opened criminal investigation as Crowley decided to press charges		
2/9/2016	Reports appeared Manziel was drunk and/or hung over, not concussed last week of season		
2/13/2016	Partied at teammate's wedding		
2/25/2016	Domestic violence case referred to grand jury		
2/25-28/2016	Partied in South Beach		
3/4/2016	Started partying tour in Hollywood		
3/6/2016	Appeared with teammate Josh Gordon at UFC fight in Vegas		
3/9/2016	Partied all week at night clubs and strip clubs on Hollywood's Sunset Blvd		
3/11/2016	Officially waived by Browns		
		3/11/2016	Statement via Publicist - Rhetoric on Being Cut by Browns
3/27/2016	Returned to Vegas to party		
4/3/2016	Continued on club tour in Hollywood in ensuing weeks; Hung with Justin Bieber; New marijuana tattoo appeared		

4/4-5/16	Threw two raging parties reportedly in Hollywood; Did \$32K worth of damage to a rental house with alcohol and drugs		
		4/8/2016	Interview with <i>TMZ Sports</i> - Rhetoric on Partying & Lifestyle
		4/10/2016	Interview with <i>TMZ Sports</i> - Rhetoric on Partying & Lifestyle
4/13/2016	Passenger in hit-and-run car accident; Later returned to scene		
4/16-17/16	Spotted in ball pit at Coachella and pictured hanging with Drake's father and posse		
4/18/2016	Dropped by new agent Rosenhaus after five-day window to enter treatment expired; Reports came out Manziel had been previously dropped by Nike and other sponsors		
		4/19/2016	Statement to <i>USA TODAY</i> - Rhetoric on Problems
4/26/2016	Indicted by grand jury on misdemeanor assault charge		

Appendix B: Benoit's Image Repair Theory Coding Sheet

Benoit's Image-Repair Strategies

Deflect Charges

1. *Denial*- refute the charges
 - 1a. *Simple denial*- deny that anything happened, that the incident was their fault, or that the act was damaging in any way
 - 1b. *Blame shifting*- place the responsibility and guilt on another party
2. *Evasion*- avoiding taking responsibility for the incident
 - 2a. *Provocation*- claim another incident occurred first that provoked the company's offensive act, and therefore, the business is not responsible
 - 2b. *Defeasibility*- assert they lacked information about or control over important elements in the situation that caused the offensive act
 - 2c. *Accident*- claim the offensive act was accidental
 - 2d. *Something good*- assert the negative action happened while the organization was actually attempting to do something good, and the negative outcome was unanticipated

Minimize the Attack

3. *Reduce Offensiveness*- employed to dispute that the action was not as bad as the accuser claims it was
 - 3a. *Bolstering*- try to enhance the company's positive image to the effect that it overcomes any negativity it received through its wrongful act
 - 3b. *Minimization*- attempt to downplay the severity the offensive action
 - 3c. *Differentiation*- make the action seem less harmful than other comparable acts
 - 3d. *Transcendence*- re-contextualize the act to show higher values were at stake
 - 3e. *Counterattack*- mount a counterattack against the accuser
 - 3f. *Compensation*- provide compensation to the harmed party
4. *Corrective action*- try to fix the harm caused and/or make a commitment to ensuring that it does not happen again

Mortification

5. *Mortification*- admit accountability, apologize and request forgiveness