

Fall 12-2012

# Religious Leaders in Crisis: An Analysis of Image Restoration Strategies and Content Variables

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The University of Southern Mississippi

RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF IMAGE RESTORATION  
STRATEGIES AND CONTINGENT VARIABLES

by

Melody Teracita Fisher

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012

## ABSTRACT

### RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF IMAGE RESTORATION STRATEGIES AND CONTINGENT VARIABLES

by Melody Teracita Fisher

December 2012

The following study employs content analysis to examine the crisis communication responses and audience reception of religious leaders involved in scandal. Benoit's Image Repair Strategies and the Contingency Theory are used to determine the strategies, stances and contingent variables of mega-church leaders: Jim Bakker, Ted Haggard, Eddie Long, Henry Lyons and Jimmy Swaggart; and the Boston Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. News framing theory determined media and audience reception of the religious leaders' crisis communication responses.

The study concludes that there is little difference in mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese's crisis communication responses. Religious leaders' dominant strategies were bolstering and denial, and their media portrayals were balanced.

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December 2012

## DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my grandparents, Mr. William (McKinley) and Mrs. Amanda McPherson and Rev. C.L. and Mrs. Willie T. Woodley. I stand on your shoulders.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God, because I firmly believe that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I thank my committee members: my chair, Dr. Jae-Hwa Shin for her assistance, encouragement, and remaining committed to me even after the birth of her twins; to Dr. Chris Campbell, Dr. Kim LeDuff, Dr. Cheryl Jenkins, and Dr. Fei Xue, thank you for your input and advice. To my honorary committee members Dr. Gene Wiggins and Dr. Dave Davies, thank you for your encouragement and support.

I send a special thank you to Maria David of the *Charlotte Observer*. You are a lifesaver!

I am so honored and humbled to have the unyielding support of my parents, Mr. Eugene and Mrs. Alma Fisher. They set an educational standard for me and I thank them for the major sacrifices they have made and resources they have given me to pursue my aspirations.

To my son Jacob, thank you for being my inspiration.

To my sister-friends and cohorts, Dr. Leslie Rasmussen and soon to be Dr. Riva Brown Teague, thank you for the texts, emails, meals, and encouragement. I am positive we will remain connected through this bond.

Lastly, to all my family, friends, church family, and co-workers, thank you for your enthusiasm about this research.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church and several Protestant churches have come under public scrutiny because of their leaders' presumed immoral, and sometimes criminal, behavior - both alleged and admitted. Religious leaders have been tried in the court of public opinion on issues ranging from financial embezzlement to sexual abuse (Panichas, 2002). Before the allegations were released, many of these leaders enjoyed opulent lifestyles, political astuteness, and sterling reputations among their congregants. Many of these men were revered in their local communities as well as on a national level.

The majority of the leaders were accused of scandalous activity. The victims, co-conspirator, or someone privy to the act(s) revealed the damaging information for individual reasons ranging from citizen justice to malice. Other times leaders admitted guilt to their respective publics in effort to clear their conscience. After these disgraces are publically announced, the leaders' images suddenly become tainted and individual campaigns to restore their positive public image are executed. Image restoration strategies are practiced in effort to combat moral dilemmas and regain the trust of respective congregations. To defend themselves from accusations and suspicion, leaders have spoken publically to their specific congregations and to the world through various forms of public relations tactics. Sermons, press conferences, and interviews have been the most frequently used ways for embattled pastors to reclaim their prevalent voice in the religious world. These tactics are a departure from normal religious public relations practices. Religious public relations practitioners primarily use the two-way symmetrical role (Cannon, 2011). Several religious communicators agreed that they used

“communication to build two-way understanding, mediate conflicts between organizations and publics, and let publics influence the organization as much as it influences them” (p. 32). This model of public relations has been touted because it encourages a dialogue between the organization and its publics (Grunig, 2001).

The press agency/publicity model is also widely practiced in religious institutions (Badaracco, 2006). In effort to disseminate information to parishioners and the general public, publicity is used. Practitioners draft news releases, disseminate media kits, and pitch stories to media outlets to inform the general audience of events and services the church offers.

The religious world often extends to the general population due to the growing popularity of mega-churches. Mega-churches have created a culture that openly connects secular practices with organized religion, while effectively utilizing media to gain more exposure. The leaders of these multi-million dollar establishments appear to be more approachable than traditional religious leaders. They reach members unorthodoxly by recreating conventional practices into acceptable and relevant forms for mass appeal (Thumma, 1996).

Mega-churches incorporate mixes of jazz, hip-hop and gospel into their worship service, unlike the piano, organ and drum combo seen at many traditional churches. The building structure is also different from the conventional churches, which often feature a steeple and stained glass windows. Mega-churches are built to resemble office complexes, warehouses and even sports arenas (Werner, 2011). Leaders of mega-churches are accustomed to receiving attention from their congregations and beyond because of their charismatic appeal and seemingly innate ability to express and

implement their vision with the support of hundreds of thousands of followers (Thumma, 1996).

Like the mega-church, the Roman Catholic Church serves as a very influential institution in the United States. With more than one billion members worldwide, it is among the oldest organized religions (Garcia, 2010). The Church has long been a defender of the poor and oppressed, central to the Christian tradition and doctrine. It serves as the largest non-government provider of medical and educational assistance through its schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other social services and has been positively and negatively depicted on numerous occasions in news and entertainment media (Gibson, 2003). Primetime sitcoms from *Will and Grace* to *Sex and the City* have had characters practice Catholicism, and the Pope is steadily on the news media agenda. The Church is also very outspoken and influential in politics. During the 2009 health care debates, the Church lobbied Congress to pass an amendment to the healthcare bill, barring anyone who receives a new tax credit from enrolling in a plan that covers abortion (Wallsten, 2009). The amendment passed in the House, but failed in the Senate. This is just one example of the Church's political influence.

#### Problem Statement

When prominent religious leaders become involved in scandal, they engage in image restoration strategies. This is complicated because their public image and identity are based on morality and good judgment, and scandals seem to be a particular betrayal of such values.

Ministers, particularly those who serve as senior leaders of their congregation, are persuasive and influential. Parishioners are endeared emotionally to leaders because of the roles they play in life's milestones. Religious leaders officiate weddings, funerals, conduct baptisms, and provide marriage counseling and overall spiritual and moral advice. Congregations are also endeared to their pastors because they are seen as chosen by God and because they undergo rigorous study and sacrifice to hold leadership positions. Catholic priests must study four years in seminary; this is usually following four years in college (Gibson, 2003). In addition, priests must take a vow of celibacy and remain unmarried.

In Protestant institutions, pastors are "called to preach." Ingram (1981) defines this calling as "divinely initiated, of the individual to engage in the most sacred and prestigious of religious activities—preaching" (p. 121). After prospective ministers receive and accept their calling, they endure a selection process where a congregation hires them. The congregation's hiring of a pastor elevates his status to being the person "above" them and is then revered as the one chosen by and for them. The pastor's status becomes more elevated as the church grows larger and a hierarchy of leadership forms.

There are often more than ten to twenty assistant ministers and an average of 50 full time staff members at mega-churches (Thumma, 1996). More pastors are hired to alleviate the senior pastor of some administrative duties, and "to address the plateau in growth which had been experienced by the church" (Kiel, 2012, p. 9). Mega-churches are seen not only as religious institutions, but also corporations where the senior pastor serves as president and chief executive officer. These powerful leaders act as the church's spokesperson. When crises arise within the church, the senior pastor takes



responsibility for communication and finding a resolution. The role of spokesperson is seen on a national scale as these leaders are often sought after by media programs to give opinion and commentary on various current events. For example, mega-church pastor, Joel Osteen recently appeared on CNN to discuss the death penalty, and Evangelist Billy Graham's support of the Iraq war was quoted in *Time* magazine (CNN.com, 2012; Gibbs & Duffy, 2010).

Although mega-church pastors are sometimes criticized in media because of their excessive lifestyles, they are seen as credible sources by media outlets due to their established stance in the church and their position as formal opinion leaders. While they are known for their savvy business sense and marketing practices, these leaders are also major activists for the betterment of their individual communities and beyond. Ohio mega-church pastor R.A. Vernon launched the *Black Out the Violence* campaign after losing a 15-year-old parishioner to gang violence (Bernstein, 2012). In 2004, Bishop Eddie Long organized the *Re-ignite the Legacy* march. The event was in response to Long's call for black churches to "become vocal on issues like banning same-sex marriages, reforming education and health care systems, and creating economic opportunities for minorities" (Lee, 2004, p.10). Their stances on these issues were widely reported, discussed and supported by media outlets, critics and the general audience, respectively.

The Catholic Church leadership early established itself as having a preeminent role in social, moral and religious contexts. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Mother Teresa are known throughout the world for their theological intelligence, and iconic status (Weigel, 2005). Catholic priests' charge is to fill the role of Jesus Christ,

“the priest is the visible presence on earth of Christ teaching, Christ preaching, Christ, feeding, Christ, suffering...” (Bevilacqua, 2003 as cited in Gibson, 2003, p. 86).

Mega church leaders and Catholic Church leaders receive a significant amount of attention in the local and national news when they fall short of their religious charge and moral training. This exposure can lead to audience distrust and removal from governing boards. It is imperative that the leaders select the appropriate strategies that will repair and restore their images to pre-crisis states.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is three fold: first, it examines and compares the image restoration strategies and stances used by mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church and determine their success; second, it identifies contingent factors that led to the choice of strategy and stance; and third, it initiates argument for the addition of religious leaders as a separate category of image repair. Benoit’s Image Repair Theory (Benoit 1997a; Benoit, 2000) and the Contingency Theory (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997) are applied to determine type of strategy used and factors that led to its selection.

The Boston Diocese priests do not have the liberty to speak to media; therefore, the Diocese’s Cardinal serves as the spokesperson. The Cardinal is responsible for speaking on the accused priests’ behalf without foreknowledge of the disgraceful act. Mega-church leaders are the spokespersons for their respective institutions and for themselves. They have foreknowledge about the act(s) as well as the motivations that led to the act(s). Based on this information, this study will analyze whether there is a significant difference in the way these two respond to crises.

Historically, scholars apply image restoration strategies to three general groups: politicians, corporations, and most recently, celebrities. Because their audience and services are different, as well as public expectation about moral behavior, religious leaders cannot be placed in neither group and therefore require a category of its own.

### Significance of Study

In a practical sense, this study will provide religious crisis managers, spokespersons, and leaders with appropriate crisis communication strategies in the wake of a scandal, and effectively manage crises. By analyzing similar cases, a specific strategy or set of strategies can be associated with successful image repair efforts and one may conclude that institutions involved in similar situations should use these strategies (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

For the study of public relations and the growing area of image repair in association with the contingency theory on a theoretical level, it is significant to recognize the importance of religious leaders and institutions. Seen as placing more value on morals, beliefs and values (Legg, 2009; Shin, 2008), religious crisis communication merits scholarly attention because little research has been done in this area despite the high incidence of crises involving religious leaders. Religious institutions are considered cornerstones of the community and its enactment of crisis communication plans should be distinguishable among corporations, celebrities and politicians. This study will analyze these standards and make suggestions for future studies.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND OF CASES

This study analyzes five cases of religious leaders involved in scandal: Jim Bakker, Ted Haggard, Eddie Long, Henry Lyons, and Jimmy Swaggart as well as examine the Roman Catholic Church's response to several sexual misconduct allegations against priests in Boston, Massachusetts. All the leaders analyzed, with the exceptions of Ted Haggard and Jimmy Swaggart, were involved in legal issues. The Protestant denomination leaders were chosen to study because of their nationwide popularity and high volume of media attention received before, during and after their respective scandals. They are all leaders of mega-churches throughout the United States and have all been accused publically of committing acts contrary to moral teachings of the church that they represent. These acts were all cases of sexual misconduct or financial deception were considered offensive by the mass audience and regarded as a betrayal by members of the respective congregations. The Roman Catholic Church has also received enormous media attention in the wake of its sexual abuse scandals, and its response to these allegations was analyzed.

#### Case of Evangelist Jim Bakker

Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker founded the television show, Praise the Lord (PTL), in the early 1970s. PTL grew into a multifaceted ministry that regularly attracted more than 10 million viewers, a network of over 9,000 cable systems and 200 broadcast stations. They also built a resort and religious theme park (Bakker, 2001).

In 1987, Bakker resigned from his position as president and chair of the board of PTL after his sexual encounter with church secretary Jessica Hahn was revealed (Tidwell,

1993). During this revelation, it was also discovered that Bakker and three of his top PTL aides had committed massive wire and mail fraud (Tidwell, 1993). At the time, Baker and PTL executives planned to build a 504-room hotel near his theme park. The group offered lifetime partnerships to individuals making a one-time \$1,000 payment to fund the project; this partnership would allow donors to stay at the hotel for four days and three nights each year for the rest of their lives. Bakker eventually sold more partnerships than needed and kept the surplus for himself and his associates, and used \$250,000 to buy Hahn's silence.

Bakker was found guilty on twenty-four counts of fraud and initially sentenced to forty-five years in federal prison (Tidwell, 1993). In 1993, Bakker's son spearheaded a letter writing campaign to the parole board resulting in his sentence being reduced to eight years (Bakker, 2001). After his release from prison, Bakker moved into a rehabilitation facility for addicts and gang members and wrote and published his autobiography. The book, which detailed his scandal, trial and prison time, sold 100,000 copies in six months. Bakker has since remarried and begun a new ministry in Missouri.

Table 1

*Bakker Timeline of Events*

Date	Event
March 15, 1987	Assemblies of God officials announced a formal investigation was under way into allegations of sexual misconduct of Jim Bakker.
March 21, 1987	Bakker resigns as head of his ministry, PTL, citing blackmail.
March 23, 1987	In a videotaped statement, Bakker retracts his statement of blackmail, says he resigned to thwart a hostile takeover of PTL.

Table 1 (continued).

Date	Event
April 25, 1987	Three members of a family filed a \$601 million lawsuit in Federal District Court against Jim Bakker, charging that their contributions were used for “illegal, illicit and immoral” purposes
April 28, 1987	PTL leadership announced it discontinued Bakker’s salary and declared that he would not be allowed to return to the ministry.
May 6, 1987	Bakker and associate pastor, Richard Dortch dismissed as ministers of the Assemblies of God.
May 28, 1987	The Justice Department opened a preliminary inquiry into reports that Bakker and his wife, Tammy Faye, were involved in financial wrongdoing at the PTL television ministry.
December 5, 1988	The Federal Government indicted Jim Bakker, Dortch, and Bakker aides David and James Taggart with 24 counts of fraud and conspiracy.
October 6, 1989	Jury finds Bakker guilty on all 24 counts; sentenced to 45 years in federal prison and a \$500,000 fine.
December 12, 1994	Bakker released on parole.
October 10, 1997	Bakker released from federal parole, begins writing autobiography and moves into the Los Angeles Dream Center, a rehabilitation facility for addicts and gang members.
January 1, 2003	Bakker begins broadcasting the Jim Bakker Show in Missouri.

#### Case of Pastor Ted Haggard

Ted Haggard was a popular Colorado pastor who served as the president of the National Association of Evangelicals and spiritual advisor for President George W. Bush’s administration. Haggard boasted a congregation of more than 14,000, Colorado’s largest at the time, and was a published author, having written twelve books on the subjects of marital faithfulness and the dangers of pornography and prostitution (Philipps & Correll, 2006). In 2005, *Time* magazine named him one of the country’s twenty-five most influential evangelicals.

One year after receiving these accolades, male prostitute Mike Jones claimed Haggard engaged in a three-year affair with him and used crystal methamphetamine in his presence (CNN.com, 2009). Jones made the affair public after he became disgruntled with Haggard publically speaking out against a Colorado initiative banning same sex marriages. Jones told ABC reporter Dan Harris, "I had to expose the hypocrisy. He is in the position of influence of millions of followers, and he's preaching against gay marriage, but behind everybody's back doing what he's preached against" (Harris, 2006, p. 1). Consequently, Haggard resigned from his posts as head of the National Association of Evangelicals and as pastor of New Life church. He has since begun a new ministry and received an enormous amount of media attention. Haggard's life was chronicled in the 2009 HBO documentary, *The Trials of Ted Haggard*; he and his wife appeared on an episode of *Divorce Court*, and most recently the couple was featured in an episode of *Celebrity Wife Swap* (Little, 2011).

Table 2

*Haggard Timeline of Events*

Date	Event
November 1, 2006	Masseur Mike Jones alleges Haggard paid for sex and used crystal methamphetamine over a three -year period.
November 3, 2006	Haggard gives interview with Denver television station denying allegations of affair and drug use.
November 4, 2006	Haggard resigns as senior pastor of his church and leader of the National Association of Evangelicals.
April 12, 2007	Haggard and family move to Arizona to begin counseling and begin "restoration" process.
August 25, 2007	Haggard releases statement asking for donations.

Table 2 (continued).

Date	Event
June 15, 2008	Email surfaces where Haggard admits sexual acts and drug use with Jones.
November 8, 2008	In several guest sermons, Haggard confesses his actions stem from sexual abuse by an adult when he was seven years old.
January 29, 2009	HBO airs the documentary, <i>The Trial of Ted Haggard</i> .
January 1-29, 2009	Haggard and wife appear on several media programs, including <i>Good Morning America</i> and <i>The Oprah Winfrey Show</i> to offer apology and confession for sexual immorality and drug abuse.
March 19, 2009	Haggard and wife appear on <i>Divorce Court</i> .
June 1, 2010	Haggard holds first meeting of new church in his home.
February 12, 2011	Haggard announces he is bisexual.
January 4, 2012	Haggard and wife appear on <i>Wife Swap</i> .

#### Case of Bishop Eddie Long

Eddie Long served as senior pastor of 25,000 member, Georgia-based mega-church, New Birth Missionary Baptist church, for more than a decade. His \$3 million annual salary, \$350,000 Bentley, and private jet are three of the many examples of his financial and material gains in ministry.

Long had far-reaching political, physical and economic influence. He was responsible for promoting anti-gay legislation, producing a fitness infomercial, and building a hospital in Kenya. He also officiated the funeral of Coretta Scott King, hosted by his church (www.eddielong.com, 2011; Poole, 2011a).



In fall of 2010, two young men accused Long of coercing them into sexual relationships when they were teenage members of his congregation (Poole, 2011a). The men claimed that Long used trips, expensive gifts and paid positions on Long's staff to maintain discretion. Later, three additional men came forward with similar allegations. All of the men attended the pastor's Longfellow Academy at the time of the alleged events and claim that he selected them to be his *Spiritual Sons*. This title allowed the young men access to numerous celebrities and participation in a spiritual covenant ceremony between Long and each young man (Poole, 2011a).

Long has since denied the allegations, but agreed to an out of court mediation and undisclosed settlement. He most recently stepped down from his position as senior pastor, announcing to the church that he is "taking time off to focus on family" after his wife initially filed for divorce (Poole, 2011b, p. 6). She has since withdrawn her petition for divorce twice and Long has assumed the title of king at his New Birth congregation.

Table 3

*Long Timeline of Events*

Date	Event
September 21, 2010	2 men filed lawsuits alleging Long coerced them into having sex with him in exchange for lavish trips, cars and cash.
September 22, 2010	3 <sup>rd</sup> lawsuit filed by a former member of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, claims Long made accuser call him "Daddy" and coerced him into sexual acts.
September 23, 2010	4 <sup>th</sup> accuser claims he was 17 when he began a sexual relationship with Long while accompanying the bishop on a trip to Nairobi, Kenya.

Table 3 (continued).

Date	Event
September 24, 2010	Long holds conference call with supporters, said he was "under attack," cancels all interviews and does not take questions from the media.
September 26, 2010	Long addresses allegations to his congregation and media, comparing his situation to that of biblical characters, David and Goliath.
May 10, 2011	As a result of mediation, Long settles lawsuit out of court according to undisclosed terms..
December 20, 2011	Long announces he is leaving the ministry, citing he needs time with his family.
January 15, 2012	Long participates in symbolic ceremony where self-proclaimed "rabbi" Ralph Messer elevates Long to a position of spiritual kingship.
February 3, 2012	Jewish leaders announce ceremony "disrespectful".
February 6, 2012	Long apologizes to Jewish group, saying it "was not his intent to participate in any ritual that is offensive to the Jewish community."

#### Case of Reverend Henry Lyons

Henry Lyons, former president of the National Baptist Convention (NBC), saw his scandal unfold in July 1997. It was then that his wife was arrested for arson and the burglarizing of a house that he owned with another woman (Associated Press, 1999). The fire prompted an investigation of Lyons' assets and his finances associated with the NBC, the nation's largest black religious organization with a roster of more than eight million members.

As leader of the NBC, Lyons was praised for reducing the organization's debt and bringing favorable publicity to his church with a campaign called *Raising the Standard* (Associated Press, 1999). Lyons' predecessor, Rev. Theodore Jemison, brought the NBC under public scrutiny due to his support of boxer Mike Tyson during his rape allegations, and Lyons was seen as shifting the organization in a positive light (Shipp, 1992).

Lyons' tenure as president ultimately proved to tarnish the image of the NBC. An investigation revealed Lyons purchased luxury cars, homes and a \$36,000 diamond ring using NBC funds. Investigators found over \$1 million dollars intended for the convention's use in a private account listed in the name of Lyons and his mistress, Bernice Edwards. Lyons was arrested and eventually plead guilty to five federal counts of tax evasion and fraud. As part of a plea deal, 49 other charges were dismissed (Associated Press, 1999). Lyons was sentenced to five years in prison and ordered to pay \$2.5 million in restitution to the NBC. After serving four years of his sentence, Lyons was released on probation and returned to preaching in St. Petersburg, Florida.

In 2009, Lyons sought to regain his post as president of the NBC, but was defeated in the election. He currently is the pastor of a Baptist church in Tampa, Florida.

Table 4

*Lyons Timeline of Events*

Date	Event
July 6, 1997	Deborah Lyons, wife of Henry Lyons, burglarizes and sets fire to a house her husband owns with another woman.
July 25, 1997	State attorney begins investigation into Lyons' finances.

Table 4 (continued).

Date	Event
February 18, 1998	Lyons and mistress, Bernice Edwards are charged with racketeering.
March 8, 1998	Lyons and Edwards plead not guilty to charges.
July 23, 1998	Lyons, Edwards and Harris are cited in a 61-count federal indictment, on charges ranging from tax evasion to money laundering to bank fraud.
March 16, 1999	Lyons resigns from his post as NBC president.
April 14, 1999	Lyons found guilty of all charges and given a 5 1/2 year prison sentence.
November 28, 2003	Lyons is released from prison on probation and returns to preaching in Florida.
April 10, 2007	Lyons is defeated in an attempt to be elected President of the Florida Baptist Convention.
September 12, 2009	Lyons defeated in election to lead NBC.

#### Case of Evangelist Jimmy Swaggart

Jimmy Swaggart was accused of soliciting a prostitute for sex in 1988. This act was not only seen as deplorable in the church, but also hypocritical because years earlier, Swaggart publically criticized Evangelist Jim Bakker as a “cancer that needed to be excised from the body of Christ” in the wake of Bakker’s admission of a sexual encounter with his secretary (Legg, 2009, p. 242). Swaggart also condemned fellow Assemblies of God minister Marvin Gorman for “committing an immoral act with a woman” (Associated Press, 1988, p. 1).

Swaggart tearfully confessed to his family, congregation and television audience in his now infamous *I Have Sinned* sermon (Kaufman, 1988). Ultimately, Swaggart lost his ministerial license from the Assemblies of God presbytery (Kaufman, 1988). Some members of his former congregation supported him, and more than a third joined the non-denominational church he founded after being defrocked (Legg, 2009).

Before the accusations, Swaggart was an immensely successful leader of the Pentecostal church. At the height of his popularity, he boasted a congregation giving more than \$150 million annually. Millions tuned in to his weekly telecast aired on more than 3,000 networks (www.jsm.org). A parishioner willed \$10 million from her estate (Kaufman, 1988).

Swaggart has since rebounded from this scandal and operates a multi-million dollar ministry with his son.

Table 5

*Swaggart Timeline of Events*

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Date	Event
February 19, 1988	Assemblies of God elders announce investigation into accusations of Jimmy Swaggart committing adultery.
February 21, 1988	Swaggart announces to his congregation that he “has sinned” and will resign his post for an “indeterminate time.”
February 23, 1988	Assemblies of God leaders order Swaggart to immediately begin a two-year rehabilitation that will limit his preaching and place him in counseling.
March 29, 1988	National Leaders of the Assemblies of God officially order Swaggart be barred from the pulpit for one year.

---

Table 5 (continued).

Date	Event
March 31, 1988	Swaggart attorney announces Swaggart intends to return to the pulpit in May, with or without the approval of the Assemblies of God leaders.
April 4, 1988	Assemblies of God official announces if Swaggart fails to accept its ruling within a reasonable time, he will be dismissed from the church.
April 8, 1988	Swaggart defrocked as a minister of the Assemblies of God for rejecting punishment ordered by national leaders of the church.
May 28, 1988	Swaggart returns to the pulpit, asks congregation for donations to keep ministry televised; transitions church into an inter-denominational status
December 22, 2009	Swaggart launches SonLife Broadcasting network, airing nationally and internationally to a viewing audience of over 80 million.

#### Case of U.S. Roman Catholic Church

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reported in 2004 that more than 4,000 priests were alleged to have engaged in sexually abusing more than 10,000 minors during the period of 1950 and 2002. One of the most concentrated areas of this abuse was Boston, Massachusetts. The public became aware of sexual abuse and cover-ups in the Boston Archdiocese after the *Boston Globe* began a thorough investigative study of four priests charged with a number of abuse claims (Rezendes, 2002).

The case of Rev. John Geoghan spawned the *Globe's* investigation into the Boston archdiocese. For thirty years, Geoghan reportedly raped or fondled more than one hundred young boys in the Boston area. Despite victims and parents reporting

Geoghan to Catholic leaders, he remained a priest, and was allowed continued contact with children as he was transferred from parish to parish. The church finally defrocked him in 1998, and in 2002, Geoghan was sentenced to ten years in prison for molesting a ten-year-old boy.

Rev. Joseph Birmingham reportedly abused more than fifty boys during his twenty-nine-year career as a priest. After he confessed to church officials that he molested children, Birmingham was allowed to remain in his position, insisting he had been “cured.” Birmingham died in 1989 before any legal action was taken against him.

Like Geoghan, Rev. Paul Shanley was shuffled from parish to parish after church officials became aware of sexual abuse allegations against him. One of the Cardinal’s top deputies even gave him a letter of recommendation to transfer to a California church. Shanley was arrested in San Diego in 2002 and returned to Boston to face ten counts of child rape.

The only Boston area priest to admit guilt publicly is Rev. Ronald Paquin. Paquin befriended and molested several young boys during his two decades in the ministry. In 2002, he pleaded guilty to three counts of child rape and was sentenced to twelve to fifteen years in prison.

While the Globe offered extensive coverage of the individual cases, the investigation’s primary focus was the Catholic Church’s cover-up and silence about the abuse. Cardinal Bernard Law served as the spokesperson regarding each case in the Boston diocese. As the diocese’s leader, Law, not the individual leaders was responsible for responding to media inquiries and offering any statements related to the cases. After

the paper's report on the church's handling of Geoghan, Law announced a zero-tolerance policy of sexual abuse and agreed to submit names of the accused priests to prosecutors.

Table 6

*Boston Diocese timeline of Events*


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Date	Event
May 7, 1992	Massachusetts priest James Porter is charged and sentenced to 18 to 20 years in prison for sexually abusing more than two dozen children.
August 22, 1999	A Massachusetts court brings child rape charges against former priest John Geoghan. Geoghan had been repeatedly accused of sexually molesting boys but was transferred from parish to parish.
January 9, 2002	After the <i>Boston Globe's</i> investigative reports, Cardinal Bernard Law apologizes to victims of Geoghan and promises a tougher line on abusive priests in future
January 18, 2002	Geoghan is convicted of indecent assault and battery of a 10-year-old boy, for which he later receives a 10-year prison sentence.
January 26, 2002	Cardinal Law writes open letter to members of the Archdiocese of Boston on the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests
June 13, 2002	US bishops approve "zero tolerance" national policy on abuse, but the Vatican demands changes to protect rights of priests.
September 15, 2002	The Boston Archdiocese reaches \$10 million settlement with victims of John Geoghan.
December 13, 2002	Cardinal Law resigns as archbishop
August 23, 2003	John Geoghan is killed in a Massachusetts prison.
March 30, 2008	Pope Benedict announces that he is "deeply ashamed" of the sexual abuse scandals among priests in the U.S. He says the church will not allow pedophiles to remain as priests.

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Table 6 (continued).

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Date	Event
September 8, 2011	Victims of sexual abuse by Catholic priests band together to file a formal complaint with the International Criminal Court alleging that the Catholic Church officials committed a crime against humanity.
September 10, 2011	The Vatican responds to the charges as being a “ludicrous publicity stunt and misuse of the international judicial process.”

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## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is a strategic and deliberate course of action taken by organizations that want to resolve a crisis with as little damage to its image as possible. Fearn-Banks (2001) described crisis communication as “the verbal, visual, and/or written interaction between the organization and its public prior to, during and after the negative occurrence” (p. 480). This vital engagement with publics can serve as the catalyst for a stronger relationship between the organization and its publics or as the abrupt end to a once mutually beneficial relationship. Fearn-Banks (2001) defined a crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization as well as its publics, goods, services, products, and/or good name” (p. 480). Pearson and Mitroff (1993) asserted that crises have five dimensions: high visibility requires immediate attention, contains an element of surprise, have a need for action, and are outside the organization’s complete control. Crises can take the form of a death of an executive, defect of a product, an ill-conceived tweet, or something on the scale of a natural disaster. Whatever the case, it should be reiterated that crises have the ability to make or break an organization.

Several scholars have offered practices and theories concerning what an organization should do to maintain successful images before, during, and post-crisis (Coombs, 1998; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Stephens, Malone, & Bailey, 2005). Cameron, Wilcox, Reber, & Shin (2008) describe the process as the “conflict management life cycle” (p. 42). The cycle comprises four stages: Proactive Phase, Strategic Phase,

Reactive Phase and Recovery Phase. The proactive phase includes practitioners being aware and informed of issues that potentially could put an organization at risk. Once an issue is identified as an emerging crisis, the cycle enters the strategic phase. During this phase, a plan is constructed to combat the specific issue. The reactive phase witnesses implementation of the crisis communication plan and lastly, strategies to restore the image and reputation of the organization occur during the recovery phase.

A crisis contingency plan should be prepared before a crisis occurs. This stage of crisis communication anticipates public awareness and prepares for undesirable situations in effort to minimize mistakes. The second component is to understand the nature of the crisis. Knowing exactly what allegations are being brought against an organization is crucial, as is identifying and understanding the concerns of relevant audiences. Benoit (1997a) asserted that in order for communication to be persuasive, the correct audience(s) must be targeted. Audience perception and response is proven to be vital in the success of an organization's image repair process. It has also been shown that not only companies should direct their attention to target audiences, but also public officials.

In analyzing the crisis situation, it is important to not only understand the communicative choices, but also the importance of crisis responses in general (Coombs, 1998). The most effective public relations responses include using a single spokesperson to speak on behalf of the organization, providing immediate communication to constituents and maintaining open communication with external sources (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001). Single spokespersons serve to maintain a unified message; the use of multiple representatives can result in a variety of contradictory messages. An organization that remains silent may lose the trust of its constituents. Prompt statements

are necessary in order to not appear to “stonewall” the audience (Seeger et al., 2001, p. 160). Lastly, consistent communication is necessary to defuse speculation on the part of media outlets. Seeger et al., (2001) note the blaring irony of these responses - media outlets and constituents want an immediate response, even though the characteristics of crises includes its element of surprise and ambiguity. Nevertheless, successful organizations adopt these strategies.

### Contingency Theory

The contingency theory focuses on how to manage conflict between an organization and its publics and audiences. The theory recognizes conflict as being a natural and positive force in the public-organization relationship; both the organization and its publics will have goals and values and the contingency theory makes suggestions on how these differences should be bridged (Lumpkins, Bae, & Cameron, 2010; Shin, 2004; Shin, 2008; Shin, Park, & Cameron, 2006).

Founding researchers of the contingency theory sought to expand the scope of and shift the existing excellence paradigm. The excellence theory names the two-way symmetrical model as the ideal model of public relations, thus positioning it as a normative theory (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Two-way symmetrical communication promotes dialogue between organizations and their publics, allowing for compromise and resolution in an effective, transparent manner (Grunig, 2001). Cancel et al., (1997) found the excellence model to be unsupported by empirical research, and Stoker and Tusinski (2006) found symmetrical communication posed moral problems, which may lead to ethically questionable behavior. Cancel et al., (1997) gave the example of an anti-abortion group compromising with a pro-choice group. These groups are fervently

convinced that their respective stances speak for the majority of society; therefore, a compromise would be seen as rejecting strong-held beliefs. In essence, to change an organization's behavior would be morally repugnant.

In effort to demonstrate the many stances that actually take place, researchers suggest that the strategic and conflictual relationships between an organization and its publics be placed on a continuum anchored by pure advocacy and pure accommodation (Cancel et al., 1997). Advocacy describes how each group serves its own interests and accommodation explains how each party considers the other party's interest. This description of advocacy illustrates the traditional purpose of the public relations practice, "the function of a public relations practitioner is to advocate, much like an attorney representing one side of an issue," (Smith, 1972 as cited in Cancel et al., 1997). Other scholars have noted that the practice of public relations entails representing the client in a favorable light and work for its best interests (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000).

Accommodation serves to represent the two-way symmetrical model of public relations where communication has balanced effects and supports "policies and actions that are mutually beneficial to both parties (Wilcox & Cameron, 2007, p. 63). As opposed to advocacy, accommodation welcomes the interests of the opposing party. Grunig (2001) hailed accommodation as two-way symmetrical communication between an organization and its publics, that provides the "normative ideal for public relations" (p. 13). Contingency theory argues against a normative model, suggesting a degree of flexibility depending on the requirements of an issue as it evolves. Between advocacy and accommodation are "a wide range of discrete operational stances and public relations strategies that entail different degrees" of the two extremes (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 37).

This continuum was the result of in-depth interviews with public relations professionals and educators who attest that the decisions made during a conflict/crisis depends on many factors (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2010). A variety of contingencies contribute to the selection of strategies, including trust, the issue creating the conflict, and top management support. The research team identified eighty-six factors and eleven categories – external threats, relationship characteristics, issue under consideration, individual characteristics, industry environment, internal threats, political/social/cultural environment, organization’s characteristics and public relations department characteristics (see Appendix B). These factors limit the degree of accommodation a public relations practitioner can adopt when dealing with conflict. Contingency also reflects how the two parties interact varies over time and by the situation. How an organization treats a market, audience or public in one situation may be different from how it treats another at a different time (Cancel et al., 1997).

The position an organization takes on the continuum before it interacts with a public may also differ from the position it takes during the interaction. In a follow-up study Cancel, Mitrook, and Cameron (1999) tested the advocacy to accommodation continuum by interviewing eighteen public relations practitioners. The researchers found the factors and stances to be valid representations of a company’s stance, and also added factors not identified in the inaugural study (Cancel et al., 1999). Those factors that explain an organization’s stance before the interaction with publics are predisposing variables. Predisposing variables “refer to those variables which have their greatest influence on an organization by helping to shape the organization’s predisposition

towards relations with external publics” (Cancel et al., 1999, p. 180). The strongly supported predisposing values identified in the study are:

- 1) *Corporation size* – the size of the company can have an influence on how the organization initially approaches a situation; 2) *Corporate culture* - usually set by the company’s founder, the corporate culture has an *underlying* effect on how corporations approach publics; 3) *Business Exposure* – what a company produces, its customers and its range of service influences a corporation’s predisposition toward external publics; 4) *Public Relations Access to Dominant Coalition* – the influence the public relations practitioners have on the final decision of how much time, money and resources are used to interact with external publics; 5) *Dominant coalition enlightenment* – the dominant coalition’s knowledge of the value of maintaining positive relationships with external publics; 6) *Individual characteristics* –the dominant coalition member’s ability to be open-minded, education and ability to think strategically (Cancel et. al., 1999, p. 180-183).

Four other variables identified were situational:

- 1) *Urgency of situation* - the outcome from an organization's assessment of the urgency of a situation significantly influences how accommodating a corporation will be of the external public in that situation; 2) *Threats* – the greater the threat the faster the organization will respond to the situation; 3) *Potential costs/benefits of strategies* – corporations will engage in a stance that offers them the most rewards at minimal costs; and 4) *Characteristics of the external public*–the public’s size, level of organization, ability to attain media coverage and

reputations are all characteristics related to an external public's power to negatively impact an organization. These factors influence how an organization shifts its stance towards an external public as the situation plays out (Cancel et al., 1999, p.180).

A 2005 study analyzed the influence that contingent factors have on an organization's stance of advocacy or accommodation (Shin, Cheng, Jin, & Cameron, 2005). The study examined the U.S. Department of Agriculture, American Airlines, Massachusetts Military Reservation and the United Parcel Service's stance during their high profile conflicts. The results concluded that strategies as well as stances of an organization and its publics change over time.

More research following the initial study tested the validity of the variables (Shin, Cameron, & Cropp, 2006; Shin, Park et al., 2006). Shin, Cameron et al., (2006) surveyed public relations practitioners in the United States to determine how each of the 86 variables influenced their practice to first quantify them. The most influential of the external variables were: the industry environment, public relationships, political/social/cultural environment, external threats, and public power. The researchers found the organization's development, organization's structure, public relations department independence, public relations department governance, management characteristics, individual capabilities, and individual characteristics were the most influential of the internal variables. The results of the survey indicated that the contingent variables were valid, and based on the philosophical concept of Occam's Razor, that the contingency theory was found to be precise and evidence-based in its foundation.



The results of the U.S. study mirrored that of a study conducted on public relations practitioners in South Korea (Shin, Cameron, et al., 2006). The practitioners noted that all 86 variables were influential to practice in South Korea, but found that public relations practitioners' predispositions towards altruism, the ability to handle complex problems, communication, competency, information use, and personal ethics and potentially damaging publicity were the most influential variables among the 86.

These variables focus on "essentially conflictual aspects of organization-public relationships and lead to the strategic management of relationships under the complex and changing environments (Shin, 2004, p. 191). In the "conflict management life cycle," (Cameron et al., 2008, p. 68) the contingent variables are analyzed in the strategic phase. These variables would then influence the stances and image restoration strategies an organization implements during the reactive phase.

#### Image Restoration Strategies

The image repair theory explains communication as goal-driven and necessary to restore tarnished images of public leaders. Benoit (1997a) offered several strategies to aid in self-defense discourse, but stipulates that the theory can only be applied if the following two criteria have been met: 1) an offensive act has occurred, and (2) an individual or organization has been accused of being responsible for that act. The five broad strategies offered in the plan are: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (See Appendix A).

Benoit explains two types of denial: *simple denial* and *shifting the blame*. Simple denial is when the accused asserts the offensive act did not occur, or that the act created no harm (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). For example, Rick Santorum's denial of using the

word 'black,' included the assertion that he actually said *blah* people (Crugnale, 2012).

*Shifting the blame* suggests someone else performed the disgraceful act. President Barack Obama claimed problems with the economy were inherited, thereby shifting the blame to the previous administration (Jackson, 2011).

Evasion of responsibility is employed by “those who are unable to deny performing the act in question” (Benoit, 1997a, p. 76). Four tactics fall under the umbrella of evasion of responsibility: *provocation*, *defeasibility*, *accident* and *good intentions*. Provocation is when an act is done in response to another act, meaning the act was unavoidable. Company layoffs can be attributed to provocation. If the business proved underperforming, then layoffs are necessary to remain viable. Defeasibility entails evading responsibility by alleging that the accused had no control over the attack. For example, an airline will not take responsibility for the actions or consequences of the actions of unstable passengers. Accident clearly means that the act was not premeditated or contrived. Len-Rios and Benoit (2004) state that if an event is named as an accident, it “must seldom occur and the rhetor must show that there was no intent to commit the act” (p. 97). The last technique used to evade responsibility is good intentions. The accused can cite there were good intentions when engaging in the offensive behavior, but for whatever reason, the actions went awry. An example of good intentions was Target’s unveiling of a new fashion line on its website. The site was so popular that the server could not accommodate the overwhelming number of people visiting the site and resulted in the site crashing.

The next heading of strategies is reducing the offensiveness of the event. By using these strategies, the accused lessens the severity of the action. *Bolstering* identifies and

highlights the accused's good qualities in effort to take attention away from the wrongful act. For example, after the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the company stated they have "always taken steps to maintain safe operations as risks changed and energy technologies evolved" (Tillerson, 2010, p. 3). *Minimization* lessens the seriousness of the action. The accused downplays the consequences of the action and asserts that the behavior has been blown out of proportion. An example of minimization is if an oil company claims that because few animals died in a spill, the environmental damage was minimal.

*Differentiation* is applied to distinguish the act from other, more offensive acts. For example, if someone was to defend himself by saying, stealing \$10 is not the same as stealing \$100. Those accused of wrong doings can reduce offensiveness through *transcendence*, which places the act in a more favorable context. Len-Rios and Benoit (2004) provided the example of throwing paint on someone wearing a fur coat. The action is justified because of the broader context of saving the lives of animals. A desperate strategy for the accused is to *attack the accusers*. In applying this strategy, the accused reveals the faults of the accuser and blames the victim or the press for the offensive act. Former Republican presidential hopeful Herman Cain attacked both the media and the victim after he referred to Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi as a "princess" (Weiner, 2011, p. 3). He stated, "I only apologized so you all [media] would stop asking me about it... ask her why she called the Tea Party people Astroturf a couple of years ago" (Weiner, 2011, p. 3). The last method of reducing offensiveness is *compensation*. Compensation offers the accusers some form of reparation in an effort to regain his or her and the public's trust. For example, a movie theatre offering free passes to the audience after a screen malfunction.

*Corrective action* and *mortification* are strategies that admit the accused has some responsibility in the wrongful action. To correct the action, the accused acknowledges that a negative act has taken place and that he or she will do what they can to correct the problem, and attempt to ensure the offensive act will not happen again. Tiger Woods' corrective action for addressing adulterous affairs was to enter a rehabilitation facility for sexual addiction. When the accused directly apologizes for the disgraceful act, he or she is exhibiting *mortification*. Mortification takes place when the accused accepts responsibility for the offensive act, apologizes, and asks for forgiveness.

Image repair draws on an ancient rhetorical strategy called *apologia*, a Greek term meaning "speech of defense" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989, p. 533). Benoit's theory of image repair is an alternative to the more traditional approach of *apologia*. Individuals seeking to clear his or her damaged name traditionally have used *apologia*, and public relations scholars have recently applied this concept to the study of organizations (Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Caldiero, Taylor & Ungureanu, 2009; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). Courtright & Hearit (2002) argued that *apologia* is used by one defender to many audiences, many defenders to many audiences, and many defenders to few audiences. Contemporary analysis of *apologia* is based on the assumption that mass media play a significant role in the creation of the event and the communication of subsequent image repair discourse (Caldiero et al., 2009). Benoit's (1997a) theory merges rhetorical and crisis communication strategies in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

Benoit (1997a) revisited his theory and contributed to the body of crisis communication research by applying image restoration discourse to corporations in crisis.

While the theory offers strategies to cope during crises, it maintains that corporations should be proactive against emerging issues.

Benoit (1997b) distinguished the situational differences among corporations, politicians and entertainers in applying image restorations strategies. These three entities each have been held responsible for an offensive action. In comparing and contrasting entertainment and politics, Benoit noted that because of the partisan nature of politics, there is more probability that his or her opposing party will attack the accused publically. Entertainers; however, do not in general have longstanding opponents. Their alleged wrongdoings are made public solely by media reports without worry that another actor will publically criticize them or initiate attacks. The distinction in job responsibilities is also a major difference between entertainers and politicians. The decisions that politicians make can negatively or positively affect the lives of their constituents, whereas entertainers' jobs do not "have a serious impact on lives" (Benoit, 1997b, p. 255).

Corporations differ in their nature. Despite the recent Supreme Court decision, a corporation is not a person, but a collection of individuals bound together around a common goal. If an employee deviates from this goal and creates a crisis or scandal, the corporation can argue that it was an individual action not encouraged or condoned by the corporation. Neither entertainers nor politicians have this liberty. A politician can be called to account for the utterances of his or her supporters. They are their own brand and must solely deal with the consequences of their own actions as well as those who act in their name. Corporations, like politicians must respond to public criticism by competitors, mainly in advertising, whereas entertainers rarely scrutinize one another. Again, like politicians, the actions of a corporation can affect a great number of people.

Finally, the major difference between a corporation, entertainers and politicians is that corporations are more likely to face litigation. The actions of their company can affect lives, and they are often required to take corrective action or make compensation on a colossal scale that neither entertainers nor politicians are subject.

The differences in the nature of these entities suggest that there are also differences in their use of image repair strategies. The following sections will discuss image repair strategies used in the areas of politics, entertainment and corporations to see if there are any insights offered to the religious contexts and also examine image repair strategies used by religious leaders.

#### *Image Repair and Politicians*

There have been several scholarly articles published on politics and image repair (Benoit & Henson, 2009; Garcia, 2011; Kaylor, 2011; Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004; Liu, 2007; Liu, 2008). These articles concentrate on the use and effectiveness of image repair strategies. Overwhelmingly, these studies found that politicians all bolstered their image during a crisis while incorporating unsuccessful strategies.

Len-Rios and Benoit (2004) applied the image restoration strategy to the case of U.S. Congressman Gary Condit. In 2001, Condit was accused of being romantically involved with a missing federal intern. Interviews and speeches given by the congressman during the time of Levy's disappearance were analyzed, and denial, differentiation, and attacking his accuser (Levy's mother) were identified as the main strategies used by Condit. Because his position required maintenance of favorable opinion among his constituents and because of the seriousness of the situation, the authors concluded that these were ineffective image restoration strategies. The authors

suggest mortification and corrective action would have been the best course of action to take in this case. Because Condit did not admit to any wrongdoing, his strategies cost him his position in congress and created tension between him and his political party.

Former president George W. Bush faced a hailstorm of controversy due to his handling of Hurricane Katrina. In his attempt to repair his image against counter arguments made by a variety of sources, Bush used bolstering, defeasibility, and corrective action (Benoit & Henson, 2009). The scholars found that due to his position as president and commander in chief, the strategies were ineffective. Because he did not apologize for his part in the delayed effort, Bush was seen as both incompetent and insensitive. Other research has shown that this combination of responses is used often by public figures even though mortification is noted to be more effective in restoring public image (Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Benoit, 1997a). Liu (2007) examined Bush's major post-Katrina speeches to determine their effectiveness in his image restoration. The analysis of nine speeches found that Bush used all five broad image repair strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Liu's evaluation of editorials revealed a majority of negative feedback, thus resulting in an unsuccessful image restoration campaign.

Although he executed many strategies, former president Bill Clinton ultimately used mortification in his discourse during the Monica Lewinsky scandal (Garcia, 2011). By doing so, he maintained his approval rating, indicating a successful strategy. Image restoration research proves that mortification "can be vital to image restoration effects," especially in political cases (Garcia, 2011, p. 104). Politicians face heightened public scrutiny because they are elected to posts. If the electing population does not feel as

though their representative is taking responsibility for his or her culpable actions, then it may translate to not taking responsibility for their actions on the job.

### *Image Repair and Corporations*

Corporations are faced with extreme public scrutiny, primarily because the mass audience has purchased their defective product or service. In 2000, reports surfaced that Bridgestone-Firestone tires were alleged to be responsible for as many as 271 deaths (Associated Press, 2005). Blaney et al., (2002) analyzed the company's response to the accusations and found it to be poorly received. Bridgestone denied the allegations by shifting the blame and later attempted corrective action and used paid spokespersons to bolster their image. The researchers concluded that while some strategies can be used together (mortification and corrective action), Bridgestone combined two that proved detrimental to the company. The public interpreted shifting the blame and corrective action as greed-based ploys serving only the interest of the company (Blaney et al., 2002). The mortification-corrective action combination has been proven by scholars as the best strategies for corporations (Benoit, 1997b; Coombs, 1998). Duke University applied these strategies during its lacrosse team scandal. In 2006, an exotic dancer accused three members of the lacrosse team of rape. Fortunato's (2008) analysis of Duke's strategies indicated that they were successful. The college's public relations department managed to frame the story by emphasizing its corrective action efforts, while accepting responsibility for the incident.

Brinson and Benoit (1999) introduced another combination of image repair strategies often used by corporations. Separation consists of bolstering, shifting the blame and corrective action. Instead of accepting full responsibility for any wrongdoing,



the company separates itself from a specific group within the organization. Texaco separated itself from three executives who were taped using racist language that proved to severely damage the company's reputation (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). The researchers argue that using separation, instead of mortification reduces a company's chance of receiving a lawsuit. Plaintiffs can easily win monetary settlements if the corporations "acknowledge responsibility for the crisis" (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000, p. 176).

Oprah Winfrey's personal image repair efforts were incorporated in the corporation category because "her image is interwoven with her company's public image" (Oles, 2010, p. 37). Oles (2010) conducted a longitudinal analysis of three separate incidents that forced Winfrey to defend her reputation - her 1996 libel lawsuit with the Texas Beef Group, her mishap at a Paris boutique, and her selection of the fabricated memoir, *A Million Little Pieces* into her book club. The author found Winfrey used denial as her first strategy in all three incidents. By transferring the blame onto someone else, she maintained her favorable public image and denied any malicious intent on her actions. Oles (2010) also found that Winfrey used her show as a setting to defend her image because it "provides a safe and controllable forum" (p. 56). The research inferred that it was necessary to conduct strategic image repair actions in each situation because Winfrey is directly linked to her company. Because of the strategies she implemented, the research concluded that Winfrey's post-crises image was viewed more positively than her pre-crises image.

*Image Repair and Entertainers*

While mortification may not be the best option for corporations, researchers have asserted that it is the best strategy for individuals (Benoit & McHale, 1999; Brazeal, 2008). Mortification gives the accused an appearance of integrity, and carries with it an expectation that the audience shall feel sympathy and ultimately will respect the accused for admitting to the fault. Mortification also helps to swiftly move the crisis from the media agenda. The longer a story receives media attention, the more likely it will play out like a soap opera, leaving the audience seeking more answers (Seeger et al., 2001).

An example of the successful use of mortification is the case of entertainer Hugh Grant (Benoit 1997b). Grant was a rising Hollywood actor accused of lewd behavior with a prostitute. This accusation also threatened the image of his long-time girlfriend, also a Hollywood actor. Grant's initial and primary use of mortification was evaluated as favorable. Benoit noted that because Grant did not face public attack by an opponent, as do politicians, the newsworthiness of his story faded, and his image was restored.

It is important to note that to be effective, mortification must appear genuine. The individual must request forgiveness and admit guilt (Benoit, 2000). Brazeal's (2008) analysis of NFL player Terrell Owens showcases a poorly executed use of mortification. Owens crisis began after he was deactivated from the Philadelphia Eagles after a contract dispute. The Eagles refused to renegotiate Owens' contract mid-season, and in retort, Owens became belligerent and openly critical of the team and its coaching staff (Brazeal, 2008). After his release from the team, Owens attempted to repair his image by holding a press conference where he bolstered his image and made feeble attempts at mortification. "Owens made the critical mistake of never saying, 'I was wrong'. Instead, he minimized

his role and offered vague apologies that seemed like efforts to smooth over (rather than address) the damage he had done” (Brazeal, 2008, p. 149). Brazeal (2008) concluded that the half-hearted apology did not improve his image with Eagles and subsequently Owens was not reinstated.

When photos surfaced of Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps allegedly smoking from marijuana pipe, he immediately released a mortification-filled statement. Walsh and McAllister-Spooner (2011) analyzed Phelps’ image repair strategies and found that mortification was his dominate strategy. His use of this strategy was significant because five years earlier, Phelps was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol just months after winning eight Olympic medals. The authors also determined the successfulness of Phelps image repair based on media reaction. Through a qualitative content analysis of print and online coverage of the controversy, the authors concluded that media outlets were forgiving. Many columnists dismissed the severity of Phelps’ situation because of his age and public belief that his use of marijuana was non-offensive. It appeared that Phelps’ image repair strategies were successful.

#### *Image Repair and Religious Leaders*

There has been limited literature on the efforts of image repair made by individual religious leaders. Studies have either focused concern on the Roman Catholic Church’s response to sexual abuse allegations, or religious public relations practitioners’ selection of strategies, but not on the efforts of individuals to restore their image (Garcia, 2010; Kane, 2008; Shin, 2008). Religious leaders are also public figures. Congregations or religious institutions (constituents) elect them to their positions and these congregations must support them in order to maintain their positions in the church. Blaney and Benoit

(1997) noted how Jesus employed religious restoration strategies to defend himself and his religious beliefs. They analyzed the responses by Jesus to several accusations towards him, and suggested that he primarily applied denial and transcendence in his defense. The author's concluded that although Jesus was crucified, his restoration discourse proved successful due to the countless number of people who accept him as the Son of God. Blaney and Benoit's analysis serves as the first to apply image restoration discourse to a religious leader, but it is limited to a leader defending his religious beliefs. To this point; however, no examination of the strategies applied to leaders defending themselves after being accused of a disgraceful act has been published.

Protestant religious leaders are similar to politicians and entertainers in the sense that they are persuasive public figures. Although many represent an institution, they are held responsible for their actions individually. However, this is not the case of the Catholic Church. Often, the general public does not know the name of individual priests involved in controversy. The Catholic Church has taken much scrutiny over its systematic silence with sexual abuse cases involving priests. High ranking members of the Church hierarchy have been found to be as guilty as the individuals accused of the acts because when misconduct was reported, the Church did not "accept organizational responsibility for its personnel" nor did it hold the priests responsible (Dunne, 2004, p. 490).

When an individual religious leader is accused of an offensive action, he or she faces exceptionally negative criticism from the media and public because he or she was previously viewed as a moral and spiritual advisor example to others. The mega-church culture; however, has merged the senior pastor and church into one. Since the pastor is

oftentimes the church's founder, visionary, and chief executive officer, his or her name is synonymous with the church. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, no institutional voice speaks on the mega-church leader's behalf; therefore, he or she is responsible for their image repair.

Studies using both image repair strategies and the contingency theory as theoretical frameworks for research in crisis communication are limited. Holtzhausen and Roberts (2009) paired the two for their examination on the effectiveness of image repair strategies and contingency theory in crisis management. Their analysis of the 2003 Air Force sexual assault scandal concluded that if the cause of the crisis is external to the entity, and requires less accommodation, the entity will more likely use advocacy-type image repair strategies, such as attacking the accuser and denial. If an entity has strong internal control over the crisis, then the entity will use accommodative strategies such as bolstering, corrective action and apology (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009).

#### News Media Framing

News frames are powerful tools that can identify problems, offer solutions, and influence public perception (An & Gower, 2009). Entman (1993) suggests frames "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (p. 52). Semetko and Valkenberg (2000) identified five prominent news frames used in media:

1. Human interest frame brings a human face or an emotional angle to the issue.
2. Conflict frames reflects conflicts and/or disagreements among individuals, groups and organizations

3. Morality frames put the event, problem, or issue in the morals, social prescriptions and religious tenants
4. Economic frames reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, groups, organizations, or countries.
5. Attribution of responsibility frames is a way of attributing responsibility for a cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group.

(An & Gower, 2009, p. 108)

An and Gower (2009) analyzed frames found in news coverage of ten companies that faced crisis in 2006: Enron, Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, Wal-Mart, Northwest Airlines, Merk, Computer Associate, Goodyear Tire, Boeing, and Delta Airlines. The authors analyzed news stories covered by national newspapers: *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *USA Today*. The analysis revealed that attribution of responsibility was the most frequently used frame, followed by economic frame and conflict frame.

Other studies analyzed frames as being positive, negative or balanced (Haskell, 2007; Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). Haskell (2007) examined the news coverage of Canadian Evangelical Christians. The group charged media with unfairly portraying them in the news. Haskell determined that while Canadian Evangelical Christians did receive a substantial amount of negative coverage, they also received an equal amount of positive coverage, resulting in an overall rating of balanced coverage. Haskell notes information selection as a part of the framing process. When a story is covered in media, it is considered salient because it is placed for audience consumption.

Holtzhausen & Roberts (2009) determined the success of image repair strategies by analyzing news story importance and story balance. To determine salience, the placement of the story was identified, “it is better for a story to be placed on the front page of an interior section than to be placed inside the front section” (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009, p. 175). To determine news story balance, the tone of the story was identified as either positive, negative or balanced. The findings indicated that the majority of the stories were placed on the inside of section A of the newspaper and that the overwhelming majority of stories were balanced, yielding a mildly successful image repair campaign.

#### Religious Public Relations

To date, a modest amount of research has been conducted on the ways religious institutions practice public relations. From the vantage of crisis communication, there is even less. Current religious crisis communication research focused on how organizations as a whole respond to publics, and not about individual response (Courtright & Hearit, 2002; Shin, 2008). Courtright and Hearit’s (2002) study examined the discourse of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C & M A) after a number of students at their academy were sexually, mentally, and physically abused. Their analysis found that although individual members committed the deplorable acts, C & M A demonstrated several instances of mortification, addressed several corrective actions and offered compensation to the victims. The researchers concluded that the institutional discourse applied minimized widespread media attention, reassured key publics that the immoral actions will not take place again and exhibited sacrifice in the form of capital costs. The study also notes the importance of the discourse settings. One apology was given during

a religious retreat, similar to a church service. This mirrored the symbolic image of the guilty going before the congregation to confess their sins.

Shin (2008) applied the contingency theory to religious public relations. Using a survey, religious public relations practitioners were asked to indicate the crisis communication/conflict management strategies they were willing to use during a conflict. Crisis communication strategies included denial, shifting the blame, provocation, defeasibility, accident, good intentions, bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, compensation, and corrective action. Conflict management strategies included in the study were: contending, compromising, collaborating, accommodating and avoiding. The study found religious public relations practitioners were more likely to use collaborating, contending and compromising in a conflict, and corrective action, good intentions and bolstering during a crisis. The study also indicated internal threats, relationship and individual characteristics have a correlation with accommodation. The results indicate religious practitioners primarily rely on their morals and religious values to resolve a crisis and these values translate to concession and corrective action.

To date, only one study has examined the tactics used by religious leaders. Legg (2009) examined the crisis campaign implemented by Jimmy Swaggart during his widely publicized sex scandal in 1988. Using both Benoit's (1997b) image repair theory and Fink's stage theory, the author sought "how crises both influence and are influenced by the organization they affect" and explored "some of the variables the factor of religion introduces to image repair discourse" (p. 241). She concluded that mortification was successful for Swaggart. This finding implied that his primary audience of religious



individuals was more concerned with his repentance than his guilt. The research also found that Swaggart structured his message based on his audiences. For his congregation, Swaggart used a combination of mortification, provocation and bolstering as the primary strategies. In media outlets, where a vast audience was present, he relied on mortification as his primary strategy.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Scholars have offered several actions individuals can take when faced with a crisis. Seeger et al., (2001) posit three general responses to crises. The authors suggest using a single spokesperson, providing immediate communication to constituents, and maintaining open communication with external publics. Benoit's (1997a) image repair strategies emphasize the message content. The five broad strategies of denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification can be attributed to each of the cases to be analyzed. Based on this information and information given in the literature review, the following questions are posed:

RQ1a: What crisis communication response strategies do mega-church leaders employ?

RQ1b: What crisis communication response strategies does the Boston Diocese employ?

RQ1c: Is there a difference in the crisis communication response strategies of mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

RQ1d: Is there a difference in the image restoration strategies overtime?

The following set of questions will examine the stances religious leaders take when dealing with opposing publics, in these cases, their accusers.

RQ2a: What are the stances mega –church leaders take to respond to a crisis?

RQ2b: What are the stances the Boston Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church take to respond to a crisis?

RQ2c: Do the stances of the religious leaders stances change over time?

Several factors can determine which image repair strategies an accused entity will use (Cancel et al., 1997). These factors determine whether an entity's strategies and stances will closely play an advocacy role or whether the entity will accommodate their audiences. Also, because the current study examines factors faced by individuals (with the exception of the U.S. Roman Catholic Church), it may be assumed that internal control is present; therefore, the following questions are posed:

RQ3a: Which contingent factors influenced the stances of mega-church leaders?

RQ3b: Which contingent factors influenced the stances of the Boston?

RQ3c: Is there a difference in the contingent factors of the Boston Diocese and mega-church leaders?

The audience's (general and primary) response to image repair strategies is the greatest factor in whether the repair campaign was received favorably. Using content analysis, researchers were able to determine the success or failure of an image repair campaign by analyzing its news frames based on newspaper placement and balance. (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). Article placement gives salience to the issue, while the frequency of negative frames elevates salience (Haskell, 2007). The following sets of questions will determine saliency of religious leader crises:

RQ4a: Where was the placement of newspaper articles about mega-church leaders?

RQ4b: Where was the placement of newspaper articles about the Boston Diocese?

RQ4c: Is there a difference between the placement of mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese articles?

RQ5a: How were mega-church leaders portrayed in newspaper items?

RQ5b: How was the Boston Diocese portrayed in newspaper items?

RQ5c: Is there a difference in the way the mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese were portrayed in newspaper items?

RQ6a: What is the overall tone of newspaper items about mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

RQ6b: What is the overall tone of newspaper items about the Boston Diocese?

RQ6c: Is there a difference between the tone of newspaper items about mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

Five news frames have been identified as commonly used in United States media coverage (An & Gower, 2009). The following research questions identify how news articles on religious leaders' scandals were framed:

RQ 7a: How were newspaper items about the mega-church leaders framed?

RQ7b: How were newspaper items about the Boston diocese framed?

RQ7c: Is there a difference between the news frames of mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

## CHAPTER V

### METHOD

#### Unit of Analysis

To answer the research questions, this study employed a quantitative content analysis of media interviews (television and newspaper), sermons, news releases, websites and press conference statements made by Jim Bakker, Tim Haggard, Eddie Long, Henry Lyons, Jimmy Swaggart or their representatives and the Boston Diocese at the height of their respective scandals. To answer the success or failure of the campaign, columns, editorial, news articles, and readers' comments from newspapers were analyzed. Media coverage of the controversies can gauge audience reception, "while the media does not speak for all people, its reaction to [controversy] had the ability to influence how people feel" (Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011, p. 159). These items determined primary and general public responses to the cases.

Content analysis serves as a "multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating any problem in which the content of communication serves as the basis of inference" (Holsti, 1969, p. 2). Content analysis can be used to illustrate the attributes of messages, and those attributes can be compared over time to identify trends (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000). Detecting trends in image repair is necessary to strengthen the body of empirical research in this area. Coombs & Schmidt (2000) attested that to develop more exact prescriptive knowledge, researchers should execute a series of similar case studies, "using a series of similar case studies would allow the researcher to find patterns that would indicate the effect of specific strategies in a particular type of crisis" (p. 164). By using five individual religious leaders and the Boston Diocese, the

current study's results identified trends used by this entity and determine what strategies should be used or avoided.

### Sampling

Media outlets sample included national television networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS and local stations nearest the areas where the scandal occurred: Atlanta's WSBT, WXIA, and WGCL; Baton Rouge's WBRZ, WAFB, and WVLA; Charlotte's WBTV, WSOC, and WCNC; Colorado Springs' KOAA, KKTV, and KRDO; and St. Petersburg's WFLA, WTSP, and WFTS. Newspapers included nationals, *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. These three papers were chosen because of their national distribution and "influence" (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009, p. 171). Papers from areas in closest proximity to the scandals were analyzed: *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Charlotte Observer*, *Colorado Gazette*, the *Boston Globe* and the *Baton Rouge Advocate*. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Colorado Gazette*, *Boston Globe* articles were selected from the ProQuest newsstand database. The *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Charlotte Observer* and *Baton Rouge Advocate* samples were selected from a subscription to their individual online archives. The LexisNexis search engine was used to gather national news stories because it is "renowned throughout the academic world as reliable, extensive, up-to-date, and technologically-capable of providing multiple sources of news and media coverage" (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009, p. 173). Broadcast media outlets were used to determine strategy and stance use only, while print media were used for strategy, stance, and effectiveness.

The sampling frame of the news releases and news stories coded were those published from the day the scandal initially appears in the media until six months later:

Jim Bakker, March 3, 1987-September 3, 1987; Ted Haggard, November 2, 2006-May 5, 2007; Eddie Long, September 21, 2010-March 20, 2011; Henry Lyons, July 6, 1997-January 6, 1998; Jimmy Swaggart, February 17, 1988-August 17, 1988; and Boston Diocese, January 6, 2002-July 6, 2002. This time frame was chosen because it reflects a uniform response-time for each case. Cases involving criminal trials (Jim Bakker, Henry Lyons, and the Boston Diocese) took more than six months to resolve; therefore, six months served as a parallel timeframe to analyze strategy implementation.

In total, 1402 items were analyzed and coded. Of these, 86 (6.1%) were items concerning repair strategies. Each separate strategy enacted was coded and duplicate stories and strategies found in other outlets were eliminated. For example, if an interview was published by a newspaper and later reported on television, it was coded once. 1316 (93.9%) were newspaper items used to evaluate response strategies. In terms of image repair strategies, religious leaders executed strategies in various outlets: press conferences, sermons, newspaper and television interviews, news releases, websites and court proceedings. Sermons were the most frequently used (n=31, 36.0%), followed by press conference statements (n=13, 15.1%), court proceedings (n=10, 11.6%), local newspaper interviews (n=9, 10.5%), national television interview (n=8, 9.3%), local television interviews (n=6, 7.0%), news releases (n=4, 4.7%) and website messages (n=2, 2.3%).

Both groups targeted a general audience more than their own respective congregations when enacting image repair strategies. Mega-church leaders addressed the general audience 44 (58.7%) times and addressed their congregations 30 times (40.0%).

The Boston Diocese addressed the general audience 5 (45.5 %) times and their congregation 5 (45.5%) times.

Table 7

*Religious Leaders' Targeted Audience*

Leader Name	General Audience	Congregation	Other
Bakker	3	3	0
Haggard	9	1	0
Long	18	9	1
Lyons	12	11	0
Swaggart	2	6	0
Boston Diocese	5	5	1

Newspaper items coded for evaluation included news articles (n=954, 72.5%), columns (n=173, 13.1%), editorials (n=110, 8.4%) and letters to the editor (n=79, 6.0%). In the six month period, 21% (n=276) of the articles were written about Henry Lyons, Jimmy Swaggart received 20.1% (n=264), followed by Ted Haggard with 10.8% (n=142), James Bakker with 8.7% (n=114) and Eddie Long with 4.3% (n=56). The Boston Diocese of the Catholic Church received 35.3% (n=464) of the total.



Table 8

*Newspaper Type by Religious Leader*

Leader Name	National Paper	Local Paper	Total
James Bakker	71	43	114
Ted Haggard	25	117	142
Eddie Long	8	48	56
Henry Lyons	21	255	276
Jimmy Swaggart	101	163	264
Boston Diocese	127	337	464

## Coding Categories

Each media interview (television and newspaper), sermons, news releases, websites and press conference statements were analyzed for content in the following categories: To answer RQ1a-d, the coding categories of speaker, audience, denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action and mortification are needed to determine Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer's (2001) general crisis response strategies, and Benoit's (1997a) image restoration strategies. Because leaders could employ more than one strategy in each response, only the dominant image repair strategy was coded.

For RQ2a-c, the coder's impression of the leader's perspective was given on a Likert-type scale ranging from very advocating to very accommodating. Like McQuail (1992) as cited in Shin et al. (2005) "coders were trained to base judgments on the likely

impression made on an average audience” (p. 403). Also, the date each stance was taken determines if the stance and strategies have changed over time.

For RQ3a-c, the external contingent variables were coded. These variables are considered threats: litigation, government regulation, potentially damaging publicity, scarring of company’s reputation in the general public and legitimizing activists’ claims (Cancel et al., 1997). General political/social environment/external culture variables will also be coded: degree of political support of business and degree of social support of business (Cancel et al., 1997).

For RQ4a-c, placement was coded as undetermined, front page, front section, or local/metro section (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009).

RQ5a-c asks about religious leaders’ portrayal. To determine how newspaper items portrayed the leaders individually, coders identified whether a newspaper item (column, news article, letter to the editor, online comment, or editorial) was dominantly positive, negative or balanced (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). To determine the overall tone of the item, coders identified column, news article, letters to the editor, online comment, or editorial as being positive, negative, or neutral, as posited in RQ6 a-b.

RQ7a-c asks how newspaper items were framed. Five framing categories were coded: attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic, human interest, and morality (An and Gower, 2009). Coders identified the dominant framed used in each item.

#### Pretest and Intercoder Reliability

A pretest was held to clarify the coding process and categories. Two coders, the researcher and an additional coder coded five percent of the initial sample (n=100) and Holsti’s (1969) formula was used to calculate intercoder reliability. Initial coding

indicated several misunderstandings, primarily on the evaluative coding sheet. A second training was held to clarify operational definitions, and a second round of coding garnered acceptable reliability. The following reliabilities were calculated for each variable: speaker, 1.00; date, 1.00; audience, .96; image repair strategy, .93; primary speaker, 1.00; litigation, 1.00; government regulation, 1.00, damaging publicity, 1.00; reputation, 1.00; activists claims, 1.00; political support, 1.00; political support, 1.00; stance, .94; item type, .89; placement, 1.00; newspaper type, 1.00; news frame, .84; story balance, .89; tone,.92. An overall reliability of .96 was calculated between two coders.

## CHAPTER VI

### RESULTS

The first set of research questions examined the three-crisis response strategies deemed vital by Seeger et al., (2001) and Benoit's (1997a) Image Restoration Strategies. Crisis communication response strategies are: maintaining one consistent speaker, offering an immediate response and maintaining open communication, and image restoration strategies are: exhibiting denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

RQ1a: How do mega-church leaders respond to crisis?

Mega-church leaders maintained a consistent speaker (leader himself) 56 (74.6%) of the seventy-five times that they addressed the crisis. In terms of immediate response, mega-church leaders responded to crises six times in the first twenty-four hours after the crisis became public.

RQ1b: How does the Boston Diocese respond to crisis?

The Boston Diocese maintained a consistent speaker four (57.1%) out of the seven times during the six-month period, and did not respond at all in the first twenty-four hours after the crisis became public. After initial contact, it was found that each entity did maintain communication with external publics. See Table 9 for full results for initial communication time and frequency of continued communication.

Table 9

*Communication Time and Frequency by Religious leader*

	(24 hours)	(48 hours)	(72 hours)	(1 week)	(2 to 3 weeks)	(4 to 6 weeks)	More than 6 weeks
Bakker	2	0	0	1	0	0	3
Haggard	2	1	0	1	0	1	5
Long	2	3	1	2	0	3	17
Lyons	0	0	1	1	0	1	20
Swaggart	0	0	0	2	3	0	0
Boston Diocese	0	0	0	1	3	2	2

Mega-church leaders employed reducing offensiveness more than any other image restoration strategy (n=26, 34.7%). The next most used strategy was denial (n=18, 24.0%), followed by unknown (n=14, 18%), mortification (n=12, 16.0%), evasion of responsibility (n=4, 5.3%), and corrective action (n=1, 1.3%). Unknown strategies are those instances where the leader acknowledged the crisis situation, but did not employ an image repair strategy. An example of reducing offensiveness is James Bakker's confession that he was "doing his best" as a leader of a multi-million dollar religious corporation and simply could not resist temptation (Harris, 1989). See Table 10 for individual results.

The Boston Diocese employed mortification more than any other strategy (n=9, 54.5%). Following mortification was unknown (n=3, 27.3%), followed by corrective action (n=1, 9.1%), and denial (n=1, 9.1%). The Church did not employ evasion of responsibility or reducing offensiveness.

Table 10

*Repair Strategies by Religious Leader*

Leader	Denial	Evasion of Responsibility	Reducing offensiveness	Corrective Action	Mortification
Bakker	3	0	3	0	0
Haggard	2	0	0	1	8
Long	5	2	14	0	0
Lyons	8	2	8	0	0
Swaggart	0	0	1	0	1
Boston Diocese	1	0	0	1	9

RQ1c: Is there a difference in the response strategies of mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

To determine if there was a difference between leader type (mega-church, Catholic church) and communication response strategies, a chi-square test was used. The test revealed that the relationship between the consistent speaker strategy was not significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=86)=6.67, p=.10$ . Another test measuring speaker communication time revealed an insignificant relationship,  $\chi^2(6, N=86)=11.31, p=.079$

A chi-square analysis found that there was a significant relationship between the image repair strategies utilized by the mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese,  $\chi^2(5, N=86)=15.02, p=.010$

This difference is due to the Boston Diocese's overwhelming use of mortification as a strategy.

RQ1d: Is there a difference in the image restoration strategies overtime?

During the first month of the crises being made public, the dominant strategies enacted by religious leaders were denial (n=7, 26.9%, reducing offensiveness (n=7, 26.9%) and unclear (n=7 26.9%). The only other strategy used during the first month was mortification (n=5,19.2%). Reducing offensiveness (n=3,42.9%) was the dominant strategy used during the second month of the crises, followed by denials (n=2, 28.6%), corrective action (n=1, 14.3%) and mortification (n=1, 14.3%). See Figure 1 for full details.

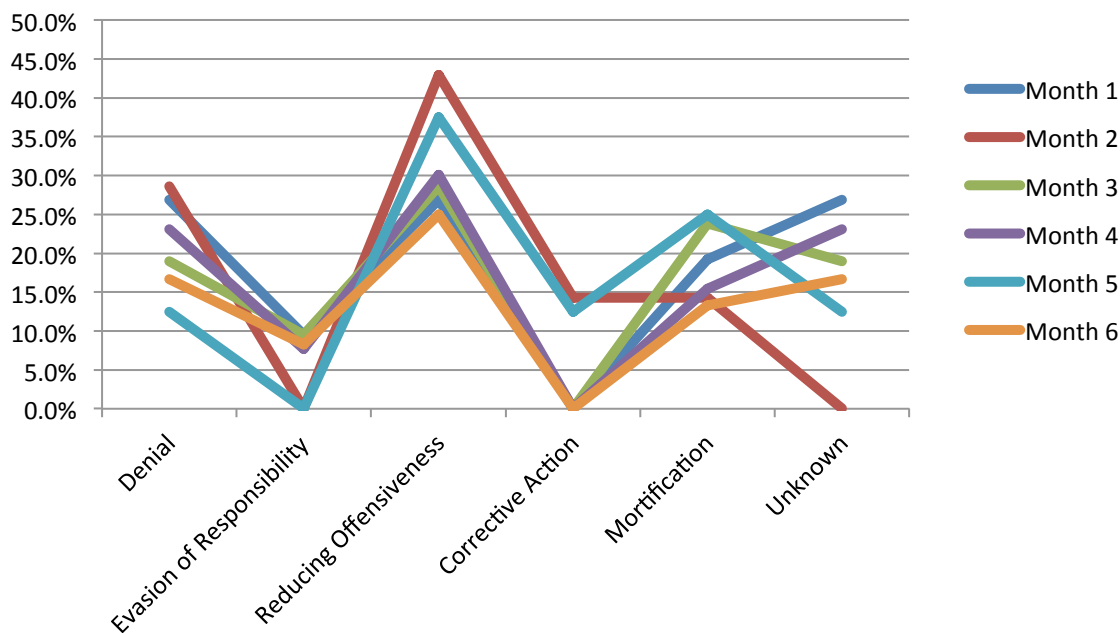


Figure 1. Image Restoration Strategies over six month period.

RQ2a: What stances did mega-church leaders take to respond to crisis?

RQ2b: What are the stances the Boston Diocese took to respond to crisis?

Mega-church leaders were found to take a “very advocating” stance more than any other stance (n=32, 42.7%), while the Boston Diocese was “very accommodating” (n=6, 54.5%) to its publics. The mega-church leaders were neutral or advocating (n=16, 12 %), while the Boston Diocese was rarely neutral or very advocating (n=1, 9.1%).

Table 11

*Leader by Stance*

Leader	Very Accommodating	Accommodating	Neutral	Advocating	Very Advocating
Bakker	0	1	1	0	4
Haggard	5	2	1	1	1
Long	0	4	6	1	16
Lyons	0	0	6	6	11
Swaggart	2	1	1	3	1
Boston Diocese	6	3	1	0	1

RQ2c: Do the stances of the mega-church leaders or the Boston Diocese change over time?

Mega-church leaders were found to have changed their stance over time, with the stance initially advocating, then becoming more accommodating as time passed. Mega church leaders ending stance was coded as predominately accommodating. The Boston



Diocese did not have a noticeable change in stance over time as its initial stance was very accommodating and ending stance remained very accommodating.

RQ3a: Which contingent factors influenced the stances of mega-church leaders?

RQ3b: Which contingent factors influenced the stances of the Boston Diocese?

Damaging publicity (n=86, 100%), reputation (n=86, 100%), legitimizing claims (n=86, 100%), political support (n=86, 100%), and social support (n=86, 100%) were external variables that influenced both mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese. Litigation (n=76, 88.4%) and Government regulation (n=58, 67.4%) were also influential in both groups' stances. In terms of individual leaders, litigation influenced James Bakker (n=6, 100%), Eddie Long (n=27, 100%), Henry Lyons (n=23, 100%) and Jimmy Swaggart (n=8, 100%). The Boston Diocese was also influenced by litigation (n=11, 100%). James Bakker (n=6, 100%), Ted Haggard (n=10, 100%), Henry Lyons (n=23, 100%), Jimmy Swaggart (n=8, 100%) and the Boston Diocese were influenced by Government regulation.

RQ3c: Is there a difference in the contingent factors of the Boston Diocese and mega-church leaders?

A significant association was not found between contingent factors and religious leaders.

RQ4a: Where was the placement of newspapers articles about mega-church leaders?

Stories of mega-church leaders' scandals were located on the front page more than any other section in the paper (n=158, 29%), placement in the front section

following closely behind (n=150, 28.2%). 129 (24.2%) stories were placed in the local/metro section, while placement of 95 (17.9%) articles could not be determined.

RQ4b: Where was the placement of newspapers articles about the Boston Diocese?

The majority of the Boston Diocese news stories were also placed on the front page (n= 205, 57.4%), while 130 (36.4%) were placed in the front section and 6.2 %, n=22 were located in the local/metro section.

Table 12

*Religious leader articles by newspaper placement*

Leader	Front Page	Front Section	Local/Metro Section	Undetermined
Bakker	37	24	20	27
Haggard	21	24	24	0
Long	7	3	32	13
Lyons	9	14	5	54
Swaggart	84	85	48	1
Boston Diocese	205	130	22	0

RQ 4c: Is there a difference between the placement of mega-church leader and Boston Diocese articles?

A significant association was found between newspaper placement and religious leaders,  $\chi^2(3, n=1316)=149.67, p < .01$ .

RQ5a: How were mega-church leaders portrayed in newspaper items?

RQ5b: How was the Boston Diocese portrayed in newspaper items?

Mega-church leaders portrayals were balanced 719 (84.4%) times in the first six months after the scandal, while the Boston Diocese portrayals were balanced light 383 (82.5%) times. The mega-church leaders were seen negatively 118 times (13.8 %), while the Boston Diocese were found to have 77 (16.6%) occurrences of negative newspaper portrayals. The leaders were rarely portrayed positively (n=15, 1.8% for mega-church leaders and 3, (.6%) for the Boston Diocese. See Table 13 for detailed results.

Table 13

*Religious Leaders by Portrayal*

Leader	Positive	Negative	Balanced
Bakker	1	21	92
Haggard	6	20	116
Long	1	10	45
Lyons	3	48	225
Swaggart	4	19	241
Boston Diocese	3	77	383

RQ5c: Is there a difference in the way the mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese were portrayed in newspaper items?

A significant association was not found between the portrayal of mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese.

RQ6a: What is the overall tone of newspaper items about mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

RQ6b: What is the overall tone of newspaper items about the Boston Diocese?

The overall tone of the item was coded as positive, negative or balanced. For mega-church leaders, 776 (91.1%) items were balanced, while 61 (7.2%) were negative and 15 (1.8%) were positive. The Boston Diocese newspaper items were overwhelmingly balanced in tone (n=454, 97.6%), followed by 8 (1.7%) negative items and 2 (.4%) positive items.

RQ6c: Is there a difference between the tone of newspaper items about mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

A significant association was revealed between the tone of newspaper items about mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese  $\chi^2(3, n=1316)=24.25, p<.01$ .

Table 14

*Religious Leaders by Item tone*

Leader	Positive	Negative	Balanced
Bakker	1	10	103
Haggard	5	18	119
Long	1	8	47
Lyons	5	19	252
Swaggart	3	6	255
Boston Diocese	2	8	453

RQ7a: How were newspaper items about the mega-church leaders and Boston diocese framed?

The overwhelming majority of the news stories written about mega-church leaders were framed as conflicts (n=477, 56.0 %), followed by the morality frame (n=112, 13.1%). The economic frame was found in 84 articles (9.9%) and 76(8.9%) of the articles were considered to be human interest. The human-interest frame was used often to offer the victims' account of the scandal. For example, in an article about the Boston Diocese, a former altar boy intricately described the impact of sexual abuse on his life (Richard, 2002).

RQ7b: How were newspaper items about the Boston diocese framed?

Articles on the Boston Diocese also garnered a majority conflict frame (n=286, 61.6%) followed by human-interest frames (n=40, 8.6%). 8.2% (n=38) of the articles had a moral frame and 6.3% (n=29) held an economic frame.

RQ7c: Is there a difference between the news frames of mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese?

A significant relationship between news frames and religious leaders was found,  $\chi^2(4, n=1316)=15.01, p=.005$

Table 15

*Religious Leaders by news frames*

Name	Human Interest	Conflict Frame	Morality Frame	Economic Frame	Attribution of Responsibility
Bakker	5	67	11	17	14
Haggard	20	59	36	6	21
Long	2	32	11	7	4
Lyons	21	158	31	19	47
Swaggart	28	161	23	35	17
Boston Diocese	40	286	38	29	71

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine the different strategies, stances and factors associated with religious leaders in crises. It also examined whether there was a difference in the strategies, stance, and factors between mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, and whether their responses were received favorably. The results of the analysis provide insight into theoretical and practical implications of religious leaders' crisis communication strategies. While it was proven that there was only a significant difference between the image restoration strategies employed by mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, the findings do suggest strong relationships in audience reception of these strategies.

The first set of research questions explored crisis responses. The findings of the study lend support to Seeger et al., (2001) research of the effectiveness of post crises responses. The results found that both groups (mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese) utilized a single spokesperson (the leader himself) more frequently than not. This is vital to the success of crisis communication, because this type of consistency took place before the crises occurred. Religious leaders, be it senior pastors, bishops or priests are the designated spokespersons for their respective institutions. Internal and external audiences expect to and do hear from the congregation's leader when major issues arise, and post-crises communication is no exception. This finding directly supports Seeger et al.'s (2001) claim that the role of "communicating to multiple audiences with a single, unified voice...typically [is] best served by the organization's CEO" (2001, p. 164).

The findings of this study also echo the findings of Fortunato's (2008) analysis of Duke University's crisis communication strategies. University President, Richard Brodhead served as the sole spokesperson during and after the crises because he and the University's public relations department found that due to the magnitude of the alleged crime, it was necessary that the leader speak on behalf of the college community. In this analysis, the leader was not charged with speaking on behalf of his community, but in defense of himself. This is important to note, because the use of a surrogate speaker would imply the leaders' insincerity and lack of seriousness towards the issue (Brazeal, 2008). When the leader was not the speaker (30.2% of the total number of occurrences), an attorney was found to speak on his behalf. This was found only in cases where the leader was facing litigation.

Seeger et al. (2001) posited that audiences demand an immediate and thorough response from involved parties despite the fact that crises appear with surprise and uncertainty. In this analysis, the crises were emerging – that is, there was only a matter of time before the offenses became public; therefore, the leaders were surprised only by the revealing of their actions and not by the actions itself. This is supported by the results, only 6.9% of all communication by the leaders occurred within twenty-four hours of the crisis becoming public, and these findings occurred in only three of the six individuals analyzed. Jim Bakker addressed the local newspaper through a spokesperson after his scandal became *breaking news*. Eddie Long also used a spokesperson as the first source of communication to the public twenty-four hours after his alleged actions became *breaking news*. The lack of prompt communication by religious leaders supports Williams and Olaniran's (1994) contention that organizations that withhold information



exacerbate a crisis, and the entire story eventually becomes known. Henry Lyons did issue an immediate response to his wife's arson charge, but failed to explain how his actions resulted in her drastic response. Eventually, his affair with two women and embezzlement of his organization's funds became public record.

Mega-church leaders were found to have maintained consistent communication during the first six months after the crises were made public. The Boston Diocese; however, failed to communicate publicly within the first week of the *Boston Globe's* exposé, but maintained communication after that time. The delay of the Archdiocese's response could be due to the seriousness of the charges against the Catholic Church and ongoing criminal trial against Priest John Geoghan. The Boston Diocese case included both the crisis of child sexual molestation accusations against priests, and the church's supporting treatment of the accused.

Mega-church leaders' communication more often included reducing offensiveness more than any other strategy; whereas, the Boston Diocese's communication included a majority of mortification. Bolstering and attacking the accuser were two strategies under the reducing offensiveness category that were used by mega-church leaders. Each leader bolstered their image based on their previous favorable characteristics. Blaney et al., (2002) also found bolstering was a reasonable choice for Bridgestone-Firestone. The company relied on their product's longstanding respectable history as a way to remind customers of commitment to quality. Similarly, mega-church leaders reminded congregations of their steadfast commitment to the ministry. While addressing his congregation, Jimmy Swaggart remarked on his tradition of audacious preaching, "I have always tried to be like a man and to preach this gospel exactly as I have seen it without

fear or reservation or compromise.” (Kaufman, 1988, p. 36). Eddie Long identified one of his many duties, “So, as a pastor, I want to help everybody,” and Ted Haggard bolstered his image by proving he is able to forgive his accuser, “Please forgive my accuser. He is revealing the deception and sensuality that was in my life. Those sins, and others, need to be dealt with harshly. So, forgive him and, actually, thank God for him” (Poole, 2011a, p. 2; Correll, 2009, p. 4). In Benoit’s (1997a) initial identification of image repair strategies, he argued that bolstering is used to “strengthen the audience’s positive feelings toward the offender, in effort to offset negative feelings with the wrongful act” (p. 180).

The Boston Diocese’s use of mortification may be attributed to their delayed response time and the seriousness of the offenses. The Boston Diocese responded to media one week after the local newspaper began a revealing investigative reporting series on its accused priests and its negligent response to accusations. In his first communication, Cardinal Bernard Law exhibited mortification to the families and victims of sexual abuse by priests, “To victims and their families, I offer my profound apology, and I also hope that the church's evolving response to that problem might offer some measure of comfort” (Dunne, 2004, p. 492). Mortification was necessary for the Boston Diocese’s image restoration efforts. It was also important that his apology appeared sincere. Cardinal Law stated that he “profoundly” apologized many times and added that he had been “tragically incorrect “ in reassigning several priests after he became aware of allegations of sexual misconduct (Dunne, 2004, p. 492). Law’s apology and admission of guilt was in direct contrast to Terrell Owens’ attempt at mortification. Owens failed to accept responsibility for his actions, and offered a vague apology (Brazeal, 2008). As a

result, he was not offered a contract with any National Football League team that year.

The initial communication also alluded to the Roman Catholic Church's corrective action strategy. After offering his apology, Law introduced a zero-tolerance policy for "such behavior" and any offenders will be removed from the Archdiocese immediately. Benoit and Henson (2009) found that corrective action was a desirable strategy particularly when damage or harm is extensive. In their analysis of President George W. Bush's response to Hurricane Katrina, corrective action was employed, but not directly by the President; therefore, the public negatively received his response. Cardinal Law himself enacted the zero-tolerance initiative for the Boston Diocese, demonstrating his concern and attempt for the offenses to not be repeated. His direct involvement implies sincerity and compassion, whereas Bush's response had serious limitations. Bush, as did the Cardinal, had a delayed response to the crisis and did not offer any apology. Because of his lackadaisical attitude during the crisis, he received negative criticism from pundits and citizens.

Research questions 2-2c investigate stances religious leaders took to respond to the crises and if these stances changed over time. Mega-church leaders' use of reducing offensiveness implies an advocating role. In fact, the results show that they took a very advocating stance more than any other stance. Jim Bakker, Ted Haggard, Eddie Long, and Henry Lyons each denied involvement in their varied wrongdoings. They further advocated their roles by reducing offensiveness of the event. Eddie Long and Henry Lyons attacked their accuser, while all the mega-church leaders bolstered their images. The results of the analysis show that the mega-church leaders moved on a continuum from pure advocacy to pure accommodation over time (Shin et al., 2005). For example,

Bishop Eddie Long changed his perspective from fighting the accusations to agreeing to participate in mediation with his accusers, and Ted Haggard initially denied involvement in the offensive acts and later delivered a full apology to his congregation and even asked his congregants to pray for his accuser.

While the stance of mega-church leaders moved along the continuum, the Boston Diocese's stance was primarily static over time. Cardinal Bernard Law, speaking on behalf of the Diocese and the accused priests, repeatedly apologized for the priests' actions and his negligence.

The contingent factors associated with the stances were explored in research questions 3-3c. The results indicate all religious leaders analyzed were influenced by external threats as well as political and social environment. Legal action influenced the stances of Jim Bakker, Eddie Long, Henry Lyons, Jimmy Swaggart, and the Boston Diocese. Each of these mega-church leaders was faced with criminal or civil trials; therefore, they were possibly cautioned by attorneys to craft messages in effort to be favorable in the court of law, and not so much the court of public opinion. Jimmy Swaggart's external threats were more complicated than the other leader's because he was in the midst of legal troubles when his crisis arose. Swaggart was the defendant in a defamation of character suit where Pastor Marvin Gorman accused Swaggart of slander. Swaggart's communication post-crisis was structured to only address the issue and not include comments on his legal woes. The leaders, including Ted Haggard, were influenced by litigation and regulation. Their strategies and stances support Holtzhausen and Robert's (2009) position that "legal or regulatory constraints affect entity" causing "it to use less accommodative strategies," (p. 171).

No significant differences were found between the mega-church leaders and the Boston diocese with variables analyzed in research questions one through three. These questions all dealt with the leader's use of responses, strategies, stances and contingent variables. This finding was not surprising, because although the mega-church leaders responded to their individual scandals and Cardinal Law responded on behalf of the accused priests, both entities were held responsible for their actions by a waiting public.

Preliminary results found that all religious leaders targeted general audiences more, and their communication with congregations came in a close second. It could be argued that the general audience was targeted more because of the heightened media attention given to the crises. Media outlets followed each of these cases closely, while constantly requesting comments from the leaders. When congregations were the primary audiences, media outlets were still privy to the communications. It is also important to note that religious leaders addressed their congregations in their respective sanctuaries. This finding is similar to Oles's (2010) study of Oprah Winfrey's crisis response strategies. Oles determined that Winfrey addressed her target audience (viewers) on her show because it offered a "safe and controllable forum." Just as Winfrey controls the production on her set, the leaders have control over the order of service in their sanctuaries. The sanctuary is a venue where the audience developed trust in the leader.

The make-up of congregations is also a vital area to discuss in terms of the similarity of mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese's strategies, stances, and contingent variables. In the mega-church congregation, members are a median age of thirty-eight, formally educated and adopters of new ideas (Thumma, 1996). The congregations are diverse and multicultural, with members representing a broad spectrum

of countries and speaking several languages (Thumma, 1996). Miller (1997) noted higher participation and giving rates among members of mega-church than those in traditional churches. Members also have an anonymity that traditional members do not share. With an auditorium filled with thousands of other worshipers, it is easy to be looked upon as a “passive viewer seeking an intense but private religious experience” (Robinson, 1991, as cited in Thumma, 1996, p. 89). To a certain degree, Catholic Church parishioners also have access to private religious experiences in the church with confessions and communion, but that is where the similarities end between the two groups. Catholics seek a structured format based on long historical development of forms of worship and liturgy (Avella, 2011). New adult members entering the Church are required to go through a process that entails study, prayer and rites of passage. The Catholic membership is economically, ethnically and culturally diverse, with parishes located all over the world.

Both groups view their leader as their shepherd, one who will teach the Gospel and foster their spiritual development (Gibson, 2003, p. 83). In practice, both are concerned with mortal existence and prosperity as well. It is imperative that the leader address his members separate from the general population, because it is the members who donate time, energy and money for causes the leader adopts.

Research question four analyzes whether media coverage of the scandals gave the issues salience. In terms of placement, the majority of newspaper articles were placed on the front page, indicating salience of the issue on the local and national platform. National news coverage also gives testament to the prominence of mega-church leaders and the Roman Catholic Church. The story placement is also important in determining

audience reception. According to Holtzhausen and Roberts (2009) visibility is best achieved when stories are placed in the front pages of the interior sections; therefore, the religious leaders' garnered high visibility on the front pages of papers. There was a significant difference in the amount of local newspaper front-page stories between the two groups. The Boston Diocese received considerable more attention mainly due to the *Boston Globe's* concentrated attention given to the sex abuse scandals. The salience placed on the scandal was magnified and extended because during the six-month period analyzed, several other allegations against priests were made public.

Research questions five and six identified how the individual leaders were portrayed in newspaper items, as well as the overall tone of the item. An overwhelming majority of the newspaper items featured balanced portrayals of the leaders. Haskell (2007) notes that balanced news portrayals "place events in perspective by providing relevant background," (p. 124). It is important to note, however, that the majority of letters to the editor depicted a negative image of the leaders. This suggests that the audience does not always subscribe to media portrayals. Readers described leaders as "horrendous", "monster" and "evil." One columnist wrote that Henry Lyons violated "the sacred bond" between the leader and its members, and identified him as "lying Lyons" (Singletary, 1997, p. H01).

The overall tone of the newspaper items was also overwhelmingly balanced. While the majority of the news articles shared balanced leader portrayals and overall balance, the balance in several columns and letter to the editor were unparalleled. One letter to the editor admonished the media and Jim Bakker's accusers for its coverage and attack on Bakker, while barely mentioning Bakker. Another letter to the editor berated

Priest John Geoghan and Cardinal Bernard Law while offering support and encouragement to victims.

The difference found between the mega-church leaders and the Boston Diocese can be attributed to the negative tones identified. Items concerning the Boston Diocese were very rarely identified as negative. This can be due to seriousness of the allegations and the legal aspects of the cases. Many items only offered facts about the cases and provided a chronology of events.

The last research question sought to identify media frames. Newspaper items framed as conflicts were more prevalent than the other frames. This finding suggests newspapers covered both sides of the crises. These pieces included initial stories informing readers about the crises and subsequent updates. The morality frame was noticed more in columns and letters to the editor other newspaper items. Columnists and readers expressed outrage and questioned the leaders' commitment to the ministry. Columnists also were more inclined to frame the story as attribution of responsibility. The writers also urged leaders take responsibility for their actions, consistently noted their abuse of authority, and urged leaders to seek professional help. Human interest frames were observed more in religious leaders who took advantage of innocent/unwilling victims. The alleged victims of Eddie Long and the priests of the Boston Diocese were given attention in local and national papers. Their identities and backgrounds were revealed in effort to give an emotional appeal to the reader and to highlight the cases importance. This finding proves Entman's (1993) assertion that framing makes issues more salient in text. Lastly, the economic frame appeared in cases where civil litigation was present. James Bakker, Eddie Long, Henry Lyons, and the



Boston Diocese's ministries all received coverage that explored the financial aspects of their actions.

Several scholars have noted the challenges in studying image repair and restoration, primarily because determining public opinion is challenging (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009; Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011). This is specifically the case for religious leaders' responses to crises. More than most other organizations, their image is the foundation for their multimillion-dollar institutions, and is directly connected to financial support from the congregation of followers. The statistical findings of this study serve as a base for qualitative discussion to investigate the effectiveness of the individual religious leaders' total crisis communication campaigns.

Jim Bakker consistently shifted the blame to others who he claimed "wickedly manipulated" him and "conspired to betray me into a sexual encounter." (Shepard, 1987, p. b02). While acknowledging that he did participate in the wrongful act, he never accepted full responsibility, and bolstered his image. Bakker responded swiftly and balanced communication between his congregation and the general public, but his communication strategies were limited due to ongoing legal battles. After his incarceration, Bakker demonstrated corrective action by entering rehabilitation and publishing his autobiography. The book's volume of sales signified a successful image repair campaign, but efforts to restore his image were unsuccessful.

Ted Haggard's chosen target audience served as a foreshadowing of his future endeavors. The analysis revealed he addressed his congregation only once, while targeting the general public nine times in the six-month period. After initially denying allegations and ultimately apologizing for his actions, Haggard used his crisis as a

springboard into pop culture. He agreed to appear in a cable-televised documentary about his life, conducted a media blitz of interviews on national talk shows and appeared on reality television shows, all occurring more than three years after the crisis. It is also important to note that Haggard was the only mega-church leader to not directly bolster his image. This omission may have been strategic, since he “acted out” his personality on several venues. While aggressive and highly visible, Haggard’s repair or restoration campaigns were not successful.

Eddie Long’s image restoration campaign was found to be very advocating more often than the other religious leaders, even publically vowing to fight the allegations made against him. His advocating stance was short-lived; however, when he agreed to mediation and a monetary settlement. The success of Long’s image campaign is somewhat difficult to evaluate. After receiving a modest amount of local newspaper coverage, compared the exposés of his counterparts, membership in Long’s church declined. The members who remained solidified their support of him by accepting him back as senior pastor after a brief break from the ministry. Long’s image was restored to his congregation, and his local general population, but not for a general audience. Several public figures in Atlanta bolstered Long’s image during his crisis, which reiterates Blaney et al.’s (2002) suggestion that bolstering is effective when used by others. As the most recent case analyzed, Long’s long-term success remains to be seen.

Like Jim Bakker, Henry Lyons’ crisis was two-fold: a sexual scandal and financial deception. He vehemently denied involvement and even attacked the media as a defense strategy. Attacking a third party, particularly one as powerful as media, has been shown to be an ineffective strategy (Brazeal, 2008). Public figures are dependent upon

media outlets to publicize agendas, and condemning them can lead to a negative working relationship. Due to the criminal accusations, a federal trial uncovered more details of his wrongdoings, which led to a guilty verdict. It was after his trial when Lyons began expressing mortification for his actions and consequently attempted to regain the top post in his denomination's regional and national association. His defeat on both levels proves that his image restoration was unsuccessful.

Jimmy Swaggart received more national news coverage than any other mega-church leader analyzed, perhaps due to his high profile among a general audience. This serves as testament to his widespread appeal and is also the result of a crisis he was in the process of managing. Swaggart made only two attempts using repair strategies, which possibly fueled the media fire, attesting to Seeger et al.'s (2001) assertion that silence "extends the time that a crisis will remain part of the media agenda" (p. 160). His crisis remained a focus of news stories until he gave his infamous apology. This tearful plea sustained his image with his congregation. Swaggart also had a tool that effectively factored into his restoration campaign – his family. Son Donnie and grandson Gabriel have reached new audiences as well as maintained those cultivated by their patriarch. Of the mega-church leaders analyzed, Swaggart's efforts were the most successful.

The Boston Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church faced the most widespread and potentially damaging accusations of the religious leaders. By concealing knowledge and delaying response, the church also added to the mounting quandaries it faced. The Boston Diocese's overwhelming use of mortification and its sincere attempt to correct the problem implied it took a consistent accommodating stance. Although mortification and corrective strategy are known to be successful responses when allegations are perceived

as serious, they should be enacted immediately to ensure that many abuse claims be avoided (Blaney et al., 2002). As the mega-church leaders' personal images are interwoven with their church's images, the Boston diocese shares the image of the Roman Catholic Church. This detail makes the process of restoration extremely complicated because other dioceses of the Church have been accused of or found guilty or having and proven to have participated in similar behavior. This widely practiced denomination continues to face scrutiny as more victims come forward and more efforts of corrective action are implemented.

#### Theoretical and Practical Implications

Benoit (1997b) used his analysis of actor Hugh Grant's image restoration strategies as a springboard to contrast entertainment image repair with political and corporate image repair. The current study seeks to contrast religious image repair with aforementioned image repair categories and encourage more research within individualized religious leaders and response strategies.

Religious leaders follow the trend of entertainers, politicians, and CEOs in their response to crises. Ironically, each is reluctant to admit their wrongdoings, which is necessary for a successful outcome. Religious leaders' reluctance has been identified in cases where legal liability is considered and when it is not. What ultimately sets religious leaders apart from other categories is their primary audience.

Public figures rely on a favorable public image for career advancement (Brazeal, 2008). If fans do not approve of entertainers' personal choices, they are likely to withdraw support. A CEO's image affects his company and influences support of his dominant coalition. The company's board of trustees has the responsibility to align their

organization with someone who behaves ethically, and a mishap can serve as grounds for termination. Constituents, too, hold politicians to a high standard. Elected officials campaign to earn the trust and vote of electors, and if an indiscretion becomes public knowledge, they are at the serious risk of being removed from office.

Religious leaders primary audiences are those who are endeared to them and have come to know and trust them. The leaders influence garners financial, physical and emotional support from his congregants and vice versa. This outpouring assistance is something that is not given to entertainers, CEOs, and politicians. Fans are not likely to be in the presence of their favorite entertainer every week; whereas, parishioners are able to see their leader in the flesh on a consistent basis. The board structurally decides upon CEO compensation, while parishioners offer several monetary donations to their leader. Lastly, politicians receive support from their constituents during campaigns and rarely receive the same support when they are not seeking reelection. Religious leaders seek to cultivate parishioner's support for generations. With these differences, it is imperative that strategy trends involving religious leaders be analyzed separate from other groups.

In terms of specific image restoration strategies, the majority of mega-church leaders post-crisis communication included several of Benoit's (1997a) strategies. The most prevalent were bolstering, religious leaders stressing their positive traits and denial, outright rejection of any involvement in the unsavory acts. One can argue that this combination of strategies is in sync with one another, as a leader stresses his good qualities, it is reasonable to surmise that they would not be involved in scandalous activity. While this combination is complimentary, it should not be used if mortification will be used later because it highlights hypocrisy. As Benoit (1997b) asserts, "when one

commits an offensive act, it is often best to employ mortification” (p. 263), and this advice should be the initial strategy used. The importance of time and application of repair strategies were related to the success of campaigns. Had the Boston Diocese engaged in communication earlier, their combination of corrective action and mortification would have been successful.

The contingency theory suggests there are a number of factors that affect an organization’s response to crisis. In this application of contingency theory, it was revealed that a majority of external factors were influential in each case. Previous application of contingency theory usually includes two opposing organizations: employers versus employees, customers versus businesses, groups for versus groups against legislation (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009; Shin et al., 2005). In this study, while there are two opposing parties, those parties do not engage in ongoing conflict, rather a conflict between the accused and the general audience. This research has proven that general audience response, including media attention, has the ability to move religious leaders’ stances along the continuum from advocacy to accommodation.

This study also confirms Cancel et al.’s (1997) original assertion that the excellence model is not always the best choice when practicing crisis communication. Two-way symmetrical communication was not an option for the majority of religious leaders, particularly because of heightened media attention, coupled with the fact that the opposing party is the general public. Public opinion is varied, and crafting an overarching message to reach the masses for its response is a difficult task. The leaders of this study produced responses focusing on their congregation’s needs, and not those needs of the general public.

Other situational factors not measured in this study could have affected stances and strategies, such as the reputation of the religious leaders and previous media biases. If the leader received a high volume of media attention that led to the formation of a positive or negative reputation, the leader's response to a crisis could be seen as an opportunity to change a negative reputation or crystallize positive reputation.

Public relations staffs are growing within religious organizations (Courtright & Hearit, 2002; Shin, 2008). For the religious public relations practitioner, this study offers strategies that will likely result in successful crisis communication. While the leader usually acted alone in damaging his or her image, the practitioner must be fully equipped to assess and advise during the crisis situation.

As with any crisis that emerges, it is imperative that there be an immediate response, specifically with crises where corrective action will take place. Corrective actions offer assurance that the offensive act does not recur, and the sooner it is executed the more likely the audience will positively receive it (Blaney, et al., 2002; Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). While legal advisors may strongly discourage early use of mortification, religious leaders must be warned that not doing so will place them on the media agenda for a lengthy time. The cases in this study where legal litigation was a factor resulted in guilty verdicts; only afterwards did leaders express mortification. During their period of denial, media and opinion leaders gave full attention to their trial and outcome. The practitioner must also work pre-crisis to maintain the leader's favorable reputation with the primary audience. In doing so, bolstering attempts will be effectively received.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the current study has several implications, there were limitations. For evaluative purposes, the study did not include reader responses on the Internet. Social media pages and other Web 2.0 sites have become important public relations resources (Wigley & Zhang, 2011). Eddie Long was the only leader that used his website to address accusations, likely because his was the most recent crisis. Future research should explore how websites and social media are used to address audiences as well as how the audience uses the Internet to respond to crises. Also, the sample time frame limited the analysis to six months. Since the majority of the crises were not resolved in that period, the study did not statistically determine how or if religious leaders continued to respond to the same crisis beyond the time frame. The time frame also limited the analysis of audience reception. Audience reception and media frames could have changed as more time passed and other items were placed on the media agenda.

Future research could examine how news organizations frame religious leaders for the duration of the crisis, and if audience reception changes over time. Other studies can determine if there is a difference between general audience and congregational reception.

### Conclusion

Individuals and organizations must respond to allegations that can potentially tarnish public image, whether it is prompt or tardy. The response must be clearly articulated, sincere, and firm to repair and restore images. This research has demonstrated that religious leaders' responses serve as acknowledgement of the image-challenging threats, and are the results of several internal and external factors. The intent



of this research is to broaden the study of religious crisis communication by focusing on individual religious leaders, their images, and audience reception.

Religious leaders – mega-church heads and Roman Catholic priests – are synonymous with their institutions. This delicate and direct relationship causes special considerations in their communications campaigns. When executed efficiently, image restoration strategies, stances and communication responses can emerge images stronger than before.

## APPENDIX A

## IMAGE RESTORATION STRATEGIES

<b>Strateav</b>	<b>Key Characteristic</b>	<b>Illustration</b>
<b>Denial</b>		
Simple Denial	Did Not Perform Act	Tylenol: did not poison capsule
Shift the Blame	Act Performed by Another	Tylenol: a madman poisoned capsules
<b>Evasion of Responsibility</b>		
Provocation	Responded to act of another	Firm moved because of new taxes
Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability	Executive not told meeting changed
Accident	Mishap	Tree fell on tracks causing train wreck
Good Intentions	Meant Well	Sears wants to provide good auto repair
<b>Reducing Offensiveness of Event</b>		
Bolstering	Stress good traits	Exxon's Swift and Competent Action
Minimization	Act not serious	Exxon: Few Animals Killed
Differentiation	Act less offensive than similar acts	Sears: Preventative Maintenance, not fraud
Transcendence	More important values	Helping humans justifies testing animals
Attack Accuser	Reduce credibility of accuser	Coke: Pepsi owns restaurants, competes directly with you for customers
Compensation	Reimburse victim	Disabled movie goers given free passes after denied access
<b>Corrective Action</b>	Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem	AT&T long distance upgrades
<b>Mortification</b>	Apologize for Act	AT&T apologized for service interruption

Benoit, 1997a

APPENDIX B

POTENTIAL VARIABLES FOR CONTINGENCY MODEL OF  
ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOMMODATION OF INDIVIDUAL EXTERNAL PUBLICS

EXTERNAL VARIABLES

Threats

- A. Litigation
- B. Government regulation
- C. Potentially damaging publicity
- D. Scarring of company's reputation in business community and in the general public
- E. Legitimizing activists' claims

Industry environment

- A. Changing dynamic or static
- B. # of competitors/level of competition
- C. Richness or leanness of resources in the environment

General political/social environment/external culture (level of uncertainty)

- A. Degree of political support of business
- B. Degree of social support of business

The External Public (Group, Individual, etc)

- A. Size and/or number of members
- B. Degree of source credibility/powerful members or connections
- C. Past successes or failures of groups to evoke change
- D. Amount of advocacy practiced by organization
- E. Level of commitment/involvement by members
- F. Whether the group has public relations counselors or not
- G. Public's perception of group: reasonable or radical
- H. Level of media coverage the public has received in past
- I. Whether representatives of the public know or like representatives of the organization

- J. Whether representatives of the organization know or like representatives from the public
  - K. Public's willingness to dilute its cause/request/claim
  - L. Moves and countermoves
  - M. Relative power of organization
  - N. Relative power of public
- Issue Under Question
- A. Size
  - B. Stakes
  - C. Complexity

#### INTERNAL VARIABLES

##### Corporation Characteristics

- A. Open or closed culture
- B. Dispersed widely geographically or centralized
- C. Level of technology the corporation uses to produce its product or serve/complexity of products and/or services
- D. Homogeneity or heterogeneity of employees
- E. Age of corporation/value placed on tradition
- F. Speed of growth in the knowledge level the corporation uses
- G. Economic stability of the organization
- H. Existence or nonexistence of issues management personnel or program
- I. Corporation's past experiences with conflicting outside organizations
- J. Distribution of decision-making power
- K. Formalization: Number of rules or codes defining and limiting the job descriptions of employees
- L. Stratification/hierarchy of positions
- M. Existence or influence of corporation legal department
- N. Business exposure (product mix and customer mix)
- O. Corporate Culture

##### Public Relations Department Characteristics

- A. Total number of practitioners and number with college degrees

- B. Type of past training of employees
  - C. Location of public relations department in corporate hierarchy
  - D. Representation in dominant coalition
  - E. Experience level of public relations practitioners in dealing with conflict
  - F. General communication competency of department
  - G. Autonomy of department
  - H. Physical placement of department in corporate building
  - I. Staff trained in research methods
  - J. Amount of funding available for dealing with external publics
  - K. Amount of time allowed to use dealing with external publics
  - L. Gender: percentage of upper-level staff female
  - M. Potential of department to practice various models of public relations
- Characteristics of dominant coalition (top management)
- A. Political values
  - B. Management style
  - C. General altruism level
  - D. Support and understanding of public relations
  - E. Frequency of external contact with publics
  - F. Their perception of the organization's external environment
  - G. Their calculation of potential rewards or losses of using different strategies with external publics
  - H. Degree of line-manager involvement in external affairs
- Internal Threats
- A. Economic loss
  - B. Marring of employees' or stockholders' perception of the company
  - C. Marring of the personal reputations of the company decision makers
- Individual Characteristics
- A. Training in public relations, marketing, journalism, and so on
  - B. Personal ethics
  - C. Tolerance or ability to deal with uncertainty
  - D. Comfort level with conflict or dissonance

- E. Comfort level with change
- F. Ability to recognize potential and existing problems
- G. Extent to which their perception of reality is open to innovation
- H. Extent to which they can grasp others' worldviews
- I. Personality: dogmatic or authoritarian
- J. Communication competency
- K. Cognitive complexity
- L. Predisposition toward negotiation
- M. Predisposition toward altruism
- N. How they receive, process, and use information and influence
- O. Whether they know or are familiar with external public or their representative
- P. Whether they like external public or their representative
- Q. Gender: Female vs. male

#### Relationship Characteristics

- A. Level of trust between organization and external public
- B. Dependency of parties involved
- C. Ideological barriers between the organization and public

Cancel, Cameron, Sallot and Mitrook, 1997

## APPENDIX C

## RELIGIOUS LEADER TACTICS, FACTORS AND STANCES CODE BOOK

- 1) Religious Leader Name** – Person giving message or person message about
- 1- James Bakker
  - 2- Ted Haggard
  - 3- Eddie Long
  - 4- Henry Lyons
  - 5- Jimmy Swaggart
  - 6- Boston Archdiocese
- 2) Date** – date message posted, aired, published
- |                           |                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 – 24 hours after        | 5- 8-13 days after          |
| 2- 48 hours after         | 6- 2 weeks after            |
| 3- 72 hours after         | 7- 3-6 weeks after          |
| 4- 73 hours- 1 week after | 8 – more than 6 weeks after |
- 3) Indicate item type** –
- 1- press conference statement- prepared statement given at press conference
  - 2- sermon – speech given inside church/institution to present audience(congregation)
  - 3 – media interview
    - 3.1 – newspaper – answers to questions published by newspaper
      - 3.11 – national – newspaper with national circulation
      - 3.12– local- newspaper with circulation limited to area near scandal
    - 3.2 – television- answers to questions aired on television
      - 3.21 – national – major television network
      - 3.22 – local – television station serving local area only
    - 3.3 – radio – answers to questions aired on radio
      - 3.31 – national
      - 3.32 - local
  - 4 – news release- statement released by religious leader
  - 5 – website message – message written by religious leader, posted on institution or religious leader webpage
  - 6- Legal proceedings
- 4)If item is newspaper article, indicate placement**
- 0- Undetermined
  - 1- Front page
  - 2- Front Section (Section A)
  - 3 – Local/Metro Section
- 5) Is leader primary speaker?** – Is the leader (the accused) is spokesperson or is someone speaking on behalf of the religious leader
- 1- yes

2- no

**6) Indicate primary audience** – to whom religious leader directly sends message

- 1- public officials – elected officials, law enforcement
- 2- general audience – no audience is specified
- 3- congregation – religious leader's own church audience
- 4 - other

**7. Image repair strategy and usage** – Indicate which image repair strategy was used

- 1- denial – religious leader states that he did not perform the act
  - shifting the blame – religious leader states the act was performed by someone other than himself
2. Evasion of responsibility
  - provocation- religious leader states he was responding to the act or action of someone other than himself
  - defeasibility – religious leader states that he was not informed that the act was immoral
  - accident- religious leader states that the act was unintentional
  - good intentions – religious leader states that he meant well when performing the act
3. Reducing offensiveness of event
  - bolstering – religious leaders states his good/positive traits
  - minimization – religious leader contends that the act was not serious
  - differentiation – religious leader contends the act was less offensive than others believe
  - transcendence – religious leader contends that there are more important considerations that deserve focus
  - attack accuser – religious leader reduces credibility of the accuser
  - compensation – religious leader states he will reimburse victim or give them monetary settlement or item states that religious leader will reimburse victim or give he or she monetary settlement
4. Corrective action – religious leaders states he sill plan to solve or prevent the problem from occurring again
5. Mortification – religious leader apologizes for act and asks for forgiveness
6. unknown- unclear, cannot be determined

**Indicate external Variables**

Threats

**8- Litigation** – is religious leader facing lawsuits, arrest or jail time

- 1- yes
- 2 – no



**9- Government regulation** – is religious leader facing reprimand or punishment from denomination or assembly?

1- yes

2- no

**10- Potentially damaging publicity**

1-yes

2- no

**11- Scarring of company's reputation in business community and in the general public**

1 – yes

2- no

**12- Legitimizing activists' claims-** religious leader acknowledges the alleged victims claims

1- yes

2-no

**13) Degree of political support of business** – religious leader's support from public officials

1 – strong support (religious leader active in political issues, ie. Supports/endorsees candidates, hosts fundraisers, participates in rallies, protests)

2- moderate support (religious leader moderately active in political issues, ie, supports political process)

3- no support – no evidence of political support

**14) Degree of social support of business** – religious leader's support of individuals/groups excluding congregations and public officials

1- Strong support

2- moderate support

3 – no support

**15) Stance** – does the speaker seem to accommodate his public or serve as an advocate for himself

1- Very accommodating

2- Accommodating

3- Neutral

4- Advocating

5 - Very advocating

6- Unclear

## APPENDIX D

## EVALUATIVE CODESHEET

(FOR USE ON EDITORIALS AND COLUMNS)

**1) Religious Leader Name**

- 1- James Bakker
- 2- Ted Haggard
- 3- Eddie Long
- 4- Henry Lyons
- 5- Jimmy Swaggart
- 6- Boston Archdiocese

**2) Date -**

- |                           |                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 – 24 hours after        | 5- 8-13 days after          |
| 2- 48 hours after         | 6- 2 weeks after            |
| 3- 72 hours after         | 7- 3-6 weeks after          |
| 4- 73 hours- 1 week after | 8 – more than 6 weeks after |

**3) Item type –**

- 1- Column
- 2- news article
- 3- letter to editor
- 4- online comment
- 5- editorial

**4) If item is newspaper article, indicate placement**

- 0- Undetermined
- 1- Front page
- 2- Front Section (Section A)
- 3 – Local/Metro Section

**5) Local or National Newspaper**

- 1- National
- 2- Local

**6) Select the dominant news frame present in the piece -**

- 1. Human interest frame: Places a human face or an emotional representation of a story.
- 2. Conflict frame: Used to reflect conflicts between individuals, groups and organizations.
- 3. Morality frame: Puts the event in context of morals, social and religious tenets.
- 4. Economic frame: Reports an event in relation to the consequences it will have economically on an individual or organizational level.

5. Attribution of responsibility frame: Attributes responsibility of an event to an individual, group, organization or country.

**7. Indicate whether item casts the mega-church leader/Boston diocese in an overall positive, negative, or balanced light**

- 1- positive
- 2- negative
- 3 – balanced

**8. Is the overall tone of the story dominantly:**

- 1. Positive tone
- 2. Negative tone
- 3. Neutral tone

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