

THE REVEREND, THE TERRORIST, AND A WEB OF RUMORS:  
THE IMAGE REPAIR DISCOURSE OF BARACK OBAMA

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the [thesis or dissertation] entitled

THE REVEREND, THE TERRORIST, AND A WEB OF RUMORS:  
THE IMAGE REPAIR DISCOURSE OF BARACK OBAMA

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ABSTRACT

During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama faced numerous attacks on his character, and on his associations. He was attacked most prominently for his associations with Reverend Jeremiah Wright and William Ayers. Obama's faith, citizenship, and patriotism were also challenged. This study employs image repair theory to analyze Obama's image repair discourse in a variety of messages. Notably, Obama's internet-based image repair discourse in response to faith, citizenship, and patriotism attacks received unique analysis in this study. Through rhetorical analysis, this study found that Obama used the strategies of simple denial, shifting the blame, defeasibility, bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser, and corrective action to respond to the Wright attacks. To respond to the Ayers attacks, Obama used simple denial, defeasibility, bolstering, differentiation, transcendence, and attack accuser. Obama used simple denial, accident, bolstering, attack accuser, differentiation, minimization, and transcendence in his various internet defenses. An important theoretical contribution of this study is the idea that *kairos*, or opportune timing of messages with respect to the rhetorical situation, should be an important consideration in the analysis *apologia*. Generally, Obama's image repair efforts were found to be *kairotically* effective. Assessment of overall effectiveness was confirmed using the criteria of media coverage, surveys, and internal consistency.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

“Not God bless America; God damn, America!”

--Rev. Jeremiah Wright

“I don’t regret setting bombs. I feel we didn’t do enough.”

--Bill Ayers

Portions, if not the whole, of these quotes became sound bytes in the 2008 presidential campaign season. Each of these quotes originated with associates or alleged associates of Obama, and each quote served as ammunition for a range of character attacks from Obama’s political rivals. Obama also faced attacks from opposition web sites and e-mails that disseminated often blatantly false information about Obama’s character and policy stances. These attacks first threatened his candidacy in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary contests and later threatened his election during the general campaign. Obama’s responses to these attacks are the focus of this dissertation.

This chapter will establish the tradition and importance of the continued examination of the *kategoria* (persuasive attacks) against and *apologia* (speeches of self-defense) of U.S. presidents and presidential candidates. Additionally, this chapter will illustrate the historic significance of the 2008 presidential primary and general campaigns and elections, focusing on the historic candidacy of Barack Obama. Having established the importance of studying image repair and the significance of Obama’s candidacy, I

will then justify investigating the nature of the attacks on Obama, his corresponding image repair discourse, the role of *kairos*, and the role of the Internet in each part of these speech-sets.

### The Tradition and Continuing Importance of Presidential *Apologia*

The inflammatory remarks that open this chapter serve as only a small sample of the subject matter of the *kategoria* leveled against Barack Obama during his campaign for the United States presidency. Other attacks included questioning Obama's religious affiliations, his patriotism, and even the validity of his citizenship. Still, Obama was by no means the first presidential candidate to undergo attacks on his character. Thomas Jefferson's political opponents claimed the Bible would be burned and that men's wives and daughters would be forced into prostitution (Jamieson, 1992). Andrew Jackson's opponents attacked his mother, and, lest we remember Lincoln only as "Honest Abe," his opponents referred to him as a "filthy story teller," a "liar," and a "perjurer" (Jamieson, 1992, p. 43). In more recent decades, George McGovern and John Kerry, decorated combat veterans who ran as their party's nominees for president, were attacked, respectively, as "unpatriotic" and "traitor" (Kauffman, 2008).

The corresponding responses to such attacks, *apologia*, are as old as the tradition of attacking presidential candidates' character. Further, there is an established genre of rhetorical criticism that analyzes the discourse of attacks and corresponding *apologia* (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Within that genre, critics have employed a variety of approaches to the study of *apologia*. One of the most tested methods of analysis has been the application of Benoit's (1995a) Theory of Image Restoration (or Repair). Benoit (1995a) approached the analysis of defensive discourse with two theoretical assumptions:

(1) Communication is a goal-directed endeavor, and (2), one of the main goals of communication is to maintain a positive image.

The symbol of the United States presidency is a powerful icon. However, as disgraced and unpopular presidents have learned in the past, the symbol of the presidency, alone, is not enough to govern. The president must also have the support of citizens and allies in the other branches of government, and a damaged image can erode this support. Thus, past presidents and presidential candidates have sought to repair their tarnished images.

Numerous studies have analyzed the *apologia* of American presidents including Eisenhower (Haapanen, 1988; Stein, 2005), Kennedy (Henry, 1988), Nixon (Benoit, 1982, 1995a; Blair, 1984; Harrell, Ware, & Linkugel, 1975; Katula, 1975; Ryan, 1988; Smith, 1988), Ford (Brock, 1988; Gold, 1978), Carter (Gold, 1978), Reagan (Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991; Friedenber, 1988; Heisey, 1988), Clinton (Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Koesten & Rowland, 2004; Kramer & Olson, 2002; Simons, 2000), and George W. Bush (Benoit, 2006a; Benoit, 2006b; Liu, 2007). To a lesser degree, the research literature also includes investigations of defensive discourse during the candidacies of presidential and vice presidential hopefuls (Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Henry, 1988; Jensen, 1988; McGuckin, 1968; Rosenfield; Ryan, 1988).

### The 2008 Presidential Campaigns

The 2008 primary and general campaigns for the United States presidency were historically significant for a number of reasons. For the first time since 1952, neither major party's candidate was a sitting president or vice president, guaranteeing from the outset that there would be hotly contested primaries in both the Democratic and



Republican parties. Further, the lack of a true incumbent meant that candidates would be less well known to voters in 2008, possibly making the campaign messages even more important than usual. Not only were the candidates who emerged from the primaries and nominating conventions less well known, but they were more diverse than ever before in American history. Barack Obama became the first African American to serve as the presidential candidate for a major political party. Sarah Palin was the first female vice presidential candidate ever to appear on the Republican vice presidential (or presidential) ticket and the first woman to appear at the top of either party's ticket since Geraldine Ferraro served as the Democratic vice presidential nominee nearly two and a half decades earlier. Further, at age 72, John McCain would have been the oldest president ever inaugurated.

#### Barack Obama's Campaign for the Presidency

As mentioned above, previous presidential *apologia* research has examined sitting presidents as well as candidates. Some of these studies of presidential apologetic discourse have responded to attacks on religious affiliation or practices (Henry, 1988; Jensen, 1988). Further, non-political research has examined issues of race that lead to speeches of self-defense by organizations (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). However, no existing image repair study analyzes a single political candidate or organizational figure that faced attacks in all of these contexts (candidacy status, race-based, religious). The analysis of Obama's discourse allows for such a study.

Aside from the unique context of the attacks, for several of the discursive exchanges between Obama and his adversaries, the channel of the speech-sets was also unique. Political *kategoria* or attacks have previously been identified in news coverage,

press conferences, television talk shows, and speeches by political rivals. Similarly, political *apologia* discourse has previously been identified in speeches, news reports, interviews, and press conferences. However, no previous studies have examined internet-based political *kategoria* and *apologia*. In the 2008 presidential campaign, the Internet served as a major channel for the exchange of attack and defense. *Kategoria* flourished in the Internet as political bloggers from across the ideological spectrum attacked candidates on the left and right throughout the primary and general campaign seasons. Rumors about candidates, especially Barack Obama, spread like wildfire through electronic mail (e-mail) campaigns (Helman, 2008). Still, the Internet served as a channel for defensive discourse as well (Helman, 2008).

Given the existence of an established genre and the long list of studies of political *apologia*, one might think that *apologia* is rather common in political campaigns. However, defensive discourse is actually rather rare among the other functions of political messages. The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (e.g., Benoit, 1999, 2007) explains that candidates have three options in their campaign messages. They may acclaim their own desirable features as candidates; they may attack the undesirable features of their opponents; or they may defend themselves against the attacks of their opponents. Research has shown that, regardless of message form, since at least 1952, candidates have most frequently acclaimed and least frequently defended (Benoit et al., 2007). Benoit and Stein (2005) explained that defenses are rare because of three inherent drawbacks:

First, attacks typically occur where the target is weakest, so responding to an attack tends to take a candidate “off message” to deal with an issue on which the

opponent may have an advantage. Second, defenses by definition are reactive rather than proactive, and could make a defender appear weak. Third, one cannot defend against an attack without identifying it. This means a defense could inadvertently remind or inform the audience of a potential weakness they had forgotten or had never heard of. (p. 206)

However, strategists in the Obama campaign challenged these drawbacks, at least in the case of Internet-based discourse, “betting that the political benefit of debunking damaging rumors outweighs the risk of making them more visible (Helman, 2008, ¶ 1).” A spokesperson for the Obama campaign, Tommy Vietor, even went as far as to challenge that defenses were reactive: “The Obama campaign isn’t going to let dishonest smears spread across the Internet unanswered. It’s not enough to just know the truth. We have to be proactive and fight back” (Helman, 2008, ¶ 3). Even though to “fight back” certainly seems to suggest a reaction (with all due respect to Mr. Vietor), the campaign’s aggressiveness on defense is noted, nevertheless.

Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, also commented on the Obama campaign’s defiance of conventional wisdom on defenses:

It's risky in a way to acknowledge these smears, because you could give more power to them. But Obama is saying, in the risk-reward calculation, it's better that people have all this information and be able to assess it themselves than to have it hidden in the shadows. (Helman, 2008, ¶ 6)

Thus, the substantially greater number of defensive texts from Barack Obama, and the break with the conventional wisdom that defenses should be used sparingly, further add to the case for examining his unique cases of image repair discourse.

## *Kairos* in Campaign '08

“The timing was perfect.” “It was the right place at the right time.” “This is your lucky day.” People often use these phrases to suggest that the success of an event, a product or a person was a result of timeliness. Conversely, people turn these phrases when an untimely decision has been made: “The timing just wasn’t right.” “It was the wrong place at the wrong time.” “It just wasn’t your day.” In some situations, these phrases may seem to suggest that timing is somewhat a matter of luck or coincidence. However, it is often the case that ideal timing, or ceasing the opportune moment, is a well-calculated matter. And, it is just as true that ill-timed episodes are often the result of miscalculations in timing. Classical rhetoricians referred to the opportune moment or ideal timing as *kairos*.

Timing is no less important in the case of political campaigns. From a politician’s earliest stages in her or his political career to the announcement of candidacy for the presidency to the day of the election, timing plays a crucial role in all of these stages. Often, damaging political attacks can be leveled at a time that is ideal for the attacker and potentially disastrous for the target of the attack. Political pundits have dubbed attacks that come in the weeks immediately before an election the “October surprise.” The implication is that if the attack had come earlier in a campaign, the target of the attack might have had time to respond to the *kategoria* and diffuse the situation. Conversely, conventional wisdom suggests that attacks that come too close to an election may cause irreversible damage to a candidate’s image. The comments by Obama staff in the previous section testify to the campaign’s belief in the vital nature of responding to

attacks but say less about the timing of a response. However, I pose that the effectiveness of attacks and defenses is moderated by the rhetors' effective use of *kairos*.

#### Purpose of and Justification for the Dissertation

The candidacy of Barack Obama for the presidency of the United States provides examples of attack and defense unique among other studies of apologetic discourse. Given the unique nature of the attacks against Obama (religious *and* race-based attacks), the unusually frequent use of defenses by the Obama campaign, and the previously unexamined channels of Internet-based speech-sets, his defensive discourse merits analysis. Further, Obama's place in history as the first major-party U.S. presidential candidate of African ancestry also encourages scrutiny of his discourse. Plus, the examination of political attacks and defenses based on race and religion is of particular social importance in a nation that claims to protect its citizens (and presumably its political candidates) from discrimination based on both criteria.

In this dissertation, I will use Benoit's (1995a) theory of image repair to analyze the *kategoria* and *apologia* in relation to (1) the comments by Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Obama's subsequent speeches on race, (2) Obama's relationship to William Ayers, and (3) rumors dispersed and responded to largely through the Internet such as lies about Obama's citizenship, faith, and family.

The name Jeremiah Wright was relatively unknown outside of the reverend's congregation on Chicago's Southside until video recordings of one of his fiery sermons exploded onto the airwaves early in 2008. The controversy was so widespread and detrimental to Obama's character that Obama's associations with his pastor were credited with producing narrow primary election losses in states like Indiana. In that state, "46

percent called Obama's former minister an important factor in their vote, and they overwhelmingly favored Clinton, by 70-30 percent” (Langer, 2007, ¶ 8). Further remarks and appearances by Wright eventually led Obama to give a major speech on race, publicly disavow Wright, and ultimately resign his longtime membership in Wright’s church (Powell, 2008). Given the prominence of these attacks, the threat they posed to Obama’s candidacy, and the unique nature (based on race), the Wright controversy certainly warrants examination.

Attacks on the basis of the relationship between William Ayers and Barack Obama had been circulating among conservative pundits and blogs for months, but the issue escalated in prominence in early October 2008, when Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin began publicly accusing Obama of “palling around with terrorists” (Griffin & Johnston, 2008; Daniel, 2008). The issue first appeared in polling following the October 15, 2008 presidential debate between John McCain and Barack Obama, when a CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll asked the question, “How much does Barack Obama's connection with William Ayers matter to you: a great deal, somewhat, not much or not at all?” Eleven percent responded “not much,” while 14% responded “somewhat,” and 23% responded “a great deal” (pollingreport.com, 2008, ¶ 10). A week later, a Newsweek poll conducted October 22-23 found that 43% of surveyed registered voters believed that Obama's association with Ayers raised serious enough doubts about the senator’s character to prove either a minor or major concern in deciding whether or not to vote for Obama (pollingreport.com, 2008). Further, the mere association of Ayers and Obama by McCain and Palin in their respective debate appearances suggests that the issue was of significant prominence in the campaign. Plus, while Obama would not have

been the first candidate to be attacked on his policies of national defense (or even the first to be soft on terrorism), he certainly is the first presidential candidate to be accused of terrorist associations; thus again, the unique subject of these attacks and defenses merits scholarly attention.

Finally, as with the discourse related to the Jeremiah Wright and William Ayers controversies, the substance of the internet-based attacks on Obama's character was significant enough to merit scholarly attention. Notably, one of the most common rumors spread through the internet was that Obama was a Muslim (Obama identifies himself as a Christian). This rumor translated into an enduring belief for significant numbers of voters, 12% believed that Obama was a Muslim as late in the campaign as July, 2008 (Dimock, 2008). According to findings by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, even 12% of Democrats believed that Obama was a Muslim, and the same study also found that those Democrats were "significantly less likely to support Obama" (Dimock, 2008, ¶ 1). Specifically, 90% of Democrats who believed Obama to be a Christian intended to vote for eventual president; conversely, support for Obama registered at only 62% among Democrats who either believed Obama was a Muslim or were unsure because they had heard different things (Dimock, 2008).

In addition to evidence for the significance of the substance and effect of internet attacks, it is important to look at these internet-based attacks simply because this medium of political *apologia* has not previously been examined. The internet presents unique situations for both attacks and defenses. First of all, internet audiences are more fractured than audiences for attacks and defenses exchanged via televised or published speeches. Further, the seemingly unlimited number of venues for attacks on the internet make it

more difficult to gauge the number of attacks. Plus, the ability of individual citizens to forward e-mails and links to web sites containing character attacks makes it nearly impossible to measure the size of the audience reached and consequently the extent of the damage done to one's image. Aside from audience, research suggests that the internet's increased level of interactivity also makes it different from traditional media (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Johnson, Bruner, & Kumar, 2006).

Thus, study of the discursive attacks and defenses regarding Obama's association with William Ayers and Jeremiah Wright is justified because of their significance and prominence. The internet-based attacks and defenses on the subjects of Obama's citizenship, faith, and family are also worthy of study because of their significance. Study of the internet rumors is further justified by the unique nature of internet discourse and the fact that internet based *kategoria* and *apologia* have not previously been studied.

For each of set of attacks and defenses, I will identify and analyze the strategies used by Obama. I will also analyze and provide evidence for the effectiveness of these strategies. Further, I will analyze the element of *kairos* in each speech-set. Finally, I will analyze the unique aspects of Internet-based attacks and image repair discourse.

In the next chapter of this dissertation I review the existing literature on *apologia* and describe previous applications of Benoit's theory of image repair in the contexts of politics, organizations, and celebrities. I then discuss the rhetorical concept of *kairos* and provide examples of its interpretation and application in both classical and contemporary rhetoric. I conclude Chapter two by proposing research questions for investigation in this dissertation. In Chapter three, I will explain Benoit's (1995a) theory of image repair and detail how that theory will be used to analyze the discourse of Barack Obama. I also



describe the manner in which I will analyze the role of *kairos* in Obama's image repair discourse. I conclude Chapter three by describing the texts that I will examine in my analysis. In Chapters four, five, and six, I will provide analysis of the attacks and image repair strategies related to various controversies that arose during Obama's campaigns for the Democratic nomination and the presidency. Each of these chapters will also provide an assessment of the effectiveness of these strategies based on textual evidence as well as evidence from external sources such as opinion polling, news media coverage, and election outcomes. These chapters will also discuss how use of *kairos* influenced the effectiveness of the chosen strategies.

Specifically, chapter four will discuss speech-sets related to comments by Barack Obama's former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Chapter five will analyze discourse about former Weather Underground member and confessed domestic terrorist, William Ayers. Chapter six will examine Internet-based attacks and image repair discourse on a variety of topics. In this chapter, I will also investigate differences between communication channels such as e-mail and the world wide web and traditional channels of political attack and defense. In doing so, I will provide comparisons to Internet-based image repair discourse and the discourse analyzed in preceding chapters. Chapter seven will provide comparisons of all of the speech-sets and their corresponding strategies, implications for Internet-based image repair discourse, and discussion of the role of *kairos* in image repair discourse. Finally, I will conclude chapter seven by discussing theoretical contributions of the dissertation, limitations of the dissertation, and directions for future research.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Literature

The field of image repair discourse, or, as its predecessor is known, *apologia*, has its roots in classical Greek rhetoric, but has since been adapted by sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and scholars of public relations and communication (see below for examples). This approach has been employed to analyze reactions to crises of international relations, organizational image, political image, and celebrity image. Of these, organizational and political *apologia* studies are the most prevalent in the research literature (as will be shown). Within the realm of political *apologia*, studies of presidential *apologia* have been the most frequent, though studies of Congressional and vice presidential *apologia* are also represented. Studies of the image repair efforts of presidential *candidates* are significantly underrepresented. In the turbulent atmosphere of attack politics, the defenses a candidate makes against attacks can be critical to the nominee's success or failure in November. Thus, the current study examines the image repair discourse of the 2008 Democratic Presidential nominee, Barack Obama.

I begin by reviewing image repair theory's foundations in *apologia*, demonstrating how early conceptualizations of *apologia* in the fields of psychology, sociology, and rhetoric evolved into Benoit's theory of image repair discourse. I will then provide a review of previous research in *apologia* and image repair, beginning with studies of corporate and celebrity image repair followed by a review of previous studies

of political image repair, the focus of this investigation. My reviews of political image repair research will begin with a review of the presidential studies and will conclude with a review of the political *apologia* studies that examined non-presidential rhetoric.

### *Apologia*

One might theorize that speeches of *apologia* or self-defense have existed since humans first realized they had reputations that were subject to shine and tarnish. However, only in the last century have scholars sought to develop typologies and classifications to better understand the different ways in which humans seek to repair, enhance, or maintain their images. Scott and Lyman (1968), Burke (1970), and Ware and Linkugel (1973), were among the first to present typologies of *apologia*. More recent theories of *apologia* evolved from the work of these scholars.

Scott and Lyman (1968) worked from a sociological perspective and did not use the term *apologia*. They instead preferred the term “account,” which they defined as “a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior” (p. 46). They distinguished between two types of accounts, excuses and justifications. Excuses do not accept full responsibility; however, those who use excuses do acknowledge “that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate” (p. 47). According to Scott and Lyman, there are four different types of excuses: “appeals to accidents, appeals to defeasibility, appeals to biological drives, and scapegoating” (p. 47). Justifications are accounts that acknowledge responsibility for an act but challenge or downplay the act’s negativity. Scott and Lyman also identified four justification strategies, which they borrow from “techniques of neutralization identified by Sykes and Matza in 1957: “denial

of injury, denial of victim,' 'condemnation of condemners,' and 'appeal to loyalties" (p. 51).

Robert Abelson (1959), also working from a social scientific perspective, proposed four "modes of resolution," denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (p. 344). Abelson intended these strategies not as strategies for public apology but rather as coping mechanisms for dealing with cognitive dissonance, or in his words, "belief dilemmas" (p. 343). Ware and Linkugel (1973) saw the potential for applying these modes of resolution to public image and adapted Abelson's four modes as "factors of verbal self-defense" (p. 275).

Working from Abelson's modes, Ware and Linkugel (1973) identified four postures or subgenres of self-defense: absolution, vindication, explanation, and justification. The absolute speech of self-defense "is one in which the speaker seeks acquittal" (p. 282). The speech of absolution incorporates Abelson's strategies of denial and differentiation, seeking to demonstrate that the speaker is not at all responsible for the act of which she or he has been accused. Ware and Linkugel define the vindicative speech as one that claims innocence as the absolution speech does but also integrates transcendence to claim "greater worth as a human being relative to the worth of his [sic] accusers" (1973, p. 283). The explanative defense combines bolstering and differentiation, the belief being "that if the audience understands his motives, actions, beliefs, or whatever, they will be unable to condemn him [sic]" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 283). Their fourth posture, justification, combines bolstering and transcendence and "asks not only for understanding, but also for approval" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 283).

Although he did not use the term *apologia*, Kenneth Burke added to the available *apologia* strategies the techniques of victimage and mortification. In *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1961), Burke explained that humans are unable to faithfully abide by the laws that they set for themselves or by the laws that are set for them by social and religious beliefs. This inability to “keep commandments” (and not just religious commandments) leads to guilt, which produces the need for redemption (p. 4). To redeem themselves and thus alleviate their guilt, people can either claim that they are victims (victimage) of circumstances or other actors, or they can admit their wrong-doing and ask for forgiveness (mortification).

Although these early writings provided the foundation for contemporary analysis of *apologia* and image repair discourse, these studies are by no means the limit of attempts to group and classify self-defense strategies. More recent theoretical and applied research in *apologia* has led to the identification of additional apologetic situations. In the next section, I will show how *apologia* theory has evolved from the versions forwarded by Scott and Lyman, Ware and Linkugel, and Burke.

#### Subgenres of *Apologia*

Dionisopolous and Vibbert (1988), in their analysis of Mobil Oil’s responses to accusations of creative bookkeeping by CBS news, were the first to apply *apologia* to corporate contexts. Although the authors did not name specific rhetorical strategies, their research introduced scholars to the idea of using *apologia* in corporate contexts. Further, Dionisopolous and Vibbert (1988) expanded *apologia* theory by suggesting that speech sets may not be limited to simply *kategoria* and *apologia*. Instead, they suggested that on

occasion, speech sets may also include “an apology to the apology-turned-accusation” (Dionisopolous & Vibbert, 1988, p. 248).

Downey (1993) did not provide a specific typology of rhetorical strategies. Instead, in her review of the evolution of this genre, she identified distinct historical periods of *apologia*: classical, medieval, modern (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), and contemporary (the current period). Within the contemporary period, Downey identified a distinct shift in the rhetorical genre of *apologia*. Drawing a line between *apologia* before and after 1960, she explained that “Three interdependent forces, resulting from momentous cultural events in the 1960s and 1970s, radically reshaped the nature of *apologia*” (p. 55). Specifically, Downey suggested that distrust of government, alienated citizens, and the rise of the news media significantly altered *apologia*. She argued that these forces caused *apologia* to evolve into an “*asituational response*” [emphasis original], in which public figures are constantly under suspicion and are constantly engaged in some form of *apologia*. Consequently, “That accusation precedes *apologia* could no longer be presumed in this period because its threat was everpresent” (p. 56). Thus, in the current investigation, I will identify specific attacks when they preceded Obama’s image repair discourse; however, I will also look for examples of preemptive *apologia*--that is, *apologia* that does not necessarily result from a specific or high-profile *kategoria*.

Although Downey (1993) did not provide a specific typology of rhetorical strategies as others had done, she instead concluded from her review that there were five subgenres or goals of *apologia*: self-exoneration, self-absolution, self-sacrifice, self-service, and self-deception. Although she acknowledged that each subgenre was present

in each period, Downey observed that each of her identified historical periods characteristically favored some goals of *apologia* over others. These historical trends are interesting. Still, it seems that each of Downey's subgenres could be collapsed into the more inclusive assumptions undergirding Benoit's (1995a) subsequent theory of image restoration: (1) that human communication is goal-driven and (2) that maintaining a positive reputation is an important goal (see next section). Downey implicitly seems to share Benoit's first assumption, and her goals of absolution just seem to be more specific incarnations of maintaining a positive image.

Following in the genre of corporate *apologia* begun by Dionisopolous and Vibbert, Hearit (1995) interpreted *kategoria* targeted at organizations as attacks on the institutions' social legitimacy, specifically, accusations of incompetence or social irresponsibility. Therefore, for Hearit (1995) *apologia* "is a response to a social legitimization crisis in which an organization seeks to justify its behavior by presenting a compelling, counter account of its actions" (p. 3). Hearit (1994) theorized that organizations had two main choices: taking some or all of the responsibility for a crisis or, through silence, denying the existence of the crisis. Hearit (1994) found that organizations go through three phases of crisis communication in which they (1) use persuasive accounts to redefine the terms of the alleged wrongdoing, (2) offer a statement of regret (not necessarily an admission of guilt), and (3) employ dissociation to "distance themselves from the wrongdoing" (p. 119). The dissociation can be opinion/knowledge dissociation, individual/group dissociation, or act/essence dissociation (Hearit, 1994, 2006). These dissociations serve as the basis for five postures used by corporate apologists: denial, counterattack, differentiation, apology, and legal (Hearit, 2001).

Further developing the corporate *apologia* work of Hearit, Benoit, and others, Coombs (1999, 2006) theorized that the degree to which organizations claim responsibility for crises would influence the strategies that the organizations would employ. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides lists of crisis types and resulting levels of acceptance, and corresponding strategies for the levels of acceptance. When organizations have a very high level of acceptance for a crisis, they will offer a full apology; when there is high acceptance, organizations will use corrective action; when organizations offer mild acceptance of responsibility, they will use the strategies of ingratiation, justification, and excuse; and when organizations accept no responsibility, they will deny and attack their accusers (Coombs, 2006).

Koesten and Rowland (2004) offered another subgenre of *apologia*, the rhetoric of atonement. Koesten and Rowland (2004) explained that the public nature of the apology, combined with the request for forgiveness and the pledge to do better are all uniquely characteristic of atonement. Further, a rhetor can engage in atonement on behalf of her or himself or on behalf of a larger group such as an organization or a nation. Atonement involves combining an admission of guilt and request for forgiveness with “appropriate charitable actions” (Koesten & Rowland, 2004, p. 74). Thus, atonement appears to combine the strategy of mortification (Burke, 1961; Benoit, 1995a) with the strategy of corrective action (Benoit, 1995a). However, the authors attempted to differentiate atonement rhetoric as a subgenre of *apologia* that differed from image repair strategies identified by Benoit and others: “...in each case [of *apologia* theory] the focus has been on denial, deflection, or justification to restore a damaged image, as opposed to accepting responsibility as a sinner” (Koesten & Rowland, 2004, p. 70). Although



Benoit's (1995a) definition may not focus on accepting responsibility as "a sinner," his identified strategy of mortification is based on Burke's belief that humans wish to alleviate themselves from guilt (the same Burkean writings on which Koesten and Rowland base their concept of atonement). Thus, although it may be valuable to designate *apologia* that accepts responsibility as a genre separate from other *apologia*, it is inaccurate for the authors to argue that other scholars have not recognized accepting responsibility as a strategy.

Villadsen (2008) argued that when a rhetor seeks atonement on behalf of others, this is a different function of *apologia* than that of personal apologies. Villadsen (2008) labels these speeches "official apologies" (p. 30). She prefers this label for two reasons. First, official apologies differentiates speeches on behalf of others from individual atonements. Second, Villadsen's label acknowledges the rigid secularism of some nations and avoids the religious connotations of atonement.

Dionisopolous and Vibbert, Downey, Hearit, Coombs, Koesten and Rowland, and Villadsen each provide valuable additions to our theoretical understanding of *apologia*. However, in each case, the subgenres provide situational applications of *apologia* (e.g., corporate contexts, crisis communication, atonement rhetoric) rather than strategies applicable to all contexts of *apologia* discourses. To better understand the available means of image repair available to a rhetor, I return to Benoit (1995a), who developed his theory from early studies of *apologia* (e.g., Burke, Ware & Linkugel).

#### Benoit's Theory of Image Repair

This study employs Benoit's (1995a) Theory of Image Restoration. The word "restoration" was later changed to the word "repair" to acknowledge that one's image

may not be entirely restored to its pre-damage state (Benoit, 2000). Benoit's image repair theory was selected because it integrates and builds upon some of the previous typologies listed above. Further, Benoit's theory was selected because it reflects a more complete theory that has been applied in a variety of contexts, including the present context of political discourse. As Hearit (2006) declared (speaking of Benoit's research in image repair) "it is no understatement to say that it has become the definitive work on the strategies used by apologists" (p. 83).

The theory of image repair begins with two assumptions: (1) that communication is motivated by making and attaining goals, and (2) that one of the central goals of human communication is to maintain a positive reputation (Benoit, 1995a). In addition, to these assumptions, Benoit identifies two elements that are necessary for an attack to have been sustained on one's image. First, there must be an undesirable act. Second, the individual whose reputation is at stake must be responsible for that undesirable act (Benoit, 1995a).

Only if both of these conditions are believed to be true by the relevant audience is the actor's reputation at risk (and only if the actor perceives that the salient audience believes these two conditions are true is the actor likely to employ image restoration discourse). (Benoit, 1995a, pp. 71-72)

The perceptions of the relevant audience are key to these points. First of all, the rhetor must perceive that a given audience had a somewhat favorable perception of the rhetor in the first place. Otherwise, there would not be a reputation to repair. Second, the subject of the attack must perceive that the audience's opinion of the rhetor has eroded (Benoit, 1995a). In other words, the rhetor must believe that her or his image has been damaged in order to engage in image repair discourse.

Benoit identifies two types of audiences whom the rhetor must address in his or her discourse; an external and an internal (Benoit, 1995a). The external audience can consist of the accuser, observers of the offense, and related third parties (such as political constituents or customers). Image repair discourse must consider all of these. The idea of the internal audience recognizes that the rhetor may be ashamed or embarrassed of her or his actions. Thus, the discourse must also meet a rhetor's expectations for him or herself.

Given these assumptions and components of image repair discourse, and building upon the classifications of previous *apologia* scholars (see above), Benoit (1995a) identifies five main strategies: denial, evading of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. Denial describes arguments that suggest the accused is not to blame. Evading responsibility consists of arguing that the accused did not willingly or intentionally commit the undesirable action(s). When rhetors attempt to reduce the offensiveness of an event, they attempt to distract audiences or weaken the significance of the wrong-doing they have been accused of. Corrective action involves commitments to put right what has gone wrong to the extent that is possible. Finally mortification is an admission of guilt and a request for forgiveness (Benoit, 1995a).

Complementing these five general image repair strategies, Benoit (1995a) identifies more specific variations on denial, evading responsibility, and reducing the offensiveness. Within denial, one can engage in simple denial (simply denying any involvement or responsibility for an event) or shifting the blame (implying that someone or something else is responsible for the wrong-doing). In evasion of responsibility, one

can suggest provocation, defeasibility, accident, or good intentions. Provocation is the excuse that an individual or organization was forced to act as she, he or they did. Defeasibility makes the argument that there was insufficient information or control available to the accused. Claiming that an undesirable act was an accident argues that the act happened by chance or due to unforeseeable circumstances. When rhetors argue they were acting with good intentions, the actors are claiming that they were doing what they believed to be the best course of action at the time (Benoit, 1995a).

Rhetors who attempt to reduce the offensiveness of an event may employ bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, or compensation (Benoit, 1995a). Those who bolster highlight the positive in an attempt to overshadow the negative. Differentiation is an attempt to redefine the alleged wrongdoing as something acceptable. When rhetors use transcendence, they suggest a different frame of reference (Benoit, 1995a, p. 78). When people attack their accusers, they are attempting to diminish their own wrong-doing by drawing attention to the negative qualities or actions of those who have delivered the *kategoria*. Compensation is the offer of a payment or concession meant to wholly or partially make up for damage inflicted by the accused.

Benoit (1995a) explains that rhetors may employ just one of these strategies, but that they are more likely to employ multiple strategies, combining, for example, elements of reducing the offensiveness and corrective action. Benoit's theory of image repair will be further explicated in the method section, in which each individual strategy will be explained in further detail with examples.

## Applications of *Apologia* and Image Repair Strategies

### *Corporate Applications of Image Repair*

Although a more inclusive label may be organizational (rather than corporate) *apologia*, analyses of image repair discourse conducted in this context have most frequently been focused on corporations specifically. One such analysis of corporate image repair attempts was conducted by Benoit and Brinson (1994) in their study of AT&T's response to a 1991 interruption of the company's long distance service. Within days of the New York based service outage, competitors MCI and Sprint ran advertisements in the *New York Times* reminding AT&T customers that they had options and, in Sprint's case, attacking AT&T for spending money "advertising reliability rather than delivering reliable service" (Benoit & Brinson, 1994, p. 75).

Benoit and Brinson (1994) found that in initial comments to the media, AT&T attempted to shift the blame to lower workers by claiming that they exercised poor judgment and failed to follow company policy. Subsequently, in a letter of apology printed in major newspapers, AT&T employed mortification, corrective action, and bolstering (Benoit & Brinson, 1994).

Benoit and Brinson (1994) identified responses by the Communication Workers of America (CWA, who represented the workers AT&T had attempted to shift the blame to) that made AT&T's attempts to shift the blame ineffective. Ultimately though, Benoit and Brinson (1994) concluded that the strategies of mortification and corrective action were well-conceived. Further, the study found that that strategies could be effectively "intertwined," as bolstering was woven into the applications of corrective action and mortification (Benoit & Brinson, 1994, p. 87) This study also was the first to

identify corrective action as a strategy used by corporations (Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici (1991) had previously identified this strategy in political *apologia*--see below).

Sears also engaged in image repair. Benoit (1995b) analyzed the corporation's image restoration efforts after the chain's branch of automotive centers was accused of dishonest business practices. Specifically, investigations by the California Department of Consumer Affairs led to accusations that Sears was (1) "making unneeded and costly auto repairs," (2) defrauding people who had their cars serviced by Sears, and (3) betraying consumers' trust in the Sears brand (Benoit, 1995b, p. 94). Related to these charges, Sears' management was accused of pressuring its employees to make recommendations to customers for unneeded parts, repairs, and maintenance (Benoit, 1995b).

Benoit (1995b) identified Sears' use of denial, differentiation, bolstering, good intentions, minimization, and attacking the accuser. Sears' responses ultimately employed corrective action as well, but not until after additional evidence against Sears emerged. Benoit (1995b) found Sears' defensive strategies to be generally poorly chosen and poorly executed and concluded that the corrective actions taken by Sears were the only effective image restoration attempts. However, Benoit observed that lack of mortification weakened Sears corrective action. Ultimately, Benoit (1995b) asserted that Sears' corrective action would have been more effective had it been Sears' first reaction, rather than its last.

Ultimately, Benoit's findings in the Sears case suggests that corrective action should be a priority when warranted; similarly, people expect mortification when wrongdoing has occurred. Perhaps most relevant to the current investigation of Obama's

image repair discourse, Benoit's (1995b) case study of Sears also provided implications for persuasive attacks:

First, a persuasive attack is more damaging when it establishes that the accused knowingly engaged in the wrongful acts... Second, the persuasive attack can be more powerful if the accuser can establish that the accused's reputation for trustworthiness is undeserved. (p. 102)

If the *kategoria* leveled at Obama employs either of these methods for intensifying persuasive attack, Obama's image repair tasks may prove more daunting.

Brinson and Benoit (1996) also applied Benoit's theory of image restoration discourse to a corporate context when they examined Dow Corning's image repair response to the breast implant crisis. From July 1991 until March 1992 (and arguably until March 1994), Dow Corning found itself under attack from the Public Citizen Health Research Group, Congressional hearings, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) stemming from questions about the safety of silicone breast implants developed and manufactured by Dow Corning. Dow Corning first attempted simple denial; later attempted denial and reducing the offensiveness of the act; and finally engaged in mortification and corrective action, while still denying and bolstering.

Brinson and Benoit (1996) concluded that the strategies of denial, minimization, and attacking the accuser were ineffective in repairing Dow Corning's image, offering as evidence that the controversy not only continued but magnified following the attempts at using these appeals. Brinson and Benoit (1996) also noted that the strategies of bolstering and transcendence were inadequate given the magnitude of the image problem and the fact that these "more positive strategies" were "lost in the sea of the company's

defensive uses of denial, minimization, and attacking accusers” (p. 38). Ultimately, Brinson and Benoit (1996) concluded that, although long overdue, the policies of mortification, corrective action, and bolstering were most effective in repairing Dow Corning’s image.

In each of these three studies of corporate image repair (AT&T, Sears, Dow Corning), the organizations went through various stages of image repair discourse, employing different strategies at different stages in the crisis. In noting implications for the Dow Corning case, Benoit and Brinson (1996) observed that organizations often must respond “to changes in the situation and to the internal evaluation of accusations. This means that looking at a single image repair discourse may provide an inherently incomplete picture.” This finding has implications for the current study of Obama’s discourse. First, the finding suggests that there is merit to looking at multiple examples of image repair discourse from both the primary and general phases of the campaign for each of the selected accusations. Most relevant to this study, the acknowledgement that there are “changes in the situation” makes the case for the importance of looking at the influence of *kairos*, or the timing of rhetoric. It may be that certain strategies are not warranted or relevant given the timing of the rhetorical situation.

Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) also examined corporate *apologia* following accusations of wrong-doing resulting in the loss of human lives. The authors evaluated USAir’s discourse following the fatal crash of one of its Boeing 737 aircraft outside of Pittsburgh: The 1994 crash killed 132 people and was the fifth USAir crash in five years. Benoit and Czerwinski identified three main accusations in *The New York Times* news coverage of the crash. First, the *Times* suggested that USAir planes were dangerous.



Second, the *Times* alleged that the airline's management policies were to blame for the dangerous planes. And third, *Times* coverage argued that the management policies had been enacted in order to save USAir money.

Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) analyzed three newspaper advertisements by USAir and found that the company had employed three different strategies: bolstering, denial, and corrective action. The ads were formatted as letters to customers from the CEO, USAir pilots, and flight attendants. Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) argued that although bolstering, denial, and corrective action were "well chosen strategies" (p. 50), letters from USAir mechanics and ground crew may have been more relevant and possibly more credible. Thus, this study makes clear the importance of considering the vehicle for an *apologia*; rhetors should consider carefully who will be the spokesperson(s) in image repair efforts. Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) also noted that the combination of denial and corrective action seemed inconsistent; "why fix something that isn't broken?" (p. 54). Thus, this study serves as a warning that when rhetors combine image repair strategies, they should consider the compatibility of their choices.

In 1996, Texaco's senior coordinator of personnel services, Richard Lundwall leaked a tape-recorded conversation among himself and three other executives. The tape included executives referring "to African American employees as 'black jelly beans' who were 'glued to the bottom of the jar'" (Brinson & Benoit, 1999, p. 484). Comments also demonstrated intolerance for the holidays of Hanukkah and Kwanza. The comments were widely reported upon by the media, and there was outrage among Texaco employees and customers (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). Responding to the image crisis, Texaco chair Peter Bijur addressed employees and the public on multiple occasions in

November, 1996, using such channels as news releases, a letter to employees, a video message to employees, an appearance on ABC's nightline, and two official statements, one of which reported on a meeting between Texaco and African American employees.

In each of these messages, Texaco employed some or all of the following strategies: bolstering, corrective action, mortification, and shifting blame (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). Texaco attempted to bolster its image by stressing its ideals of tolerance and the company's formal policies that contradicted any evidence of racism or illegal action. The bolstering messages demonstrated outrage and disgust at the attitudes and behaviors of the recorded executives, seeking to contrast the true nature of Texaco with the deplorable racism exhibited by the accused. Bolstering appeals also stressed Texaco's concern and respect for all of its employees.

Brinson and Benoit (1999) also identified corrective action as a strategy consistently applied by Bijur and Texaco. The company took such corrective steps as to hire an independent party to investigate the allegations and pledged to take disciplinary action where appropriate, including firing guilty parties. Other corrective actions included pledges to review and improve Texaco's diversity programs and meetings with leaders of the African American community. Finally, Texaco agreed to settle the discriminatory lawsuit brought against the company.

Mortification was also effectively used by Texaco (Brinson & Benoit, 1999), as Bijur expressed sadness for the victims of the discrimination and regret and shame from the act of the discrimination. Bijur also explicitly apologized to both employees and the general public, ultimately admitting wrong-doing by declaring that the company's "values and policies have been violated" (Brinson & Benoit, 1999, p. 499).

Shifting the blame was the fourth strategy adapted by Texaco. In almost every image repair message, Bijur made an attempt to shift the blame for the racist allegations from the company as a whole to the four executives caught on tape. In doing so, Texaco was employing a specific variety of shifting the blame which Brinson and Benoit (1999) labeled “separation” (p. 505) because the company as a whole separated itself from the four bad employees. Importantly, Brinson and Benoit observed that shifting the blame, alone, is usually not a sufficient strategy for repairing image (e.g., the Exxon *Valdez* oil spill and Nixon during Watergate). They suggested that separation combined shifting the blame with the usually more successful strategies of corrective action and mortification and ultimately led to Texaco’s success in repairing its image.

Brinson and Benoit do not argue that Texaco restored its image; they instead argue that Texaco’s efforts resulted in limiting the damage to its reputation. They offer, as evidence, Texaco’s stock price, which dropped over \$5 per share during the controversy but rebounded to exceed its pre-crisis value by nearly \$9 per share. Thus, scholars gained from this case an example of how to effectively combine shifting the blame with corrective action and mortification. More important to the current investigation, the Texaco case provides examples of how parties have sought to repair images damaged by comments on race. The Texaco case study should serve as a point of comparison for how Obama dealt with racially-charged comments made by his pastor, Jeremiah Wright.

Drawing from the conclusions reached by Brinson and Benoit in the 1999 Texaco image restoration analysis, Coombs and Schmidt (2000) hypothesized that research participants exposed to scenarios employing mortification and separation would have

more positive images of Texaco than respondents in conditions exposed to shifting blame, corrective action, or bolstering. Further, they predicted that those in the separation condition would have even more positive perceptions of Texaco than respondents who received only the mortification condition.

Coombs and Schmidt (2000) actually found that all of the five strategies resulted in respondents having a positive image of Texaco. Further, the researchers found no significant differences among the strategies employed by Texaco except that shifting the blame was rated as showing less concern for the victims compared to the other strategies. Thus, conclusions by Brinson and Benoit (1999) that Texaco successfully improved its image were supported. Further, considering that the results suggested no additional benefit to using mortification in addition to or instead of bolstering or corrective action, Coombs and Schmidt suggested that organizations might subject themselves to reduced legal threats if they avoided mortification's requirement of claiming responsibility for a crisis. However, the authors admit that "more research is needed to ascertain what specific crisis situations would benefit from the use of mortification," suggesting that some crises, such as those resulting in loss of life, may require mortification (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000, p. 176).

One of the most controversial corporate entities is the tobacco industry, and in 1989, one of the political action arms of the industry, the Tobacco Institute, came under attack from cartoonist Gary Trudeau and his *Doonesbury* comic strip. Trudeau made four distinct attacks on the industry at large: "(1) smoking is harmful, (2) cigarettes are addictive, (3) ridicule of smokers' rights, and (4) the tobacco industry targets youth in advertising" (Benoit & Hirson, 2001, p. 282). These attacks culminated in a comic strip

that included a fictitious coupon redeemable by under-age smokers for free cigarettes. Benoit and Hirson (2001) analyzed the four attacks along with the Tobacco Institute's rhetorical response to one of those attacks, that the industry markets tobacco to minors.

The Tobacco Institute's defense came in the form of a brochure entitled "Smoking and Young People: Where the Tobacco Industry Stands" and included the strategies of denial, corrective action, shifting the blame, bolstering, and good intentions (Benoit & Hirson, 2001). Benoit and Hirson (2001) found that the Tobacco Institute's attempts at image repair were incomplete since they only responded to one of the four attacks leveled by Trudeau's comic strip campaign. Further, they concluded that the response was ill-conceived, that it did not consider its audience, and that it implausibly shifted blame to the publics which the image repair strategies were aimed at, parents. This study reinforces the importance of considering the audience when fashioning a message. In observing that the Tobacco Institute only addressed one of four accusations, Benoit and Hirson (2001) also noted the peril of ignoring "important accusations" (p. 289). Certainly, Obama and his campaign staff were faced multiple accusations. The severity of the attacks and the perceived responsibility should be guides for choosing which attacks to respond to (Benoit, 1995a; Benoit & Hirson, 2001).

In contrast with the Tobacco Institute's image problem that resulted from its advertising, in 1998, Northwest Airlines (NWA) attempted to use issue advertising to maintain and restore its image during a pilots' strike. Cowden and Sellnow (2002) analyzed the image restoration strategies in the advertisements and provided evaluations of how the campaign impacted multiple publics, including customers, investors, and employees. Contextually, this study combines previous examination of the airline

industry by Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) and analysis of communication with employees and organized labor (Benoit & Brinson, 1994). In their review of thirteen different NWA issue advertisements, Cowden and Sellnow (2002) identified the use of all five of Benoit's (1995a) general image restoration strategies: denial, evading responsibility, reducing the offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

Cowden and Sellnow surmised from their analysis that NWA's strategy of compensation worked well, as the airline was able to maintain and even increase passenger levels. However, the authors judged that overall, NWA had failed to repair its image with key publics.

The company eventually conceded on nearly all of ALPA's [the Airline Pilots Association's] demands; lost more than \$200 million; and, due to the increased wages paid to pilots and other personnel, has still not returned to the profit levels it enjoyed prior to the strike. (p. 209)

Cowden and Sellnow (2002) were particularly critical of NWA's failure to maintain a positive image with its investors, citing that NWA's stock plummeted from around \$65 a share to less than \$20 per share. Finally, the analysts concluded that NWA's messages were inconsistent with its past actions. Relevant to the current investigation, the NWA case study serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining relationships with key publics. In the realm of political discourse, key publics may be translated into important segments of the electorate. Thus, an important consideration for Obama may have been crafting messages that targeted key voters.

Blaney, Benoit, and Brazeal (2002) provided analysis of Bridgestone-Firestone Corporation's efforts to repair its image following a crisis resulting from faulty tires

which ultimately resulted in 271 deaths. Firestone was accused of manufacturing a faulty product that resulted in hundreds of fatalities in both the United States and Venezuela. Further, the company was accused of withholding information about the defective tires for 3 years, only to admit the problems after multiple reported deaths. Blaney et al. (2002) identified two phases in Firestone's image repair attempts; an initial attempt that consisted of official statements by Firestone executives, recall notices, and strategic communications with other corporations and a second response phase that consisted of an advertising campaign.

In the initial response, Firestone applied the strategies of mortification, corrective action, bolstering, and both forms of denial (simple denial and shifting the blame). Firestone's second phase of image repair was conducted through a print and television advertising campaign, "Making it Right." Blaney et al. (2002) found that, as indicated by the title of the campaign, corrective action was a prevalent strategy in this image repair effort as Firestone. Blaney et al. also identified bolstering and shifting the blame as strategies.

Blaney et al. (2002) evaluated Firestone's corrective action strategies as generally "too little, too late, and too slow" (p. 386) concluding that Firestone should have informed consumers much earlier but instead waited as long as they could have without inviting a government-forced recall. The corrective action was made further ineffective by the absence of mortification. In general, Blaney et al. (2002) judged the Firestone image repair efforts as poorly conceived, poorly executed failures, citing as evidence the hundreds of lives lost and also a *CNN/USA Today* poll conducted after the image repair efforts that found lingering unfavorable opinions of Bridgestone-Firestone.

The Bridgestone-Firestone case study; like the studies of Sears, AT&T, and Dow Corning, and US Air; followed the organization's evolving image repair discourse over the course of multiple phases or stages of the crisis. In each case, as the corporations tried and failed with some strategies or as new information reignited the crises, the organizations would attempt different strategies (or different variations on the already-tried strategies). This aspect of phases or stages of a crisis is a common trait of corporate crises in general (see Coombs, 1999; Hearit, 2006 for examples), and will be shown to be a similar trait of individual image crises as well.

The previous applications of image repair theory to corporate discourses all possess a key characteristic of corporate image repair discourse: defense of the collective. These studies mark a distinct departure from the tradition of self defense described by Ware and Linkugel, who studied individuals in their case studies and provided individuals as exemplars of the tradition. Still, these studies are helpful in understanding this dissertation's analysis of Barack Obama's discourse. Given that presidential candidates are also viewed as the leaders of their respective political parties (or at the very least, the most visible members of their parties), I would argue that Obama's discourse can be seen as defense of the collective Democratic Party as well as a defense of his individual character and candidacy. However, at this point of my review, I return to the tradition of self-defense of the individual. In the remainder of the review, I will discuss scholarly analyses of examples of image repair discourse among celebrities and political figures.



### *Celebrity Applications of Image Repair*

Celebrity *apologia* represents another significant contextual application of image repair theory. Benoit and Hanczor (1994) studied the image repair efforts of Tonya Harding. Harding was a U.S. Olympic figure skater accused of being involved in the 1994 assault on one of her U.S. Olympic teammates and rivals, Nancy Kerrigan. Media reports and criminal allegations had widely implicated Harding in a conspiracy that resulted in Kerrigan being struck on the leg in an attempt to remove her from competition. Benoit and Hanczor analyzed Harding's remarks in an appearance on the news program *Eye-to-Eye with Connie Chung*. The researchers found that Harding attempted to use the strategies of bolstering, denial, attacking the accuser, and defeasibility to defend her character.

Benoit and Hanczor (1994) concluded that the strategies were appropriate defenses for the occasion but that they were ill-conceived and inconsistent with Harding's past actions. For example, they observed that the scared, helpless demeanor that Harding portrayed in the television interview contrasted with the "brash" confidence Harding had demonstrated throughout her skating career (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994, p. 425). Further, they argue that Harding's strategies were ineffective because there was no proof offered for what she was arguing other than her own word. Finally, Benoit and Hanczor make the point that Harding waited too long to attempt a defense; this final finding presents an important implication for the influence of *kairos* in *apologia*. The finding by Benoit and Hanczor (1994) that Harding waited too long suggests that there was an opportune time in an earlier phase of the crisis. This study's intent to interpret the role of *kairos* in rhetorical situations will flesh out these opportune times for defenses.

Tonya Harding was certainly not the only athlete to face an image crisis. Brazeal (2008) examined the image repair efforts of (U.S.) National Football League (NFL) player Terrell Owens and his agent, Drew Rosenhaus. In the midst of a contract dispute, Owens made disparaging comments about the ownership of his team (the Philadelphia Eagles), the quarterback of his team (Donovan McNabb) and his coach (Andy Reid), the Eagles suspended Owens for the remainder of the 2005 season (Brazeal, 2008). In an attempt to repair perceptions of his image among fans and members of the Eagles organization, Owens, along with Rosenhaus, held a press conference in which Owens read a prepared statement and Rosenhaus addressed questions from the press (Brazeal, 2008). Brazeal (2008) analyzed these texts, finding that in his prepared statement, Owens used the strategies of bolstering and mortification and that Rosenhaus employed the strategies of attacking accusers, bolstering, mortification, and good intentions.

Brazeal concluded that the apologies were ineffective and demonstrated a lack of understanding of the values of American sports fans. She found that the mortification was ineffective because the apologies rang of insincerity and were devoid of any admission of guilt in the statements by both Owens and his surrogate, Rosenhaus (Brazeal, 2008). In addition to the ill-conceived and poorly executed strategies, Brazeal (2008) concluded that Owens and Rosenhaus lacked credibility and that this, combined with their perceived insincerity actually worsened Owens' image among the Eagles organization, and fans of the NFL. Thus, this study suggests that rhetors are likely to be more successful in their image repair efforts if they are viewed as credible.

In addition to image problems among celebrity athletes, Hollywood celebrities often find themselves with tarnished images. Such was the case after it was widely

reported that actor Hugh Grant “was arrested for lewd behavior with a prostitute” (Benoit, 1997, p. 251). In addition to the public embarrassment of being charged with engaging a prostitute, Grant was also criticized by the media for his betrayal of his girlfriend, Elizabeth Hurley. To repair his image, Grant appeared on five different talk shows. Benoit analyzed Grant’s remarks on those talk shows and found that the actor had employed the image repair strategies of mortification, bolstering, attacking the accuser, and denial.

Benoit generally praised the image repair efforts of Hugh Grant, arguing that the actor had skillfully used bolstering and mortification to admit wrong-doing while still conveying the impression that he was a good person. Although Benoit notes that “our willingness to forgive someone who engages in mortification is not assured” (1997, p. 261), he concludes that Grant’s apparent sincerity and the tone of his apology contributed to the success of this particular mortification.

In addition to the tone and sincerity adopted by Grant, other factors may have made his image repair challenges, and those of celebrities in general, easier than those faced by corporations and politicians (Benoit, 1997). As I have already demonstrated, corporations face attacks from multiple publics including the media, share holders, government regulatory bodies, consumers, and employees. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent sections, politicians often face attacks from multiple sources as well. Public officials must answer to voters, political allies, political foes, party leaders, campaign donors, and even the threat of Constitutional powers such as impeachment. The lesser number of attackers, alone, is an advantage for professional athletes and other celebrities.

But with fewer attackers comes another advantage, the absence of a desire to prolong the image crisis (Benoit, 1997). Harding and Grant did not face this threat. However, competitors such as MCI and Sprint wanted to extend the debate over AT&T's service. After all, MCI and Sprint would surely have benefitted financially from the weakening or elimination of a market competitor. As will be shown in the cases below, political enemies have ample motivation to sustain character questions about the opposition. A political opponent with an image problem is surely preferable to a rival with unquestioned character.

### *Political Apologia*

As stated above, there are two assumptions about communication that serve as the founding for Benoit's theory of image repair. Any application of image restoration analysis should follow from these assumptions. Most political campaign communication, including the discourse that serves as the focus of this study, has an obvious goal: election to political office. Second, given the importance that political communication research places on the role of character or image (e.g., Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Devlin, 1997; Kaid & Johnston, 1991), political discourse has most certainly been shown to be concerned with maintaining a favorable reputation or image.

Further, the two necessary components of problem and responsibility must be established. Image problems are numerous in politics. Studies detailing attacks in politics (e.g., Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997; Jamieson, 1992; Kaid & Johnston, 1991) are as numerous as studies examining the importance of image in political communication. Presumably, each time a character attack is leveled, there is the potential with the target of the attack for an image problem. Certainly the problem has been established, as there

has been an undesirable act or trait attributed to an individual. As for Benoit's (1995a) stipulation that an individual must be regarded as responsible for the act, this may not be necessary in the realm of a politics. The mere appearance of impropriety is most likely sufficient to tarnish a political image and provoke a defense from the target of the attack. In fact, in a content analysis of data from U.S. presidential general debates, U.S. presidential primary debates, U.S. Senate debates, and international political debates, Benoit (2007) found that the more frequently a candidate was attacked, the more likely that candidate was to engage in defenses, regardless of perceived responsibility.

Although the scholarship is steadily diversifying, research in political advertising, political debates, and news coverage of political campaigns has, historically, focused disproportionately on U.S. politics and, specifically on presidential campaigns (Benoit & Davis, 2007; Kaid, 2004; McKinney & Carlin, 2004;). The same is true of political image repair, as far more studies have examined presidential image repair than have studied non-presidential image repair attempts. Richard Nixon (Benoit, 1995a; Blair, 1984; Katula, 1975; Newman, 1970; Smith, 1988;) has been the most frequent subject of studies of presidential image repair discourse, but scholars have also analyzed the image repair efforts of Dwight Eisenhower (Haapanen, 1988; Stein, 2005), John Kennedy (Henry, 1988), Gerald Ford (Brock, 1988; Gold, 1978), Ronald Reagan (Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991; Friedenber, 1988; Heisey, 1988) Bill Clinton (Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Koesten & Rowland, 2004; Kramer & Olson, 2002; Simons, 2000), and George W. Bush (Benoit, 2006; Benoit & Henson, 2009; Liu, 2007).

*Eisenhower.* On May 1, 1960, the Soviet Union downed a U.S. operated U-2 spy plane over Soviet airspace. Unable to account for the plane's disappearance and guessing

that the Soviets would have little evidence to the contrary, the CIA issued a press release that told of a NASA weather aircraft that had gone missing on the Turkish-Soviet border (Haapanen, 1988). However, Soviet forces had recovered the plane, intact, along with the pilot of the plane, alive and well. On May 5, days before the planned Paris Summit Conference, Soviet premier Nikita S. Khrushchev disclosed this information in a speech to the Supreme Soviet, in which he condemned the U.S. for its aggression (Haapanen, 1988). By withholding announcement of the U-2 downing, Khrushchev, had allowed the U.S. to ensnare itself in a lie. Thus, U.S. President Eisenhower was left to respond to Khrushchev's attacks as he prepared to meet the Soviet premiere, as well as the leaders of Great Britain and France, at the Paris Summit Conference. Eisenhower's case of *apologia* stands unique among the other cases of presidential *apologia* reviewed here in that Eisenhower was apologizing to a foreign government rather than to his fellow citizens and prospective voters.

Haapanen (1988) detailed Eisenhower's *apologia* through an official statement released on May 9 and through May 11 press conference, in which "Eisenhower took full responsibility for the U-2 program and defended it on the grounds of national security" (p. 143). Specifically, Haapanen identified, in Eisenhower's *apologia*, four major arguments. First, Eisenhower argued that intelligence gathering was necessary to protect the U.S. and also that the Soviet Union's secrecy had required the U.S. to spy. Second, Haapanen noted that Eisenhower differentiated intelligence gathering from other government actions, explaining that such activities required secrecy. Third, Eisenhower argued that in rejecting the "open skies" proposal, the Soviets had removed other methods of safeguarding against surprise attacks (Haapanen, 1988, p. 145). Finally,

Eisenhower's *apologia* argued that there were more important issues that the world should concern itself with. Haapanen observed that Eisenhower offered no "hint of apology or regret about the U-2 overflights" (1988, p. 145).

Haapanen (1988) offered two separate assessments of the effectiveness of Eisenhower's *apologia*, dependent on the audience. Haapanen concluded that "President Eisenhower's *apologia* of redefinition played well with his intended audiences, the American public and the Western allies" (p. 145). As evidence for this conclusion, he provided public opinion polling that demonstrates Americans' approval of Eisenhower's actions. In contrast, Khrushchev was unconvinced by Eisenhower's *apologia*. At the opening of the Paris Summit Conference, the soviet premiere demanded an apology from Eisenhower, and ultimately, "the summit broke up almost as soon as it began" (Haapanen, 1988, p. 145).

Stein (2005) also examined *apologia* in the case of the U-2 incident. Stein reached similar conclusions to those of Haapanen but used Benoit's Theory of Image Repair to analyze and classify the defenses used by Eisenhower, and by extension, the United States. Stein identified U.S. applications of denial, accident, defeasibility, provocation, attacking the accuser, minimization, bolstering, transcendence, and corrective action. Stein concluded that the U.S. most effectively used transcendence in arguing "that the surveillance flights were necessary in order to protect the security of the world" (2005, p. 227). However, Stein evaluated the U.S. strategies of denial and corrective action as the least effective in that the denial was easily refuted by Soviet evidence to the contrary, and the corrective action was too minimal.

Stein compared the strategies employed by Eisenhower in the 1960 incident with those used by the United States in a 2001 spy plane incident, in which a U.S. pilot made an emergency landing in Chinese territory. Stein (2005) found that the U.S. used the strategies of minimization, transcendence, attacking the accuser, denial, shifting blame, accident, defeasibility, mortification, and corrective action. In the 2001 case, Stein (2005) found that the U.S. effectively employed the strategies of defeasibility, attacking the accuser. Further, Stein found that the U.S. made limited, though adequate, use of the strategies of mortification and corrective action. George W. Bush was president at that time; however, Stein (2005) does not frame the rhetoric as primarily that of Bush but rather as that of the United States government as a whole, since Bush was not the primary rhetor in the U.S. responses.

Stein (2005, 2008) also advanced theory in apologia through his study of the U-2 incident. In addition to analyzing the *kategoria* (persuasive attack) and *apologia* in the U-2 and Chinese spy plane incidents, Stein (2005, 2008) also developed a typology of *antapologia*, or responses to a rhetor's *apologia*. He identified two strategies that seek to strengthen the *kategoria*: identifying concessions made in the *apologia* and refining the attack. Stein (2005, 2008) also identified six strategies that weaken the *apologia*, explaining that a rhetor may argue that the *apologia*: is untrue, contradicts previously employed *apologia* strategies, does not take proper responsibility, and reflects character flaws of the accused. *Antapologia* can also weaken *apologia* through inclusion of a defense against attacks made in the *apologia* and by arguing that the *apologia* itself can cause harm.



Although the current study will not analyze *antapologia* as a separate speech set, Stein's work may be helpful in better understanding multiple phases of attacks. Specifically, revised or strengthened attacks may have ramifications for interpreting the role of *karios*. For example, it may be that Obama was able to ignore some attacks or respond with nominal defenses. However, Obama may be forced to respond to attacks on the same subject at a different time in the campaign if attackers have refined their *kategoria*.

*Kennedy*. In 1960, John F. Kennedy faced an electorate wary of sending a Catholic to the White House for the first time. Kennedy, well aware of the apprehension among Protestant voters, actually shaped the rhetorical situation of faith and the presidency before he faced and responded to more specific attacks regarding his Catholicism (Henry, 1988). Henry observes that Kennedy's "preparation for the *Look* magazine interview, the early Democratic primaries, and the address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors had readied him thoroughly for the final encounter" (1988, p. 169). In each of those events, Kennedy had primed the audience and foreshadowed his response to concerns about his faith. The "final encounter" that Henry wrote of was a televised September 12, 1960 speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. The speech was on the topic of religious tolerance and separation of church and state and was followed by a question and answer session, in which Kennedy answered specific attacks.

One strategy that Kennedy used was to declare that his religion was of minimum importance in comparison to other campaign issues (Henry, 1988). Henry (1988) also identified Kennedy's ability to differentiate religious interests (private affairs) from the

interests of the nation (public affairs). Kennedy also clearly bolstered his belief in the Constitution, specifically in the guarantees for separation of church and state provided by Article VI and the First Amendment (Henry, 1988). Henry's analysis of Kennedy's *apologia* also highlighted Kennedy's *kategoria*, his attacks on his accusers. These included attacks on the bigotry of those who would exclude a citizen from consideration for the presidency based on her or his religious choice. Kennedy also attacked his Protestant accusers by charging that they were treating him, as a Catholic, in the same unfair manner that they suggested he might unfairly treat non-Catholics (Henry, 1988).

Henry's analysis stands apart from other analyses of presidential *apologia* because Kennedy is defending an aspect of his character rather than a past action as in the case of other presidential defenses. Further, Kennedy was not being attacked for policies or actions influenced by his Catholicism; he faced attacks simply because he was Catholic. The attacks leveled against Kennedy's Catholicism seem particularly relevant to my investigation of Barack Obama. Due to his name and the religious traditions of his father's family, one (untrue) rumor spread that Obama was a Muslim. In investigating the responses to this rumor, it will be interesting to see how Obama's defenses on topics of religion compare to those of Kennedy.

*Nixon as a vice presidential candidate.* Richard M. Nixon's presidency has become synonymous with the Watergate scandal. However, even before he was president, Nixon responded to numerous attacks that have warranted scholarly attention. When he was Eisenhower's vice presidential running mate Nixon delivered a national radio and television address on September 23, 1952 now infamously known as the "Checkers" speech (Ryan, 1988). Generally, Nixon faced criticism for his use of a

special campaign fund. More specifically, critics in the media and the opposing Democratic Party charged that Nixon lived beyond his means, misused government funds, and accepted improper campaign contributions (Ryan, 1988).

Nixon's address became known as the "Checkers" speech because, included among his lengthy disclosures of campaign contributions he had received, he declared that he and his family had received a small black and white spotted dog from an admirer in Texas. Nixon's six-year-old daughter had named the dog Checkers, and the vice presidential candidate vowed "that regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it" (McGuckin, 1968). McGuckin (1968) offered declarations such as this one as evidence that Nixon's speech of defense was successful because he had demonstrated values that viewers identified with. McGuckin's (1968) value analysis of Nixon's address concluded that values such as integrity, hard work, family cooperation, togetherness, and thrift won the confidence of American voters.

Rosenfield (1968) examined Nixon's "Checkers" speech in comparison to Harry S. Truman's response to accusations that "he had allowed a Communist agent, Harry Dexter White, to hold high governmental office" (p. 435). Rosenfield detected four overarching similarities that he suggested may serve as "constants in the apologetic equation" (1968, p. 449). First, Rosenfield (1968) predicted that "broadcast *apologia* is likely to be part of a short, intense, decisive clash of views" (p. 449). He also suggested that speakers are likely to attack their accusers as Truman and Nixon did. Further, Rosenfield suggested that the forensic demands of *apologia* and the circumstantial demands of broadcasting necessitate the disclosure of large volumes of facts. Finally,

Truman and Nixon both repeated portions of previous arguments in their broadcast defenses.

In the age of the 24 hour news cycle, public figures are arguably exposed to greater scrutiny. However, transgressions are likely to fade from the public consciousness more quickly as they are promptly supplanted by more current news. Thus, forty years later, in some ways, Rosenfield's predicted "short, intense, decisive clash of views" may be growing even shorter. To the contrary, the latent, pass along nature of forwarded e-mails may cause some clashes of views to be drawn out for much longer than Rosenfield could have envisioned. Further, the interactivity of the world wide web no longer constrains the life of a story to the number of days the story is in the news. Search engines and archives unlimited by spatial constraints allow citizens to re-visit controversies long after they have disappeared from television news coverage. In this dissertation, by looking at speech-sets in traditional and new media texts, I will be able to analyze potential channel-based differences, such as these, in image repair discourse.

Ryan (1988) also analyzed the defensive discourse Nixon used in the September 23 speech. However, rather than focusing on individual strategies of *apologia* as other critics have done, Ryan sought to identify the use of a broad range of rhetorical techniques. Although Ryan (1988) did agree with others' (such as Rosenfield's) assessments that Nixon had effectively denied, shifted blame, and counterattacked, Ryan also credited Nixon's success with his use of other rhetorical techniques, including fallacies such as *argumentum ad personam* (character attacks) and *petito principii* (begging the question). Ryan (1988) also observed that Nixon relied on other rhetorical

devices such as effective delivery and *kairos*. *Kairos*, or opportune timing, was a factor because Nixon's attacks on his accusers coincided with allegations questioning the propriety of the finances of Adlai Stevenson (the Democratic presidential nominee).

*Kairos* may prove to be a factor in the *apologia* of Obama as well, given the importance of timing in presidential campaigns. John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign was roundly criticized for failing to respond, in a timely manner, to the unfounded attacks by the Swiftboat Veterans for Truth group, who questioned the nature of Kerry's service in the Vietnam War. Assuming the Obama campaign would wish to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Kerry campaign, it will be interesting to see the role that *kairos* played in Obama's image repair discourse.

*President Nixon.* Each of the scholars who examined Nixon's *apologia* in the "Checkers" speech agreed that Nixon, as a vice presidential candidate, had successfully deflected the attacks on his alleged financial impropriety. Although Eisenhower won the White House in 1952 and took with him Nixon as his vice president, two other men would sit in the Oval Office before Nixon would finally win the presidency in 1968. Once president, Nixon found occasion for multiple speeches of image repair. However, his handling of "Vietnamization," the invasion of Cambodia, and Watergate never garnered the popular or scholarly praise he received for the "Checkers" speech.

On October 15, 1969, Nixon announced that he would offer a major speech on Vietnam policy on November, 3, 1969. Newman (1970) argued that the building anticipation for Nixon's remarks, alone, likely set the President up for failure:

In retrospect, expectations were so high that not even the Sermon on the Mount could have fulfilled them. The President had focused the spotlight so long and so

carefully that only rhetorical perfection would have been equal to the occasion. (p. 169)

Newman reported that the lag between the announcement of the speech and the actual speech did have one favorable outcome for Nixon in that his attackers withheld their criticisms until after the speech. Thus, given that there had been no policy details to attack, much of Nixon's defense of his "plan for Vietnamization" was preemptive (Newman, 1970, p. 176).

Nixon's strike against the anticipated objections of his audience consisted of two main strategies. The first was to attack his enemies through false dichotomy and ad hominem, claiming that there were "Only two choices: my plan, or the cut and run cowardice of the rioters in the streets" (Newman, 1970, p. 176). According to Newman, Nixon's other strategy was to simply ignore the logical objections to his proposed policy. Despite Newman's claims that Nixon's speech could not possibly have lived up to expectations, Newman offered evidence that Nixon had largely achieved his goals with his three audiences; conservatives, doves, and the silent majority (those who wanted the war to end but did not want a hasty withdrawal with negative consequences in Vietnam). Republicans and conservative columnists hailed Nixon's policy and his speech as a success; the peace movement lost steam; and Gallup polls showed 77% approval for the President's proposal (Newman, 1970). However, despite the short-term effectiveness of Nixon's speech, Newman concluded that the address was "shoddy rhetoric" with unsound strategies and substantive argument (1970, p. 178).

On the heels of Nixon's Vietnamization speech, he made another speech a few months later, disclosing that the United States had in fact expanded the Vietnam conflict

by invading the neighboring nation of Cambodia. In his analysis of the April 30, 1970 speech, Benoit (1995a) found that Nixon had employed preemptive image repair strategies in his attempt to justify the invasion to his fellow Americans. The April 30 speech not only contradicted the November 3, 1969 Vietnamization speech but also a speech just ten days prior on April 20, 1970 in which Nixon boasted the withdrawal of 115,000 troops and a planned further withdrawal of 150,000 troops (Benoit, 1995a). Benoit argued that the April 30 speech should be read as a preemptive image repair effort because the inconsistency between his previous and current statements and questions about the propriety of a Cambodian invasion “would deal a severe blow to audience perceptions of his morality” (1995a, p. 145).

Nixon was careful not to, in any way, shift the blame or evade responsibility for the event. Conversely, “Nixon attempted to link the invasion of Cambodia to the end of the war, and accepting responsibility for this decision would indeed allow him to accept credit for the end of the war in Vietnam” (Benoit, 1995a, p. 147). Benoit found that Nixon, instead, employed three strategies aimed at reducing the offensiveness of the Cambodia invasion: bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Nixon attempted to bolster his image by associating his military decision with successful military decisions made in the same room by preceding Presidents Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Kennedy. Nixon also used differentiation, arguing that the attacks were not an invasion of the sovereign nation of Cambodia but rather attacks on North Vietnamese strongholds that happened to be located within the borders of Cambodia. Thus, the attacks in Cambodia were not a broadening of the conflict but rather “a continuation of existing military policy employed in the war up to this point” (Benoit, 1995a, p. 149).

Nixon also used transcendence by arguing that the purpose of the offensive was not simply to invade Cambodia but to end the war and achieve peace.

Benoit (1995a) was unimpressed by Nixon's image repair efforts, noting that the room where the military decision is made "has no logical bearing on the probable outcome of Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia" (p. 151). Benoit also concluded that the differentiation argument was refuted by the very map Nixon used to illustrate the location of North Vietnamese forces (inside Cambodia). Further, Nixon's transcendence strategy was undercut because he never explained why the cause of peace necessitated an invasion of Cambodia (Benoit, 1995a). Benoit offered, as evidence for the failure of these strategies, the ensuing nationwide protests that resulted in the death of college students. Further Benoit (1995a) cited Gallup polls that showed only 25 percent of respondents agreed with sending troops into Cambodia and that Nixon's overall approval rating had plummeted from just six months earlier.

Still, the most extensive scholarship on Nixon's presidential *apologia* focuses on his attempts to save himself from the Watergate scandals. Katula (1975) employed Ware and Linkugel's typology to identify apologetic strategies used by Nixon in his resignation address. Katula found that Nixon had used a vindicative strategy; that is, one incorporating denial and transcendence by professing that he was innocent of crimes but that he was resigning because it was more important to put the country's best interests first. This strategy of putting the nation first was not only an example of transcendence but also a form of victimization because Nixon had "presented himself as a victim of the national interest" (Katula, 1975, p. 3).



In addition to analyzing Nixon's August 8, 1974 resignation speech as one of *apologia*, Katula (1975) also analyzed the discourse as a farewell address, concluding that Nixon had chosen to merge the two genres in one speech because it would minimize Watergate:

Nixon subordinated the whole Watergate affair and his resignation to the larger victories of his administration. It is here that Nixon's decision to resign and say farewell in one address becomes clear... Watergate is characterized as just one more episode in the turbulent history of the last quarter century. It is simply one loss amidst a greater number of wins. (p. 3)

Ultimately, finding no public comment suggesting Nixon had improved his association with Watergate, Katula concluded that Nixon's address failed as a speech of vindication. Further, Katula argued that the discourse as a farewell speech had also failed because Nixon had failed to provide closure to the scandal, and consequently, his presidency.

Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel (1975) also analyzed Nixon's Watergate discourse, employing, in their study, the typology developed by the latter two authors. Rather than focusing on only the August 8, 1974 resignation address, Harrell et al. critically examined Nixon's discourse throughout the development of the Watergate scandal. The critics identified two distinct phases of apologetic discourse: an explanation phase and an absolution phase. In the explanation phase, Harrell et al. (1975) identified Nixon's use of bolstering and differentiation. Nixon bolstered by stressing the history, importance, and integrity of the office of the Presidency. Nixon also used differentiation by noting that executive privilege would be used to protect the public interest and not individuals in the administration. Further, Nixon sought to differentiate "between what he could have

known and what he perhaps should have found out” (Harrell et al., 1975, p. 255).

Nixon’s absolution phase was characterized by his use of denial and differentiation.

Nixon denied personal involvement in the Watergate break-in and the subsequent cover-up. The President also drew a line between the Watergate operation and national security operations. Harrell et al. (1975) argued that Nixon’s apology failed because he “took the matter too lightly for too long” (p. 261). Finally, the authors concluded that Nixon used too many different denials and attempted transcendence using institutions that were not valued by his audience.

Benoit’s (1982) investigation of Nixon’s Watergate discourse also identified different phases of his defense. More specifically, Benoit identified the use of nine different rhetorical strategies spanning four distinct phases. In the first phase, Nixon emphasized investigations and shifted blame to others. In the second phase, the President emphasized confidentiality, indicted White House counsel John Dean, and refocused attention. The third phase was characterized by Nixon stressing his cooperation with investigations, and in the fourth phase Nixon used quotations as evidence of his cooperation. Benoit also identified two other strategies that were not necessarily characteristic of any one phase: Nixon claimed executive privilege and declared that his reelection to a second term was a mandate to govern the country as he saw fit. Consistent with the assessments made by other Watergate critics, Benoit (1982) concluded that Nixon’s rhetorical devices were “inconsistent and generally unpersuasive” and that many were “shown to be unethical” (p. 211). Benoit concluded his analysis by providing survey research as evidence that Nixon’s strategies had failed to repair his image among the public.

Smith (1988), building on the previous research that had overwhelmingly concluded that Nixon had failed in his Watergate discourse, set out to further explore the question of why Nixon's efforts had failed so miserably and in doing so produced four major conclusions regarding apologia. Recall that Benoit (1995a) found that Nixon had used preemptive image repair strategies in his address on Vietnamization. Smith (1988) suggested that Nixon had used this same tactic again in the case of Watergate: "The White House denounced the break-in and categorically denied complicity before being accused" (p. 216). Smith found that Nixon had actually lessened his accusers' burden of proof by providing the charges in his preemptive denial. Noting that Nixon had worsened his situation by providing his critics with ammunition, Smith declared his first of four major conclusions regarding Nixon's Watergate apologia: "Apologists should respond to charges, not make them" (p. 216).

Smith's second major conclusion was that apologists must identify and effectively address all of the various audiences involved in any given rhetorical situation. Regarding Nixon's Watergate rhetoric, Smith (1988) argued that the President had realized all four audiences (courts, Congress, the press, and the public), but that Nixon had devoted too many resources to the courts and the press, two audiences whose power paled in comparison to that of Congress and the public. Smith's (1988) third conclusion warned accusers that they, themselves, are likely to become tarnished by their attacks on others. To this point, Smith argued that the Watergate affair had not only injured Nixon but the entire "body politic," citing damage to the public's image of Congress (Democrats and Republicans), the courts, and the press. Finally, Smith (1988) concluded that "the admission of culpability requires dramatic redemption through mortification or

victimage” (p. 217). In other words, if it becomes clear that there is someone to blame, then that someone (or ones) must be named, and preferably, they must accept responsibility for the actions. In the case of Nixon,

Because he would neither repent nor blame his loyal subordinates, he facilitated the diffusion of guilt and suspicion throughout the American polity. When he could neither justify his operations nor abandon them he assured that the reputations of countless institutions and individuals would be damaged for his own sake. (Smith, 1988, p. 218)

In absence of a clear culprit, everyone falls under suspicion.

Although the diffusion of guilt may be a serious concern for administrations (or campaign organizations) in general, this seems less likely in the case of the attacks against Obama that I have chosen to analyze. For example, there does not seem to be any confusion as to whose decision it was to attend Jeremiah Wright’s church or to attend a fundraiser at the home of Bill Ayers. However, I do not expect that this perception will necessarily preclude Obama from using the strategy of shifting the blame.

Blair (1984), like Smith, began her investigation of the effects of Watergate rhetoric by assuming the conclusion reached by the other critics reviewed above, that Nixon’s *apologia* had failed. Moving forward from this assumption, Blair analyzed the strategies of post-Watergate *apologia*. She drew her articles of analysis from books written by twelve different members of the Nixon administration (including Nixon himself). Not surprisingly, she found that each one of the authors had used the strategies of denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. However, she found that the post-scandal authors were no more successful in their defenses than apologists whom had

spoken during the scandal. Blair argued that the twelve authors had failed to take a cue from the efforts of Ford and Carter to move on from the scandal. Instead, “they chose to raise anew, rather than dismiss, the charges against them” (Blair, 1984, p. 259). In addition to the apologists refreshing the public’s memory of the accusations against them, Blair also found that the contradictions and differing accounts found across the books further called into question the trustworthiness of the former administration members.

Blair (1984) concluded that her comparative study of the twelve books provided further evidence for the importance of employing a “multidimensional analysis” (p. 260) (examining multiple perspectives in a speech set) to ensure all the contributing factors of a rhetorical situation are considered. My dissertation answers Blair’s call for multidimensional analysis of a rhetorical situation. First, I plan to examine multiple articulations of each attack by different attackers. Second, I will investigate how attacks and defenses were exchanged in different channels such as traditional news media, speeches, and the Internet.

*Ford.* Although Richard Nixon’s transgressions provided fodder for far more studies of presidential *apologia* (see above) than those of his successor, Gerald R. Ford, also required image repair work. In the first month of his presidency, Ford made two public announcements that garnered varying degrees of criticism. The first, his decision to grant limited amnesty to deserters and dodgers of the Vietnam War, met with mostly praise. Brock (1988) found that Ford’s policy of limited amnesty was largely successful because the policy was consistent with Ford’s inaugural address, which preached reconciliation and compromise. Further, Brock found that Ford successfully preempted attacks on his amnesty policy by bolstering his role as a statesman. Ford also declared

that he, the Congress, and the American people had important work to do. This observation by Brock suggests that Brock also engaged in transcendence.

Brock (1988) contrasted Ford's success in resolving Nixon's unfinished Vietnam policy with Ford's failure in justifying his pardon of Nixon. Brock wrote that Ford had failed to defend his pardon of Nixon because he explained the pardon as a benefit for Nixon and his family as individuals. "By focusing on the actions necessary to move the country forward, Ford might have been able to use national interest to gain transcendence above the interest of any individual or group to fulfill this standard of statesmanship. Thus, the legal-moral dichotomy could have been subordinated to expediency for the nation" (Brock, 1988, p. 236). Brock is asserting here that Ford failed to effectively use transcendence as a strategy. If Obama employs transcendence, one way of evaluating the effectiveness of that strategy will be to determine whether or not he successfully established a higher national interest (e.g., the economic crisis) than attacks on his character.

During the 1976 presidential campaign, the aftermath of the Watergate scandal still poisoned the political culture. Gold (1978) analyzed the efforts by both Ford and (then Governor) Carter to defend their character in an atmosphere of distrust. As with most other presidential apologia, Ford and Carter frequently used forms of denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (Gold, 1978). However, Gold observed that in 1976, Ford and Carter took measures to manipulate the situation in which they repaired their images so as not to draw close comparisons to the Watergate legacy.

In one example, Ford was able to change the rhetorical situation to his advantage. The President volunteered to appear before a Congressional committee, thus

differentiating himself from Nixon, whom had refused to appear in such a capacity (Gold, 1978). Further though, Ford's cordial appearance in front of a House committee lessened the likelihood of comparisons to Nixon's television addresses.

In other examples, the candidates' efforts to alter the rhetorical circumstances met with less success. Wary of being labeled dishonest like Nixon, Carter and Ford were careful "to the point of absurdity" not to admit mistakes (Gold, 1978, p. 315). Carter responded with overly indignant rebuttals to seemingly insignificant media attacks that he had "fibbed"; he also resorted to ad hominem when it was suggested he "talked out of both sides of his mouth, just like any other politician" (Gold, 1978, p. 311). Ford was also hyper-sensitive to his own errors. When he famously misspoke about the autonomy of Poland, he made so many attempts to correct the misstatement that he actually attracted greater attention to the mistake and ultimately raised the question "of whether he was sufficiently competent and informed to be President of the United States" (Gold, 1978, p. 313). Despite these strategic errors, Gold (1978) concluded that, during the 1976 campaign, both Ford and Carter had succeeded in differentiating their defenses from those of Nixon, citing as evidence polls that "rated both Ford and Carter highly trustworthy" (p. 316).

In the current investigation, will Obama be wary of repeating mistakes made by recent candidates? For example, wary of being labeled a "flip-flopper" as John Kerry was, will Obama be more consistent in his defenses? Relevant to *kairos*, will Obama's responses be more timely or immediate than those of Kerry?

*Reagan.* In terms of scandals, Ronald Reagan's presidency is most remembered for its involvement in the Iran-Contra affair. Heisey (1988) examined Reagan's *apologia*

regarding this event. More specifically, Heisey analyzed eight different rhetorical exchanges between Reagan and his attackers in the media, the Congress, and the electorate. Reagan faced attacks on his policy regarding the Iran-Contra affair, his character (e.g., issues of honesty, accusations of cover up), his competence, and his privilege to remain president. In his analysis, Heisey detected an evolution in Reagan's *apologia* over the course of the controversy. Initially, Reagan attempted to deny all illegal activity. Additionally, Heisey identified the use of strategies he called mitigation and purification in Reagan's attempts to justify engaging Iran in dialogue. Heisey (1988) concluded that these strategies were ineffective and further charged that the defense "was so inadequate that it weakened his credibility" (p. 286) and led to suggestions "that the institution of the presidency was at stake" (p. 289).

Realizing these strategies were not effective at repairing his image, Reagan later attempted to conceal the attacked policies beneath "a cloak of good intentions" (Heisey, 1988, p. 289). Reagan also employed transcendence in his 1987 State of the Union address in which he attempted to "focus his audience's attention to the future and away from the troublesome past" Heisey, 1988, p. 291). Reagan also took corrective action by appointing a new chief of staff and a new director for the CIA. Finally, in an address to the nation, Reagan reiterated his good intentions, but accepted responsibility for what had happened, declaring, "This happened on my watch" (Heisey, 1988, p. 294).

Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici (1991) also examined Reagan's defenses for the Iran-Contra affair. Extending Heisey's work, Benoit et al. developed a typology of defensive strategies that they used to more thoroughly analyze and interpret the strategies used by Reagan in defending his actions connected to the Iran-Contra affair. Like Heisey, Benoit



et al. (1991) analyzed Reagan's Iran-Contra discourse chronologically, detecting an evolution in the President's *apologia*. However, Benoit et al. pointed out that the general strategies of denial, evasion of responsibility, and absence of mortification were relatively consistent. For Benoit et al. (1991), the evolution in strategy takes place within the specific variants of each general strategy. For example, Benoit et al. observed that although Reagan constantly employed denial, "the objects of the denial change dramatically over time" (1991, p. 286). Ultimately, these variants prompted the authors to identify three phases of Reagan's defensive discourse: "First, he denies that arms had been traded for hostages. Second, he attempts to justify his actions on the basis of his good intentions. Finally—and most effectively—he admits wrongdoing and announces action to correct the causes of the problem" (Benoit et al., 1991, p. 290).

Beyond the conclusions reached regarding Reagan specifically, Benoit et al. (1991) provide an important theoretical development in the final lines of the essay:

Thus, the general strategies for image restoration are useful for focusing the critic's attention, for guiding the critical analysis of the discourse. Yet the strategies as actually embodied in the discourse remain more important than the abstract categories themselves. No matter how useful a theory is in helping critics to understand and illuminate the discourse, critics ultimately must focus their attention on the discourse itself, as we have done here in assessing Reagan's defensive discourse on the Iran-Contra affair. (p. 291)

In other words, Benoit and his colleagues were arguing that although typologies provide a useful way of approaching a discursive analysis, the text, itself, remains the most important element of an analysis of *apologia*.

The Iran-Contra affair was not the only time that Reagan responded to attacks on his actions and character. Friedenberg (1988) analyzed Reagan's defensive discourse following public criticism of the President's planned visit to a West German military cemetery in Bitburg. The announced visit was controversial primarily because the Bitburg cemetery included the graves of SS troops, men who had volunteered to carry out wartime atrocities identified as criminal by the Nuremberg tribunal. Most notable among the atrocities of SS troops was that they were responsible for the administration and guarding of the German concentration camps. Further, the SS graves at Bitburg were those of a unit accused of killing over 600 civilians and 100 American prisoners of war (Friedenberg, 1988). Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor, writer, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, provided the most specific *kategoria*, charging that Reagan's plan to lay a wreath at the cemetery would be "an act of homage to Nazi Germany and the SS" and evidence that the nation's leaders "may have forgotten the lessons of the holocaust" (Friedenberg, 1988, p. 270).

Friedenberg identified two significant phases of Reagan's *apologia*. First, Reagan initially responded to the charges during a press conference by attempting to depict the events as out of his control. In the press conference, Reagan also denied the intentions charged by Wiesel and sought to redefine the act of laying the wreath not as homage but as reconciliation. Finally, Friedenberg (1988) observed that Reagan attempted to bolster his image by announcing plans to visit the site of a concentration camp at Dachau.

The second phase of Reagan's *apologia* took place when he delivered an official address immediately after visiting the cemetery at Bitburg. Friedenberg (1988) found that Reagan had, again, attempted to define the wreath-laying as reconciliatory, rather

than honorary and had stressed that reconciliation was not equal to forgetting. Reagan also bolstered the importance of freedom, identifying himself with the cause of freedom fighters. Friedenberg (1988) concluded that although Wiesel and others felt that their objections had gone unanswered, the President had been somewhat successful in minimizing the damage. Friedenberg saw the speech at Bitburg as an improvement upon the earlier press conference, and cited polling information that suggested Bitburg had not hurt the President's public image overall. In addition to using common *apologia* strategies such as denial, redefinition, and bolstering, Friedenberg (1988) also cited Reagan's use of time as a factor in his ability "to downplay the entire controversy" (p. 276). Timing was critical in this rhetorical situation first, because the controversy had diminished somewhat between the initial accusations and the actual wreath-laying. Secondly, Reagan's address immediately after the wreath-laying also demonstrated carefully calculated timing. Thus, this study provides further evidence that the timing of an *apologia* should be an important consideration.

*Clinton.* Although studies of Nixon's image repair efforts outnumber those of Clinton, it could easily be argued that Clinton, in his presidency, dealt with more crises. Indeed, Blaney and Benoit (2001) identified five different scandals that Clinton responded to with image restoration discourse (not counting the additional scandals, which Clinton's surrogates addressed). However, just as the bulk of the Nixon studies focused their sights on Watergate, most of the Clinton studies focus on the President's affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. As with Nixon's primetime television resignation address, Clinton's address to the nation attracted the attention of multiple scholars.

In his analysis of Clinton's August 17, 1998 speech, Simons' (2000) sought to make his analysis of Clinton's speech unique from other presidential *apologia* studies. Arguing that the genre of *apologia* too often neglected analysis of the rhetorical situation, Simons (2000) called for what he termed a "dilemma-centered analysis" (p. 438). Simons (2000) criticized other rhetorical critics such as Benoit for over-relying on classifications and suggested that it was not very helpful "to learn that a given strategy works some of the time" (p. 440). Simons used excerpts from CRTNET debates to point out how other scholars had, in his opinion, failed to consider important situational factors. However, after a lengthy analysis employing the very typologies he had earlier decried, Simons simply suggested that Clinton should have employed corrective action, neglecting to offer any rationale for that choice other than that was what Kathleen Jamieson had suggested to Simons in private.

In addition to analyzing Clinton's discourse on the Lewinsky affair, Blaney and Benoit (2001) also examined the President's image repair efforts on the subject of his draft record, his alleged affair with Gennifer Flowers, questions about his marijuana use, and the Whitewater real estate scandal. In responding to accusations that Clinton had evaded the Vietnam draft, the President primarily denied and bolstered but also, argued defeasibility, differentiated, claimed good intentions and transcendence, minimized, and attacked his accusers. The draft dodging attacks first arose during the 1992 Democratic primary, and Blaney and Benoit (2001) concluded that Clinton had used the named strategies effectively enough to accomplish viability as a candidate early on in the election process.

In the case of the Gennifer Flowers scandal, Clinton primarily used simple denial and transcendence to deflect charges of adultery but also employed the strategies of bolstering, attacking the accuser, and differentiation (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). Again, the critics found that Clinton had repaired his image enough to get elected. Blaney and Benoit (2001) classified Clinton's infamous declaration that he had smoked but not inhaled marijuana as minimization and simple denial. Blaney and Benoit concluded that even though voters claimed that the discourse had neither a positive or negative impact on their perceptions of Clinton, in general this excuse was "laughable" and "did more to damage than repair his image" (2001, p. 131). Responding to accusations of impropriety in the Whitewater real estate development, Clinton used simple denial, bolstering, transcendence, and, to lesser degrees, shifting the blame, corrective action, differentiation, attacking his accusers, mortification, defeasibility, and minimization (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). Again, Blaney and Benoit concluded that the discourse was ultimately effective, as Clinton was reelected and most voters did not consider the issue to be of immediate importance.

Blaney and Benoit (2001) identified two different phases of Clinton's image repair discourse in the matter of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. In the first stage, Clinton predominantly denied but also used bolstering and transcendence, all with great success. This discourse was proven effective because there was little change in Clinton's personal approval ratings, and the accusations, for the time, failed to gain traction. The second phase of Clinton's Lewinsky discourse was ushered in by the revelation that there was physical evidence of a sexual relationship between Clinton and his intern. Facing these new challenges, Clinton adjusted his strategy somewhat and addressed the nation on

August 17, 1998. Clinton now used mortification, good intentions, minimization, attacking the accuser, transcendence, corrective action, and denial. Blaney and Benoit found that Clinton's mortification was appropriate but had lacked humility and was weakened by attempts to transcend and attack accusers. As evidence of the overall failure of the August 17 speech, personal favorability ratings of Clinton dropped drastically.

The critics found that Clinton's image repair discourse did not strike the proper chord until nearly a month later at the September 11 White House Prayer Breakfast. In his remarks at that event, Clinton used primarily mortification and corrective action, and to lesser degrees, transcendence, bolstering, differentiation, and attacking the accuser (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). As evidence of Clinton's ultimate success, the authors observed that not only was Clinton not convicted but that in the 1998 midterm elections, opposing Republicans failed to gain a seat in the U.S. Senate and, bucking historical trends, actually lost seats in the House of Representatives.

Blaney and Benoit (2001) made a number of contributions to the study of political *apologia*. Interestingly, in each of the Clinton speech sets, Blaney and Benoit (2001) found that transcendence was a consistent strategy. Additionally, they found that, as with previous studies Clinton's most successful defense was the combination of corrective action and mortification. Plus, the Blaney and Benoit (2001) found that Clinton made deft use of a "victimization" (p. 136) variation of attacking the accuser. It will be interesting to see if Obama's strategies mirror Clinton's defenses. Further, Blaney and Benoit (2001) found that Clinton made frequent use of surrogates to deliver his *apologia*;

however, the authors found that each of these surrogates failed. Will Obama use surrogates? Will Obama's surrogates be more successful than Clinton's?

Kramer and Olson (2002) introduced the idea of a "progressive *apologia*" to explain Clinton's survival of the Lewinsky scandal. Specifically, the authors found that Clinton had strategically progressed through the four stases of fact, definition, jurisdiction, and quality over the course of three distinct stages of his over year-long defense. Clinton began with a technical denial, minimizing the amount of information and details and in doing so, giving the impression of a general denial while technically only denying a specific act. In the second stage, having established certain technical denials, the President specifically defined the terms of his guilt. Further, Clinton was later able to limit the jurisdiction under which he would be investigated and judged (Kramer & Olson, 2002). Finally, in the third stage, Clinton's *apologia* focused on the stasis of quality, leading the audience to question the importance of the charges in the context of the other issues facing the nation. Ultimately, the authors concluded that "Clinton's three different *apologia* stages, each emphasizing a distinct stasis or pair of stases without totally ceding the others, improved his chances for surviving the Lewinsky scandal" (Kramer & Olson, 2002, pp. 364-365). This finding provides further evidence that a defense strategy may successfully evolve over the life of the crisis.

Koesten and Rowland (2004) used Clinton's discourse as a case study to demonstrate what the authors identified as a subgenre of *apologia*: atonement rhetoric (see above). Koesten and Rowland (2004) identify five characteristics that make atonement rhetoric different from other *apologia* discourse: (1) recognition of wrongdoing and a request for forgiveness; (2) "a thorough examination of the sinful act

and... a changed attitude or policy to prevent future wrong-doing” (p. 73); (3) efforts to change “the present and future” (p. 73); (4) mortification; and (5) a public confession. The authors identified the presence of these characteristics in two different episodes of Clinton’s rhetoric. First, Clinton used atonement rhetoric on behalf of the country in apologizing for the Tuskegee syphilis study. Koesten and Rowland (2004) found that Clinton’s proposed plans of action (including a memorial, increased community involvement, and a strengthening in bioethics training) was a key component of this rhetoric.

In analyzing Clinton’s atonement rhetoric during the Lewinsky scandal, Koesten and Rowland (2004) found, as other scholars had, that the President’s discourse consisted of multiple messages on various occasions. The Koesten and Rowland study included the address to the nation on August 17, 1998, a speech in Oak Bluff, Massachusetts on August 28, and the September 11 Prayer Breakfast. In the August 17 speech, Clinton’s use of denial, differentiation, bolstering, transcendence, and accusation weakened his atonement. The August 28 speech failed because Clinton did not identify who he was asking to forgive him or how he would change his ways (Koesten & Rowland, 2004). The authors concluded that it was not until the September 11 speech that Clinton “offered his first complete use of the rhetoric of atonement” (Koesten & Rowland, 2004, p. 80), meaning that all five of the atonement characteristics were present in this speech set. Koesten and Rowland offer an interesting variation on other *apologia* theories. However, as discussed above, their strategies seem to needlessly overlap with Benoit’s (1995) theory of image repair.



*Bush.* In 2003 and 2004, the Democratic field of presidential candidates leveled numerous attacks against George W. Bush for the President's actions during his first term. On February 8, 2004, Bush appeared on *Meet the Press* to respond to the two central accusations; that the invasion of Iraq was unjustified and that Bush's policies had damaged the economy (Benoit, 2006a). Benoit (2006a) analyzed Bush's use of image repair strategies in the television appearance. Responding to accusations about Iraq, Bush denied that he had misled the country about pre-war intelligence supporting Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Bush also used transcendence to argue that ultimately it did not matter that there were no WMD because removing the dangerous Saddam Hussein was important regardless. When asked why the United States does not remove other dangerous leaders from power, Bush attempted to differentiate Hussein from other world leaders (Benoit, 2006a). Further, Bush used defeasibility to suggest that there may have been WMD in Iraq but that if Hussein had moved or destroyed them, there was no way for Bush to prove their existence. The President also employed corrective action, highlighting a commission he had created to investigate the failures of the United States intelligence community (Benoit, 2006a).

Responding to the charge that the economy had suffered as a result of his policies, Bush first shifted the blame, claiming that the economic woes had actually started before his term began (Benoit, 2006a). Bush also used defeasibility, arguing that there were "three other causes of economic problems for which he cannot be held responsible: corporate scandals, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the war in Iraq" (Benoit, 2006a, p. 297). The President then brought up his tax cuts as a form of corrective action, arguing that he had taken steps to fix the problem and offering evidence that the unemployment

rate had fallen since the introduction of his tax cuts. Benoit (2006a) also found that, challenged that the tax cuts had not created as many jobs as he had promised, Bush used a form of denial by suggesting that it was untrue “that his tax cuts would never create jobs” (p. 297). Bush again denied responsibility for the budget deficit, claiming that his five year plan had not had enough time to work. He also shifted blame to the Congress by noting that they too must act. Finally, Bush again used defeasibility to suggest that there were other factors such as Medicare, Social Security, and the war that were “beyond his control” (Benoit, 2006a, p. 298).

Evaluating Bush’s discourse, Benoit (2006a) concluded that the strategy of framing himself as a war president, subject to different expectations was potentially good but incomplete, since Bush had not directly addressed voters’ economic fears. Benoit (2006a) was also quite critical of Bush’s use of defeasibility:

It is also important to realize that defeasibility is a very risky strategy for incumbents; lack of information or power may serve as an excuse, but it may raise doubts about whether the incumbent is likely to do better if given a second term in office. (p. 303)

Benoit (2006a) ultimately concluded that Bush’s poor performance on *Meet the Press* had not cost him the election. However, Benoit (2006a) raised serious questions about the morality of Bush’s shifting justifications and noted that public opinion polling suggested that Bush would have lost had the election been held at the time of his image repair discourse on *Meet the Press*.

Bush still found himself on the defensive when he held the third primetime press conference of his presidency on April 13, 2004. Benoit (2006b) analyzed Bush’s image

repair discourse in the press conference, focusing on the President's responses to attacks that he had lied about WMD, that he had not sought the help of U.S. allies in the invasion of Iraq, and that he had no Iraq exit strategy. In his opening remarks, Bush used transcendence and bolstering (Benoit, 2006b). He employed transcendence by arguing that the danger of Saddam Hussein possessing WMD was too great a risk to ignore. Bush also argued that removing an evil man from power and bringing freedom to the people of Iraq were worth the costs of the war. Bush also bolstered his resolve to see the war through and his concern for the American troops in harm's way (Benoit, 2006b). In the second segment of the press conference, Benoit (2006b) found that in responding to reporters' questions, Bush denied any suggestion that he had made mistakes in his execution of the war. He also furthered his use of transcendence and defeasibility. Bush also denied any responsibility for the events of September 11, 2001, and attempted to shift the Blame to Osama bin Laden (Benoit, 2006b).

Benoit (2006b) argued that Bush's use of transcendence was ineffectual because (1) the idea that Saddam was evil did not negate the administration's claim that Iraq had WMD, and (2) Bush never explained why the U.S. should have fought to win freedom for the people of Iraq and not the people in the rest of the world living under oppressive regimes. Benoit acknowledged that Bush's use of bolstering his compassion for U.S. soldiers was likely well received by half the audience but regarded as a sign of stubbornness by the rest of the audience. Further, Benoit (2006b) criticized Bush's refusal "to admit any mistakes, to concede any responsibility, or to apologize" (p. 142). Overall, Benoit (2006b) found that, based on opinion polls, the response to Bush's press

conference discourse was largely split along partisan lines and that “at best he temporarily halted his slide in the polls without reversing his recent losses” (p. 142).

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, President Bush and his appointees in the Federal Emergency Management Agency faced heavy criticism for their delayed and inadequate responses to the devastation left by the storm. Using Benoit’s Image Repair Theory (1995a), Liu (2007) analyzed Bush’s image repair discourse in the nine Katrina speeches he delivered between August 31, 2006 and January 12, 2006. Liu found that Bush evaded responsibility by pointing out that Katrina was an accident and by using defeasibility to argue that FEMA was not able to deal with such an extraordinary storm. Bush also used bolstering to highlight the good things the government was doing in response and compensation by promising financial incentives for the areas affected by the storm (Liu, 2007). Liu also found that Bush shifted the blame, suggesting that Louisiana and Mississippi would have to bear some of the burden of reconstruction. Finally, Bush used mortification, admitting that the federal government had failed the victims of Katrina and employed corrective action, promising a review of current and future emergency response plans (Liu, 2007).

To evaluate the effectiveness of Bush’s image repair discourse, Liu (2007) content analyzed 50 articles from the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Times Picayune*, and the *Sun Herald* and found that news reporting, editorials, and letters to the editor were all largely negative in their assessment of Bush’s Katrina speeches. She suggested that Bush’s rhetoric may have been ineffective because of the contradictory nature of some of the strategies he combined such as evasion of responsibility and mortification. Liu (2007) also speculated that Bush’s discourse may have been more

effective had he more frequently incorporated mortification, noting that only two of the nine speeches used that strategy.

Benoit and Henson (2009) also analyzed Bush's Katrina discourse using Image Repair Theory. Focusing on just one of the nine Katrina speeches analyzed by Liu, Benoit and Henson found that Bush used bolstering, defeasibility, and corrective action in his September 15, 2006 speech from Jackson Square in New Orleans.

Bush bolstered by talking about his faith and his good character. Bush also bolstered himself by proclaiming his compassion for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. In addition to the bolstering in his oral arguments, Benoit and Henson (2009) also found that Bush used visual bolstering, noting that the setting of the speech in a park clear of debris suggested that clean-up efforts were succeeding and that Bush's actual presence in New Orleans (rather than Washington) was an attempt to further demonstrate the President's compassion and involvement in the response.

Benoit and Henson (2009) also found that Bush used corrective action in three separate appeals that Bush used to explain what the federal government was doing and would be doing in response to the hurricane and subsequent flooding. Bush stated that he had requested funds from congress for disaster relief and discussed the actions being carried out by various federal agencies. Bush also promised legislation to rebuild the gulf coast, including incentives for job creation and training. The third corrective action Bush provided was a pledge to improve future disaster responses and a commitment not to repeat the mistakes made in responding to Katrina.

The authors found that Bush also used defeasibility, arguing that Katrina was an extraordinary natural disaster, for which the nation's infrastructure and response

mechanisms were not adequately equipped. Further, Bush argued that he did not have the authority to respond as should have (Benoit & Henson, 2009).

Benoit and Henson (2009) found Bush's use of bolstering to be ineffectual, arguing that any concern or compassion that Bush tried to claim could be countered by questions of why it took such a caring and compassionate person so long to respond to the crisis. The researchers found that Bush's use of the strategy of defeasibility was also ineffective as "anyone who had even glanced at the news in the days leading up to the disaster knew Katrina was a very powerful hurricane that was headed for the New Orleans area" (Benoit & Henson, 2009, p. 44). Further, Benoit and Henson (2009) claim that it was potentially dangerous for Bush to claim helplessness and weaken the office of the president. Regarding Bush's employ of corrective action, Benoit and Henson (2009) acknowledged that generally, this is an appropriate strategy for rhetors to use since audiences appreciate resolved problems. However, the researchers argued that Bush's corrective action was questionable because many of the actions he discussed were merely proposals or ideas and not actual corrective actions that had already been taken. Further, Benoit and Henson (2009) note that many of the corrective actions that Bush mentioned were not his to claim, suggesting that he may have been perceived as taking credit for the commendable actions of others.

Benoit and Henson (2009) suggested that Bush might have effectively made use of shifting the blame by scapegoating FEMA head, Michael Brown. Further, like Liu (2007), Benoit and Henson argue that Bush might have been more successful in his image repair efforts had he engaged in mortification. However, Benoit and Henson (2009) provide multiple examples from Bush's presidency to suggest that he had an

aversion to admitting wrong-doing. Therefore, mortification may not have been an option for Bush, since he would have had to admit mistakes such as mishandling of the Katrina response and even the mistake of appointing Brown to head FEMA (Benoit & Henson, 2009).

*Vice presidents.* Compared to analyses of sitting presidents, there are relatively few analyses of presidential candidates (although a few notable examples are offered in this review). Aside from reviews of Nixon's so-called "Checkers speech" (see above), Jensen's (1988) analysis of Geraldine Ferraro's image repair efforts is the only analysis of a vice presidential candidate. Ferraro made history during the 1984 campaign as the first woman to receive a major party nomination for vice president. The nomination made her a target for numerous media attacks regarding her personal finances as well as attacks from the Catholic church regarding her stance on abortion (Jensen, 1988).

Ferraro was repeatedly criticized by members of the media for failing to fully disclose records of her personal finances. When she finally did disclose the documents, she was further criticized for omitting details about her husband's business dealings (Jensen, 1988). Ferraro responded to the attacks during a press conference, in which she faced her accusers in the media. Jensen (1988) offered excerpts from media reports on the press conference to support his conclusion that Ferraro was largely successful in persuading the public that she was innocent of financial impropriety.

As a practicing Catholic, Ferraro also faced attacks from members of the Catholic church for her stances on abortion issues. Specifically, church officials such as Archbishop O'Connor and Bishop Law argued that Ferraro had misrepresented the Church's position on abortion by suggesting that she could support abortion rights and

still declare herself to be a practicing Catholic (Jensen, 1988). Further, Jensen wrote that Ferraro's public campaign appearances were constantly plagued by hecklers and antiabortion protesters. Ferraro responded to these attacks in a press conference, invoking John F. Kennedy, as she declared that "I do not speak for my Church in public matters, and the Church does not speak for me.' That's exactly, my position today" (Jensen, 1988, p. 261). Jensen also notes that "Ferraro believed he [O'Connor] was ignoring the real suffering of the living while expressing concern for potential problems of the unborn" (Jensen, 1988, p. 261). Jensen concluded that Ferraro had unsuccessfully made ill-fated attempts to repair her image with attackers who had immovable positions. As evidence of the failed *apologia*, he observed, "Ferraro's image was so tainted that she decided not to run for the U.S. Senate in 1986.

Jensen's (1988) analysis provided a relatively unique case study of the *apologia* of a vice presidential candidate. Further, numerous excerpts from news coverage of the controversy provide examples of media attacks as well as evidence of how the *apologia* were received. However, in the cases of both the financial records and the abortion debate, Jensen failed to provide extensive examples of the actual *apologia*. Further, the analysis made no attempt to interpret or classify individual strategies of *apologia*. Although this study makes contributions to research on political *apologia*, an analysis of individual strategies would have further advanced the literature.

*Non-presidential political applications.* Although studies of presidential image repair far outweigh non-presidential studies, there are a few notable exceptions. Multiple studies (Benoit, 1988; Butler, 1972; Ling, 1970) have examined the discourse of Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy following the death of Mary Jo Kopechne. Kennedy had left a



Chappaquiddick party to drive Kopechne home, but the car went off a bridge, killing Kopechne. Since he had been the last person to see Kopechne alive and since he had failed to report the accident until the following morning after the car and Kopechne's body had already been found, Kennedy's involvement in the accident was in question. A review of the studies by Benoit (1988) and Butler (1972) follow. However, Ling's (1970) study was not included because he conducted a Pentadic analysis of Kennedy's rhetoric, rather than focusing on the *apologia*.

Benoit (1988) identified four questions that might have determined the future of Senator Kennedy's political career:

1. Was Kennedy responsible for the accident (and therefore Miss Kopechne's death)?
2. Were Kennedy and Kopechne intoxicated and/or engaged in immoral activities during or prior to the accident?
3. Why did Kennedy fail to report the accident and resulting death to the police immediately?
4. Was Kennedy fit to hold public office? (Benoit, 1988, p. 189)

Kennedy sought to answer these questions in a televised address.

Kennedy's first defense was to plead guilty to the crime of leaving the scene of an accident. Kennedy also expressed sorrow over Kopechne's death, creating the perception among the audience of an apology or acceptance of guilt where there was none. Benoit argued that in doing so, not only was Kennedy able to mortify himself but also possibly avoided further attacks regarding his responsibility for the accident. And, although Kennedy did, in fact, declare that he would not evade responsibility, he went on to explain how unsafe driving conditions, including a narrow bridge lacking guard rails and lighting and an unsafe curve to the road contributed to the accident. Thus, Benoit (1988)

observes, “He appeared to deny this scenic causality while actually, but subtly, affirming it” (p. 191). Kennedy further shifted the blame by mentioning a supposed curse on his family.

Kennedy also used simple denial in responding to the accusations that he had been intoxicated and that he had been involved in other immoral activities with Kopechne (Benoit, 1988). He flatly denied that he was under the influence of alcohol, and he also directly denied any accusations of “a private relationship” (Benoit, 1988, p. 192). Benoit (1988) further observed that Kennedy not only denied the character attacks but also attacked his accusers for speculating about the immorality of “the unfortunate victim of the tragedy as well as the other girls” (p. 192). Thus, much as Hugh Grant, decades later, was able to take the high ground by defending the character of his embarrassed girlfriend, Kennedy was able to assume the moral high ground by defending the character of a dead woman.

In judging the effectiveness of Kennedy’s speech, Benoit concluded that Kennedy had successfully repaired his image enough to save his senate seat but not his presidential aspirations (1988). He cited as evidence the fact that Kennedy received ten times more favorable than unfavorable messages at his Congressional office and that Massachusetts and national polls showed only minimal losses in favorability. Benoit also offered as evidence the fact that Kennedy was able to keep his Senate seat.

Butler (1972) sought to test Rosenfield’s four *apologia* constants (see above) using Kennedy’s Chappaquiddick discourse. Butler found that two of Rosenfield’s constants held true in that (1) the middle third of Kennedy’s speech contained many facts, and (2) Kennedy repeated many statements in his address that he had already delivered to

the press. However, Kennedy's speech broke from Rosenfield's constants first because the senator's comments were not part of a brief controversy but actually "instilled new energy in his critics" (Butler, 1972, p. 283). Also, unlike Truman and Nixon in Rosenfield's analysis, Kennedy did not attack his accusers because he had no explicit accusers (Butler, 1972).

In addition to disproving two of Rosenfield's constants, Kennedy's speech was also met with much greater public skepticism compared to the addresses by Truman and Nixon. Butler (1972) suggested four reasons for the differences in the discourse and the differences in the public response. First, Butler noted that television was much more common in 1969 than in the 1950's. Second, increased familiarity with the medium also bred more sophisticated viewers. Third, Kennedy's lack of a clearly delineated enemy removed the likelihood of the senator attacking his accusers. Finally, Butler (1972) observed that Kennedy had failed to appeal to Americans' values in the way that McGuckin (see above) had found Nixon to have successfully appealed in the Checkers speech. Butler (1972) concluded by predicting that that "the form of the *apologia* will probably change little," but that "the effects of the *apologia* will doubtless never again be so startling as in 1952 [for Nixon] and 1953 [for Truman]" (p. 289).

Gary Condit was another U.S. Congressman whose image was damaged after he came under suspicion for wrong-doing involving a young woman. In 2001, Chandra Levy, a Washington intern, disappeared and was later found dead in the city's Rock Creek Park. Suspicions of Condit's involvement in her disappearance arose after information emerged suggesting that he had been romantically involved with Levy. Condit would subsequently face image attacks from police investigating the missing

person report, Levy's family, and the media, including calls from his hometown newspaper to resign (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). To respond to these threats to his image, Condit sent a letter to the people of his district and appeared in a televised interview on ABC's "PrimeTime," hosted by Connie Chung.

In Condit's letter to his constituents, he employed simple denial, shifting the blame, bolstering, attacking one's accuser, and transcendence (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). He denied that he had not cooperated with the FBI and the police who were investigating the crime. He also shifted blame to the neighborhood Levy had disappeared from, suggesting that her fate might be unfortunate but common. Condit's letter also attempted to bolster his image with his constituents by reminding them of the work he had done for them in the past and by announcing a reward he had established for Levy. Condit also attacked his accusers in the media, labeling them as tabloids and suggesting they did not have the facts straight. Finally, Condit attempted the strategy of transcendence by claiming that his personal affairs were above the concern of the public and thus not subject to scrutiny (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004).

Condit's television interview with Chung also demonstrated attempts to employ denial, along with differentiation, attacking one's accuser, and refusing to answer. Condit denied knowledge of details about Levy's appearance, denied romantic involvement or attraction to Levy, denied intentions to leave his wife, and denied that he had not cooperated with investigators (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). Condit also attempted to reduce the offensiveness of his events by claiming that Levy may have left phone messages but that she never spoke to him via phone on the day of her disappearance. He also attempted to differentiate his own statements from those of his lawyers and

attempted to differentiate the meaning of discarded gifts he had received from another woman who was not his wife (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). Condit also attacked his accusers during the television appearance by questioning their motives and questioning their understanding of conversations (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). Finally, Len-Rios and Benoit (2004) reported that Condit used another strategy not generally regarded as a form of image repair: refusal to answer. In multiple instances, they found that Condit would issue responses that did not answer the questions posed by Chung.

Len-Rios and Benoit (2004) did not find Condit's image repair strategies to be effective. In fact, they found his denials to be "anything but an effective defense" (2004, p. 103). Further, they concluded that Condit's refusal to apologize for anything or admit any wrongdoing was a great blunder. As evidence for the failure of Condit's strategies, the authors offered polling data that showed overwhelming majorities "thought he was hiding something" and "believed he was motivated more by concern for his career than concern for Levy" (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004, p. 103).

The Condit study provides additional evidence for the negative ramifications of refusing to concede any wrong-doing. Further, Condit's disastrous appearance in the Chung interview demonstrates the danger of (1) not properly preparing for a public defense, and (2) delivering a live, uncontrolled defense.

### *Religious Applications*

As previously stated, Jensen's (1988) analysis of Geraldine Ferraro's *apologia* provided a relatively rare scholarly analysis of a vice presidential candidate. In addition, the Ferraro case, like Henry's (1988) analysis of Kennedy's *apologia*, also provides an example of rhetorical attacks and defenses in a religious context. Although under-

represented in the literature compared to political and corporate examples, scholarship on religious *apologia* also bears discussion. Rather than repeating the previous reviews of the intersection of political and religious *apologia*, this section will focus on the defensive discourse of religious figures and religious groups.

Blaney and Benoit (1997) analyzed the image repair discourse of Jesus in the Gospel of John. They identified six attacks made against Jesus, including: attacks by the disciples on Jesus' religious rigidity, attacks by Pharisees who challenged Jesus' testimony for himself, attacks for violating law by performing a healing on the Sabbath, accusations that Jesus "disrespected civil authorities," claims that Jesus was inflicted with demonic possession, and accusations of blasphemy based on Jesus' claim to be the Son of God (Blaney & Benoit, 1997, p. 26).

The authors found that Jesus responded to the claims of rigidity in religious observance and attacks on his self-testimony by employing transcendence (Blaney & Benoit, 1997). Jesus also used transcendence, along with minimization, to reply to accusations that he violated the Sabbath (Blaney & Benoit, 1997). In defense against attacks that Jesus had disrespected authorities, Jesus again used transcendence, along with the strategies of simple denial and attacking the accuser. Jesus also used simple denial to refute the suggestion that he was possessed by a demon (Blaney & Benoit, 1997).

Blaney and Benoit (1997) argue that the accusation of blasphemy was the most serious and most frequent attack (they identify four separate instances) in the Gospel of John. In responding to this attack, the critics found that Jesus attacked his accusers and used simple denial. Blaney and Benoit found each of these strategies to be appropriate

and effective. As evidence for this claim, they point out that Jesus' image repair strategies were effective enough to convince "the hundreds of millions who accept Jesus as the Son of God" (Blaney & Benoit, 1997, p. 30). Ultimately, Blaney and Benoit (1997) concluded that "transcendence can be an especially apt strategy for those who defend theological doctrines" (p. 30).

Using Benoit's theory of image repair discourse, Miller (2002) analyzed six separate cases of religious image repair discourse: Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Justin Martyr's defense of the Christian Church, Martin Luther's defense of his actions against the Catholic Church, Jimmy Swaggart's apology for sexual immorality, traditionalist responses to the Jesus Seminar, and the Southern Baptist Convention's defense of the "Article on the Family."

Analyzing Paul's letter to the Christian church in Galatia (located in Greece) Miller (2002) found that Paul used bolstering, attacked his accusers, and employed transcendence. Miller (2002) analyzed the image repair strategies used by Justin (Martyr) in two of his epistles, the *First* and *Second Apologies*, and found that the apologist used the strategies of simple denial, bolstering, attacking his accusers, and transcendence. Miller's (2002) review of Martin Luther's *apologia* speeches given before the Diet of Worms found that Luther used only two strategies, denial and transcendence. Miller (2002) suggested that the similarities among Paul, Justin, and Luther provide characteristics of "protestantic" Christian rhetoric (p. 64). These characteristics are the creation of distinctions between the beliefs of the rhetors and the practices of their accusers; the promotion of individual credibility, the transcendence of

the status quo, and the assumption that the judgment of God trumps all earthly laws (Miller, 2002).

In addition to the rhetoric of the three “historical apologists” (Paul, Justin Martyr, and Martin Luther) analyzed by Miller (2002), he also provides interpretation of the discourse of three sets of “contemporary” *apologia* (p. v). Miller found that Jimmy Swaggart used the strategies of mortification, bolstering, defeasibility, attacking accusers, and differentiation. Miller’s (2002) second study of contemporary religious apologists concerns not a single person but rather a discourse of attack and defense between two groups the Jesus seminar and “the traditionalists.” The Jesus Seminar is comprised of scholars who meet regularly to challenge the accuracy of biblical portrayals of Jesus of Nazareth. In his analysis of their discourse, Miller (2002) found that the traditionalists used denial, attacking accusers, differentiation, and transcendence. Miller’s (2002) third case study of contemporary religious *apologia* concerns the image repair rhetoric of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in response to attacks on the convention’s declaration that “A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband, even as the church willingly submits to the leadership of Christ” (p. 103). Miller (2002) found that the SBC employed the strategies of denial, bolstering, attacking accusers, differentiation, and transcendence.

Interpreting, as a whole, the findings of his six reviewed cases of religious image repair, Miller (2002) found it interesting that the three contemporary rhetors used differentiation, while none of the historical apologists employed that strategy. To explain this trend, Miller asserts that the contemporary rhetors were more apt to assume their audiences could accept an alternate view of reality than were their ancient counterparts.



Miller also comments on the use of transcendence, noting that this strategy's prominence (if not dominance) in all of the cases confirms the contention of Blaney and Benoit (1997) that transcendence is well-suited to religious *apologia*. More importantly though, Miller observes that the Christian apologists' use of transcendence was not only frequent but unique. Miller asserts that these instances of transcendence "were not simply broadening the scope of the issue or advocating a return to important matters, they were suggesting an entirely new worldview" (2002, p. 146). Although Miller contends that there are undeniable trends present in religious image repair, he refrains from declaring rules or prescriptions for the entire genre of religious *apologia*. Miller suggests that his analyses should serve as a broad foundation for further work in religious *apologia*, leaving room for studies of non-Christian *apologia* and comparative studies across religions.

Blaney (2009) furthered the application of Benoit's image repair theory to the context of religious *apologia* in his analysis of the rhetoric of Pope John Paul II in response to the sexual abuse crisis. In 2002, the Pope addressed the Cardinals of the United States in responses to accusations of widespread sexual abuse by priests and the Catholic hierarchy's alleged attempts to cover up the crisis. Blaney found that John Paul II primarily employed the strategy of mortification but also used the strategies of corrective action, bolstering, defeasibility, shifting blame, transcendence, and differentiation.

In evaluating the Pope's discourse, Blaney (2009) concluded that, with the exception of shifting the blame, the Pope's image repair strategies were well chosen and well executed. The strategies of mortification and corrective action were especially

effective. Further, Blaney found that the Pope was an ideal surrogate defender for the American Catholic hierarchy, since the Pope was seen as far more credible than the tainted American leadership.

I began this literature review by demonstrating the development of the rhetorical genre of *apologia*, including the theory of image repair and competing theories and typologies of apologetic discourse. I then provided a review of applications of image repair theory in corporate and celebrity contexts and a review of *apologia* studies in political and religious contexts. I now turn to a review of work regarding the idea of *kairos*, its importance to rhetoric in general, and its relevance to *apologia* specifically. I will conclude this chapter by summarizing the findings of *apologia* scholars and presenting this study's guiding research questions.

#### The Role of *Kairos* in *Apologia*

The rhetorical concept of *kairos*, first surfaced by the Sophists, gives a name to questions of timeliness and the opportune. In fact, the Greek word, *kairos*, in its literal translation can be taken to mean simply “opportune.” One of the first Sophists to take up the idea of *kairos* was the anonymous author of *Dissoi Logoi*, who makes the assertion in the text that “everything done at the right time is seemly and everything done at the wrong time is disgraceful” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990, p. 23). *Kairos* emerges here pointing out a contingency between truth and circumstances. Other Sophists, particularly Gorgias and Protagoras, applied *kairos* using a definition closer to that of the literal meaning of the word (the opportune). Protagoras was the first of the Sophists to point out the advantages of speeches using “the power of the opportune moment” (Poulakos, 1983, p. 60). In his essay, “Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric,” John Poulakos (1983)

not only identifies *kairos* as a major element of his Sophist definition, but in summing up the views of Gorgias and Protagoras, he makes the following observation: “Clearly, speaking involves a temporal [time related] choice. The choice is not whether to speak but whether to speak now; more precisely, it is whether now is the time to speak” (p. 60). Certainly, speeches of self-defense are subject to considerations of timing.

In the *Palamedes*, Gorgias demonstrated an extreme example of how *kairos* could be manipulated to form a defense (Poulakos, 2002). Applying *kairos*, Gorgias realized that unique occasions and audiences call for unique discourse. Accordingly, Gorgias abandoned the traditional options for defense: “Gorgias’ challenge then, is to avoid employing what is normatively typical because the typical in the form of the expected is the exact opposite of the unique in the form of the timely” (Poulakos, 2002, p. 91). In other words, Gorgias employed the unique bounds of the situation to create an unexpected (and thus more effective) defense.

Other significant writings on *kairos* come from Isocrates. Sipiora (2002) credits Isocrates with articulating the “theory of *kairos*” (p. 14). Isocrates was a student of both Gorgias and Socrates (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990), and this can be seen in his philosophy of rhetoric, which is somewhat of a compromise between Sophistic and Socratic thought. His views on *kairos* were no exception. Writing in *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates combined the Sophistic interpretation of the opportune moment and the Socratic interpretation of the opportune message: “oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment” (n.d./1956, p. 171). Later, in the same essay, Isocrates reinforced the importance of the occasion,

declaring that “not to miss what the occasion demands” was “the task of a vigorous and imaginative mind” (n.d./1956, pp. 173-175).

Jaeger (1965) summarized Isocrates’ perspective on *kairos*: “Perfect eloquence must be the individual expression of a single critical moment, a *kairos*, and its highest law is that it should be wholly appropriate. Only by observing these two rules can it succeed in being new and original” (p. 134). Isocrates built upon the ideas of Protagoras and Gorgias, but expanded upon them, placing *kairos* above both knowledge (*episteme*) and opinion (*doxa*) (Rummel, 1979). Isocrates didn’t disregard the concepts of knowledge and opinion. In fact he placed great importance upon them, particularly *doxa*, but he thought them irrelevant if not properly applied with respect to *kairos* (Rummel, 1979). Isocrates also broke with Gorgias’ interpretation of *kairos* as complete relativism (Kinneavy, 1986).

Isocrates also realized the strategic value of *kairos*. Isocrates knew well that “an individual or group that best understands the kairic dimensions of any particular issue has a distinct advantage over an adversary” (Sipiora, 2002, p. 13). Sipiora (2002) argued that Isocrates applied *kairos* in his speech of self-defense. Like Socrates, Isocrates was accused of corrupting the youth. In *Antidosis*, Isocrates defended himself and his school against these accusations and provided *kairos* as a rationale for his decision of which arguments to cite (Sipiora, 2002). In other words, Isocrates drew upon *kairos* in planning his defense.

Like Isocrates, Plato also rejected *kairos* as moral relativism but agreed with Gorgias that *kairos* should be the “cornerstone of rhetoric” (Kinneavy, 1986, p. 91). In the *Phaedrus*, Plato writes:

When he has acquired all this, and has added thereto a knowledge of the times for speaking and for keeping the silence, and has also distinguished the favorable occasions for brief speech or pitiful speech or intensity and all the classes of speech which he has learned, then, and not till then, will his art be fully and completely finished. (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990, p. 138)

As Kinneavy (1986) summed up, commenting on this excerpt, for Plato, “rhetorical thought becomes effective only at the moment of *kairos*” (p. 89). Thus, Gorgias, Protagoras, Isocrates, and Plato all saw *kairos* as essential to mastering the art of rhetoric. Should not studies of *apologia* rhetoric also take into account the influence of *kairos*?

Contemporary scholars have also analyzed the importance of *kairos* in discourse. Two of the more notable contributors to 20<sup>th</sup> century *kairos* theory are Paul Tillich (1936) and James L. Kinneavy (1986). Tillich sought to clarify the relationship between *logos* and *kairos*. *Logos* represents, for Tillich (1926/1936), what he calls the “methodical main line” (p. 129). *Logos*-based evaluations of right and wrong, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate, etc., are universal and timeless. *Kairos*-based evaluations, on the other hand, take into consideration historical or situational concerns. Tillich (1926/1936) refers to *kairos* as a “fateful moment of knowledge” (p. 175). However, this is not to suggest that *kairos* is derived purely from chance or fate. Instead, “Kairos then is not knowledge growing out of accidental arbitrary events of a period but out of the period’s basic significance” (Tillich, 1926/1936, p. 174). Thus, *kairos* is not arrived at randomly but is, instead, the natural and ideal knowledge of when and how to act as dictated by the historically formed situation. This idea clearly places importance on the situational factors influencing rhetoric. However, for Tillich, *kairos* seems to be more of

a constraint, bordering on determinism, rather than an opportunity for a rhetor to take advantage of a rhetorical situation.

Kinneavy (1986, 2002) provided a more encompassing definition of *kairos*: “the right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something” (1986, p. 80; 2002, p. 58). Drawing comparisons between *kairos* and Bitzer’s rhetorical situation, Kinneavy (1986) also argued that a modern term for *kairos* is “situational context” (p. 83). Kinneavy also contended that Burke’s pentad supports situational analysis. Ultimately, Kinneavy (1986) concluded that “some consideration in any rhetorical theory must be given to the issue raised by the concept of *kairos*—the appropriateness of the discourse to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and audience involved” (p. 84). Certainly, Kinneavy’s plea for consideration of *kairos* should be answered in analyses of *apologia*.

Bitzer (1968) implicitly, provided argument for the importance of analyzing the rhetorical situation (which Kinneavy (1986 linked to *kairos*) in discourses of *apologia*: “We need to understand that a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance” (p. 4). Without the utterance of *kategoria*, there is no need for *apologia*. Or, to paraphrase Benoit (1995a), if there is no undesirable act or risk to reputation, there is no need to employ image repair discourse.

Sullivan (1992) analyzed the New Testament proclamation rhetoric as a *kairotic* form, arguing for the importance of timing in that genre and concluding that New Testament rhetoric was more similar to Sophistic rhetoric than to Platonic or Aristotelian rhetoric. Montesano (1995) also explored early Christian rhetoric through the lens of *kairos*. Pairing *kairos* with *kerygma* (a world view), Montesano argued that acceptance

of certain world views depends greatly on situational factors such as timing, or an “interaction of forces coming to bear at the ‘right time’” (1995, p. 176). A rhetor’s response to an attack is essentially, her or his interpretation for the audience of what happened or why it happened, her or his view. Thus, if image repair discourse is the defender’s point of view, and if point of view depends on timing, then it is arguable that the success of an *apologia* depends greatly on the timing of the discourse.

Miller (1994), in her analysis of technology rhetoric, observed that *kairos* can be interpreted as both a threat and an opportunity. There is an opportunity to make one’s discourse take full advantages of the timing of a situation, but there is also the threat that one might miss that opportune moment or that the opportune moment will not arrive at the most convenient time. Building on the work of Miller, Scott (2006) analyzed the role of *kairos* in risk management. Scott (2006) suggested that, in some contexts, “kairotic action can be based on the assessment of and attempt to opportunistically control or at least avoid or defend against risk” (p. 119). Certainly, attacks on one’s character represent risks to be managed. Consequently, if the role of *kairos* has been analyzed in risk management, scholarship ought to consider, more closely, the role of *kairos* in image repair discourse, specifically. Similarly, Hughes (2002) defines *kairos* as “a crucial or otherwise novel situation, calling for a quick, appropriate, and effective response” (p. 128). Certainly, threats to one’s image comprise crucial situations demanding effective responses, especially in the context of a political campaign.

To some extent, *apologia* studies *have* mentioned the role of *kairos*. Ryan (1988) pointed out that the success of Nixon’s Checkers speech relied on *kairos*, or opportune timing because Nixon’s defense corresponded to allegations that Stevenson, the opposing

Democratic presidential nominee at the time, also had campaign finance irregularities. Friedenberg's (1988) analysis of Reagan's Bitburg speeches also concluded that timing was a critical aspect of that rhetorical situation, noting that the time that elapsed between speeches worked to Reagan's advantage. However, these examples of the consideration of *kairos* in *apologia* are too few. Ultimately, I submit that the success of a defense has everything to do with the timing and situation of that defense. Therefore, in examining attacks and defenses, we must also carefully consider *kairos* as an element of *apologia*.

### Conclusions from the Research Literature

Examination of the existing literature on *apologia* shows that, in the nearly twenty-five hundred years of human communication since Socrates provided the first documented case of *apologia*, scholars have produced multiple theories and typologies of apologetic discourse. Building on work by Scott and Lyman (1968); Burke (1970); Ware and Linkugel (1973); and others, Benoit (1995a) developed one of the most comprehensive, yet practically applicable, theories of image repair discourse. Benoit's (1995a) theory of image restoration (repair) has been applied in instances of organizational *apologia*, celebrity *apologia*, and political *apologia*. Within the context of political *apologia*, U.S. presidential discourse has been the most frequent subject of study. However, to a lesser degree, the discourse of congresspersons, vice presidents, and presidential and vice presidential candidates has also been examined. Studies of presidential and vice presidential candidate *apologia* includes the image repair discourse of Nixon (McGuckin, 1968; Rosenfield; Ryan, 1988), John F. Kennedy (Henry, 1988), Ferraro (Jensen, 1988), and Clinton (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). Given the historical



significance of Barack Obama's candidacy and subsequent election, I propose that his image repair discourse also merits detailed analysis.

Henry (1988) and Jensen (1988) described, respectively the defenses that Senator John F. Kennedy and Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro made in response to attacks related to their Catholicism. However, no previous study has examined a candidate's defenses against allegations that she or he was of a religion other than that which the candidate claimed. Jamieson (1992) provides accounts of suggestions of the satanic practices of Jefferson and Lincoln, but there is no discussion of the defenses employed by these candidates. Thus, although other image repair studies have examined religious-based attacks and defenses, none have examined a case like that of Barack Obama.

Past presidential candidates, including Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and John McCain have faced rumors (true ones in the case of Jefferson), that they had fathered children out of wedlock with African Americans. However, there are no scholarly studies of defenses responding to these charges. In fact, Brinson and Benoit (1999) were the only scholars to study race-related image repair discourse, and that was in the context of Texaco's corporate image repair efforts. Thus, the proposed analysis of Obama's discourse on the Jeremiah Wright controversy will be the first political (presidential or otherwise) image repair study to examine issues of race.

In addition to political and organizational contexts, review of the image repair research literature has also shown that scholars have conducted multiple analyses of celebrities' image repair discourse. However, none of these celebrities was attacked for actually being a celebrity. Further, previous scholars have not considered politicians as celebrities as they have considered actors and professional athletes as celebrities. Obama

not only achieved celebrity status during his candidacy but was attacked for his fame, drawing comparisons to divas, Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. Thus, this study allows for a merger of the study of celebrity and political image repair discourse.

Religious discourse is another context of *apologia* research that will contribute to analysis of Barack Obama's image repair discourse. Scholars such as Miller, Blaney, and Benoit have identified similarities among successful religious image repair efforts, notably, the extensive use of transcendence. Existing scholarship has focused exclusively on the rhetoric of Christian apologists. Although Obama is a Christian, one of the rumor-type *kategoria* lodged against him was that he was a Muslim. Miller's (2002) review of Justin Martyr's image repair discourse may provide a reference point for study of attacks on one's religious affiliation and beliefs. However, the fact that Obama was being accused of a faith to which he did not subscribe adds a new dimension to the analysis of religious discourse. Multiple Christian *kategoria* have also been targeted at church dogma and conflicting interpretations of the Bible (See, in this chapter, Miller's reviews of Paul, Luther, and the Southern Baptist Convention). These studies will serve as a point of comparison for attacks on Obama's pastor (the Reverend Jeremiah Wright) and his church. Further, there has certainly been a political element to the attacks and defenses against religious figures such as Swaggart, Luther, and even Jesus. However, the political dimension of these examples of religious *apologia* is not related to a campaign or administration of public office. Thus, in addition to relying on the research in religious *apologia*, my analysis should also be informed by the rhetoric of politicians, such as Ferraro and John F. Kennedy, who faced attacks focused on their religious faith.

Although Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and John Kerry each faced questions about their patriotism and activity during the Vietnam War era, none was associated with terrorists in the way that Obama was identified with the ideals of domestic terrorist William Ayers. In fact, the nearest comparison to such an attack among existing studies of *apologia* would be Friedenberg's (1988) analysis of Reagan's defensive discourse surrounding his visit to Bitburg cemetery, when Reagan was accused of committing "an act of homage to Nazi Germany and the SS" (p. 270). Still, no one accused Reagan of being a terrorist or terrorist sympathizer. Such attacks were leveled at Obama, and the candidate's defenses merit analysis in this dissertation.

Finally, Blair (1984) called for multidimensional analysis of *apologia* to understand all contributing factors of a rhetorical situation; this dissertation answers that call. First, I plan to examine multiple articulations of each attack by different attackers. Second, I will investigate how attacks and defenses were exchanged in different channels such as traditional news media, speeches, and the Internet. The introduction of Internet-based texts marks an extension of the scope of image repair theory, as none of the reviewed studies have examined attacks and image repair discourse based in the context of e-mail or the world wide web.

Each of the cases reviewed thus far has demonstrated ramifications for the use of Benoit's various strategies. Denial has been shown to be an effective strategy if the accused is perceived to be innocent (e.g., Nixon's Checkers speech). Conversely, the failed examples of denial demonstrate the importance of openness and honesty in responding to accusations (e.g., Eisenhower and the U-2 incident). Evading responsibility has been shown to have mixed results depending on the evidence presented

to corroborate claims such as good intentions. For example, good intentions (combined with other strategies) worked well for Clinton in the draft dodging accusations, but Reagan's use of good intentions in the Iran-Contra affair was insufficient. Likewise, reducing the offensiveness has also been effective when there has been warranted use of strategies such as transcendence (most frequently in religious *apologia*), differentiation (e.g., Reagan at Bitburg cemetery), and attacking the accuser (e.g., Kennedy's attacks on those who attacked his Catholicism). Bolstering was another frequently used strategy to reduce offensiveness and was found to be effective if used when the individual or organization had qualities positive enough to warrant bolstering (e.g., Hugh Grant, Kennedy). Corrective action was generally a successful strategy (e.g., Dow Corning), but was shown to be less effective when absent of mortification (e.g., Firestone). Mortification was generally a useful strategy when the accused was guilty (e.g., Clinton responding to Lewinsky, Reagan on Iran-Contra).

The timing of apologetic discourse represents another dimension of a rhetorical situation. Kinneavy (1986) went as far as to argue that *kairos* was equal to the rhetorical situation. Rhetorical scholarship has also established that *kairos* plays an important role in the acceptance of world views and that *kairos* is critical to understanding risk management. Further, previous apologetic literature has also identified the importance of *kairos* in the case of Ryan's (1988) analysis of Nixon's Checkers speech and Friedenbergs' (1988) analysis of Reagan's Bitburg speeches. However, most other studies of image repair discourse have not provided a full assessment of the role of *kairos*. I propose that *kairos* should be more carefully examined in political image repair

discourse. Further, the role of *kairos* in Internet-based image repair discourse could be quite significant.

Given the limitations in the existing literature, I pose the following research questions in this dissertation:

RQ1: What attacks did Obama face in each examined episode of apologetic discourse?

RQ2: Which image repair strategies were employed by Obama in each examined episode of apologetic discourse?

RQ3: Given the attacks and the image repair strategies used by Barack Obama in each episode, how effective were his image repair efforts?

RQ4: What are the similarities and differences between Barack Obama's race-themed image repair efforts and the race-related image repair efforts by previous rhetors such as those in the Texaco case (reviewed in Chapter 2)?

RQ5: What are the similarities and differences between Barack Obama's religious-based image repair efforts and the religious image repair efforts by previous rhetors (reviewed in Chapter 2)?

RQ6: What are the similarities and differences between Barack Obama's Internet-based image repair discourse and his image repair discourse in more traditional communication channels?

6a. How is Obama's Internet image repair discourse different from the image repair discourse of other political rhetors?

6b. How is Obama's Internet image repair discourse different from his image repair discourse in other communication channels?

6c. What are the similarities and differences between e-mail and web page image repair discourse?

RQ7: How did *kairos* influence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Barack Obama's image repair discourse?

In chapter three, I will discuss the method by which I will answer each of these questions and describe the texts which I will analyze. In the subsequent chapters, I will answer these questions relevant to the episode discussed in each chapter and will conclude the dissertation by discussing the implications of the findings, the limitations of the dissertation, and directions for future research.

## Chapter Three

### Method

#### Methods for Analyzing *Apologia*

To answer the first research question, and as a point of comparison in answering the second and third research questions, I will apply Benoit's (1995a) theory of image repair. Benoit's theory of image repair provides the method of rhetorical analysis for this study's examination of Barack Obama's image repair discourse. For each episode of Obama's image repair discourse, I will describe the attacks leveled against him and then identify the strategy or strategies applied by Obama in his response to those attacks. I will then assess the effectiveness of those attacks based on textual evidence as well as evidence from external sources such as opinion polling, news media coverage, and election outcomes.

Building upon the classifications of previous *apologia* scholars (see above), Benoit (1995a) identified five main strategies: denial, evading of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. Within the strategy of denial, rhetors can use simple denial or shifting the blame. In evading responsibility, one can use provocation, defeasibility, accident, or good intentions. When an individual or organization attempts to reduce the offensiveness of an event, options include bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, and compensation. Benoit explained that rhetors may employ just one of these strategies, but that they are

more likely to employ multiple strategies. Below, I define each of these strategies and provide examples, including, when applicable, examples from the review of literature in Chapter two.

### *Simple Denial*

Denial can take two different forms, simple denial and the strategy of shifting the blame. Simple denial is fairly self-explanatory. It involves simply denying any involvement or responsibility for an event. Simple denial may also be evidenced by denying that an event has taken place. For example, Benoit and Hanczor (1994) described Tonya Harding's application of simple denial. They noted that Harding denied all wrongdoing. Further, she denied any prior knowledge that her ex-husband, Jeff Gillooly and his associate Shawn Eckardt planned to attack Harding's ice-skating rival, Nancy Kerrigan. In 2001, Congressman Gary Condit denied any involvement in the disappearance of his staffer, Chandra Levy. Len-Rios and Benoit (2004), in their analysis of Condit's image repair attempts, observed that Condit was also employing simple denial as one strategy.

### *Shifting the Blame*

Benoit (1995a) observes that when individuals or organizations attempt to shift the blame for an action to another party, the rhetor is still essentially denying involvement in the action. Thus, Len-Rios and Benoit (2004) observed that Condit not only employed simple denial but also attempted to shift the blame by implying that someone else may be responsible for Levy's disappearance.



### *Provocation*

Provocation is one of the four sub-strategies of evading responsibility. Provocation was originally referred to as scapegoating by Scott and Lyman (1968), who described it as one of the four ways by which individuals account for undesirable acts by making excuses. Provocation or scapegoating describes the act of suggesting that the wrongful act was in response to another wrongful act, i.e., the person was provoked into acting as they did (Benoit, 1995a). The classic quarreling children's defense of "s/he started it!" would be an application of provocation.

### *Defeasibility*

Defeasibility is a second form of evading responsibility. In applying a strategy of defeasibility, the rhetor claims a "lack of information about or control over important factors in the situation" (Benoit, 1995a, p. 76). Rhetors pleading defeasibility might argue that they didn't know what was going on. This strategy might often be referred to as pleading ignorance and seems to be a popular strategy among government officials who claim limited knowledge of the actions of their superiors or subordinates.

### *Accident*

Claiming that the inappropriate act was an accident is a third way of evading responsibility (Benoit, 1995a). If an event is perceived to be a mishap, then the rhetor might be able to repair his or her image. A child's excuse for a broken item, "it was an accident" is an application of this form of evading responsibility.

### *Good Intentions*

A fourth way by which the rhetor might attempt to evade responsibility for an action is to claim that she or he had good intentions. In other words, the individual does

not deny the act took place, but by claiming that the undesirable occurrence was the unintended consequence of an action initiated with good intentions, he or she may still be able to evade perceived responsibility for the action. Benoit and Hirson (2001) noted that when the Tobacco Institute responded to criticisms regarding their marketing tactics, they claimed that they had “good intentions toward our nation’s youth” (p. 287), claiming that they take measures to protect American youths that no other industry takes.

### *Bolstering*

In addition to denying and evading responsibility, rhetors seeking to enhance their images might also attempt to employ strategies that reduce the offensiveness of actions. There are six sub-strategies of reducing the offensiveness of an event. The first of these, bolstering, involves the attempt to lessen the negative perceptions of the rhetor by highlighting the positive traits (Benoit, 1995a). Rhetors who engage in bolstering attempt to eliminate (or at least lessen) the negative by accentuating the positive. Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) detailed US Air’s attempts to bolster their image in the aftermath of the 1994 737 jet crash that killed 132 people. In addition to the obvious image ramifications of such a deadly crash, US Air was also accused of having a poor safety record (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997). In an attempt to dull the impact of the negatives in this horrific event, US Air attempted to bolster its image by highlighting employees’ commitment to safety and professionalism (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997).

### *Minimization*

Another way that rhetors attempt to reduce the offensiveness of an event is to minimize the negatives associated with the event (Benoit, 1995a). The idea here is that if the audience comes to believe the act is not as severe as initially thought, the image of the

rhetor may be somewhat restored. Exxon attempted to use minimization following the oil spill from the *Valdez*, claiming that there were not “tens of thousands” of dead seas animals as reports had suggested by rather only “300 birds and 70 otters” (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p. 42; Benoit, 1995a).

### *Differentiation*

The strategy of differentiation may also be applied to reduce the offensiveness of an event. Differentiation describes efforts to separate a negative action from a closely-linked but more offensive action (Benoit, 1995a). One manifestation of differentiation is to change the wording to lessen the negative connotation of an event. For example, steroid users may refer to the illicit drugs as enhancers. A company laying off employees in masses may refer to this as “a reduction in workforce. The Nazi’s referred to the mass extermination of Jews and others as “the final solution.”

### *Transcendence*

Transcendence attempts to reduce the offensiveness of actions “by placing the act in a different context” (Benoit, 1995a, p. 77). Typically, in transcendence, a negative act is situated to be less important or less significant when compared to broader goals. “It was done for the greater good” or “the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few” are examples of applications of transcendence. When rationalizing the mass civilian casualties sustained when the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the excuse is often that millions of lives were spared by not further drawing out World War II. This is another example of transcendence.

### *Attack Accuser*

A fifth method of reducing the offensiveness of an event is to attack the accuser. Attacking the accuser amounts to an attempt to deteriorate the credibility of one's attackers and thus deteriorate the negative claims against the defender (Benoit, 1995a). Condit employed this tactic during an interview with Connie Chung, attacking Chandra Levy's mother's credibility (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). Benoit and Hanczor (1994) observed that Harding also attacked her accusers, noting that she called Gillooly and Eckhardt liars and later depicted Gillooly as a traitor and a violent threat.

### *Compensation*

Compensation, the sixth and final method of reducing offensiveness, describes the practice of providing victims with items of value (money, services, etc.) in order to soften the negative impact of the offensive act. As Benoit (1995a) observed, "in effect, compensation functions as a bribe." Often airlines will attempt to use compensation by providing overnight accommodations, free alcoholic beverages, or first class seats to inconvenienced passengers when the airlines are forced to (or choose to) cancel flights.

### *Corrective Action*

Corrective action is different than compensation because compensation provides concessions that do not right the situation. Corrective action attempts to restore or repair image by returning the situation to the way it was before the undesirable event occurred. As this is often times impossible, corrective action also involves efforts to change negative policies or practices or to "make changes to prevent the recurrence of the undesirable act" (Benoit, 1995a, p. 79). Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) noted that US Air attempted to implement corrective action when they hired independent auditor PRC

Aviation to review US Air flight safety operations. In the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush employed corrective action by appointing an independent, bipartisan 9/11 Commission to review what could be done to prevent future attacks of that nature. It is important to note that corrective action does not necessarily involve assuming responsibility or blame for a negative action.

### *Mortification*

Mortification does involve the acceptance of guilt or responsibility and the admission of wrong-doing, and usually is accompanied by an apology and a request for forgiveness (Benoit, 1995a). Benoit (1995a) suggested that mortification will be more effective when combined with corrective action. Responding to the fallout from the Iran-Contra affair, President Reagan employed mortification, declaring “I take full responsibility for my actions” (Benoit, Gullifor, Panici, 1991, p. 283). In our litigious society, mortification may be less common in corporate apologia because it makes the organization more vulnerable to lawsuit and financial loss (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2006).

### Methods for Analyzing *Kairos*

There is no established method for analyzing the role of *kairos* in discourse. As such, in devising a method by which to analyze *kairos*, it becomes important to understand what constitutes *kairos*. Then, by analyzing elements of *kairos*, I will be able to accurately analyze the role of *kairos* in image repair discourse. Referring back to the review of literature on *kairos*, recall that Isocrates argued that the importance of the occasion was an element of *kairos*, and similarly, Plato linked *kairos* to appropriate times and occasions. Kinneavy (1986) further expanded the bounds of *kairos*, equating the

concept with Bitzer's rhetorical situation and declaring that "Kenneth Burke's pentad is an attempt to erect the major dimensions of a situation" (p. 84). Sheard (1993) also linked *kairos* to Burke:

*Kairos*, then, is the "scene" of Burke's rhetorical theory. If *kairos* grounds all action (including language "acts") in the discursive elements of the "scene" in which those acts take place, it therefore includes all those "scenic" or contextual elements of both time and place that circumscribe and delimit moments of discursive exchange: from the culturally transmitted opinions and attitudes that inform an audience's orientations and expectations of the discourse, to the exigence of the occasion itself and the conventions of the genre dictated by that occasion at that time and place. In short, *kairos* denotes the infinite combinations of cosubstantial, scenic elements that exist as potentialities of discursive acts. (p. 306)

Given these expansive and inclusive definitions of *kairos*, to analyze the role of *kairos* in the image repair discourse of Obama, I have provided, for each controversy, a thorough analysis of the rhetorical situation.

#### *Kairos & Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation*

To better understand the role of *kairos* in discourse, I have argued that we must thoroughly explore the rhetorical situation. Bitzer (1968) defined a rhetorical situation as: a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence... Any exigence is an

imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be... In any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected.

(pp. 6-7)

Clearly, exchange of *kategoria* and *apologia* discourse meet the requirements for Bitzer's rhetorical situation. The controlling exigences are the *kategoria*, the urgent defects or obstacles that must be answered. The *apologia* is the discourse which can alleviate or remove the exigence created by the persuasive attack. Bitzer also identifies the audience and constraints as elements of a rhetorical situation. Constraints are "made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8).

These are factors that limit Obama's ability to defend himself against accusations. The "rhetorical audience consists of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). Presumably, in political discourse, the rhetorical audience would include multiple parties, but most central, voters, political donors, the media, and other politicians.

Less clear is the role of *kairos* in Bitzer's (1968) definition. Yes, the word, "events," suggests that there are specific occasions that influence the rhetorical situation. However, upon closer examination of Bitzer's (1968) features of rhetorical situations, the role of *kairos* becomes clearer. Although each characteristic has relevance for apologetic discourse in general, the first, second, and sixth features have specific ramifications for *kairos* and will be discussed here. Bitzer's (1968) first feature states that "the situation

that the rhetor perceives amounts to an invitation to create and present discourse” (p. 9). Thus, as perceptions change, the opportunity to present an appropriate discourse changes. Rhetors must appropriate the right *kairos* to present their messages. Bitzer’s (1968) second general characteristic of a rhetorical situation is that it must invite “a fitting response, a response that fits the situation” (p. 10). If rhetorical situations are time bound, then there is an appropriate moment for the delivery of a message.

Bitzer’s (1968) sixth feature stated that “in any case, situations grow and come to maturity; they involve to just the time when a rhetorical discourse would be most fitting” (pp. 12-13). This sentence represents the clearest tie between *kairos* and the rhetorical situation. There is a point of maturity; there is a point when the rhetorical situation has become the most critical. More importantly, Bitzer (1968) argued that there was a specific time when “discourse would be most fitting” (p. 13). I argue that this time that he refers to is *kairos*. By analyzing the rhetorical situation, I was able to argue whether or not Obama’s image repair discourse was delivered with respect to *kairos*, when it was most fitting. Thus, the rhetorical situation is a means by which to assess the *kairotic* effectiveness of discourse. In the next section, I provide a detailed method for using the rhetorical situation to evaluate the *kairos* of image repair discourse.

#### *Analysis of Kairos and Kairotic Effectiveness through the Rhetorical Situation*

To fully analyze the rhetorical situation, for each speech set, I analyzed the controlling exigences, the audience, and the constraints. Since the *kategoria* represent the exigences, imperfections marked by urgency according to Bitzer (1968), I began by referring back to my analysis of the *kategoria* (persuasive attacks) leveled against Obama. An important point of consideration in analysis of the exigences was how urgent



the attacks were. Did they demand immediate rhetorical action or was it possible to delay the *apologia*? Having answered this question, I next turned to analyzing the audience and constraints that shaped Obama's image repair discourse.

Recall that constraints are "made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). To identify the constraints, I had to explain the elements of the rhetorical situation that limited or impeded Obama's *apologia*. Additionally, I analyzed the role that Obama's audience of voters, political allies, political opponents, and media critics played in formation of the rhetorical situation. Taking each of these influences into account allowed me to evaluate the *kairotic* effectiveness of Obama's image repair strategies.

To summarize, I asked three questions about each image repair strategy: (1) How urgent were the exigences, and how did the urgency shape the demands of the image repair discourse?; (2) What were the constraints and how did they shape the demands of the image repair discourse?; and (3) Who comprised the rhetorical audience and how did those members shape the demands of the image repair discourse? The answers to these questions yielded the influence of *kairos* in each speech set. The *kairotic* effectiveness of each image repair strategy was measured by evaluating how well Obama met each of the demands and was discussed as part of the overall evaluation of the image repair strategies (see below).

#### Description & Justification of the Texts

Each of the three major sets of discourse which I examined occurred in somewhat different message forms. In this section, I will describe and justify the texts which I

analyzed for each speech-set. A speech-set is comprised of the attacks on Obama and the corresponding image repair discourse that responds to those attacks. This dissertation analyzes three major image crisis episodes over the course of Obama's candidacy. As I demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, some of these image crises were isolated to the general campaign period. Still, others originated during the primary phase of the election and persisted on through the general election period. Consequently, the analysis chapters are organized by controversy or image crisis, and my description of the texts I analyzed are organized in the same manner in this chapter. These image crises included speech-sets related to comments by Barack Obama's former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright; discourse about former Weather Underground member and confessed domestic terrorist, William Ayers; and Internet-based attacks and image repair discourse on a variety of topics. I begin with the Jeremiah Wright texts.

#### *Reverend Jeremiah Wright and the Speech on Race*

The controversy surrounding Obama's pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, spanned several months throughout the campaign season. For Obama, the image crisis began with the surfacing of a 2003 video recording of one of Wright's sermons. I will analyze attacks resulting from this recording--specifically, attacks by members of the media and by Obama's political opponents. One source of attacks is a North Carolina Republican Party television spot. I will also analyze transcripts of Wright's April, 2008 speeches at the meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Detroit and at a National Press Club speaking engagement (in Washington, D.C.). Further, I will analyze the transcript of an interview of Wright by Bill Moyers on the PBS television program *Journal*. The transcript of this program also contains footage

from an earlier PBS *Frontline* episode, which had covered Wright and his church during the mid-1980's. In addition to these texts, I will analyze attacks repeated in national news coverage of Wright's comments. The news coverage was selected using a LexisNexis Academic Power Search, between the dates of March 12, 2008 and June 2, 2008 (see dates of Obama speeches below for rationale of time frame), using the search terms Obama AND Jeremiah AND Wright AND attacks AND Republican.

The news stories will also provide context for analysis of Obama's defenses. The image repair discourse comes from transcripts of a speech and two news conferences that Obama delivered regarding the controversy. The speech transcript is of a March 18, 2008 speech that Obama delivered on issues of race in America, which included responses to comments by Wright. I will also analyze Obama's subsequent responses in April 29 and May 31, 2008 news conferences in which he first repudiated and disavowed Wright and ultimately left the church.

#### *William Ayers and the Weather Underground*

My analysis of image repair discourse surrounding the relationship between Obama and accused domestic terrorist William Ayers will also rely on a variety of texts. As with the Wright controversy, I will be analyzing televised political advertisements, which associated Obama with Ayers and his beliefs and actions. I will also analyze Ayers' comments in a 2001 *New York Times* article about his involvement in the 1960's Weather Underground bombings. I will further analyze news coverage which reported on attacks by Republican vice presidential candidate Governor Sarah Palin. News coverage will also be included which reports on comments by Obama and his campaign staff. Finally, I will analyze documents from the Obama campaign web site which

respond to allegations about Obama and Ayers. These include html-format web pages as well as downloadable Portable Document Format (PDF) brochures responding to the attacks. The web page texts also include messages designed to be copied by supporters and e-mailed to their friends to further aid in disputing the claims about Ayers and Obama.

### *Internet Katagoria & Apologia*

Obama was attacked for being a Muslim, even though he professed to be a Christian. Obama was attacked for being sworn into the United States Senate using a *Koran*, even though he put his hand on a *Bible*. His citizenship was questioned even though he was born in Hawaii to his American mother. Each of these attacks, along with many others, was spread through Internet e-mail campaigns and web logs (blogs). To combat these attacks, the Obama campaign developed unique Internet-based image repair discourse, which included a separate web page for each “smear,” which was the label the campaign gave to the attacks. The “Fight the Smears” web sites included descriptions of each attack and responses to each. Further, the web sites included text designed to be copied by supporters and e-mailed to friends to help “share the truth.” Also, each Fight the Smears sight was linked to a downloadable PDF brochure which could be printed and distributed by supporters.

I have obtained and will analyze copies of some of the more wide-spread e-mail-borne attacks. I will also analyze news coverage which reported on such attacks. In analyzing the Obama campaign’s image repair discourse, I will use the web sites, the e-mail response messages, and the PDF brochures as my texts. Further, I will analyze the

comments of high-profile surrogates, such as Colin Powell and others, who attempted to debunk and rebuke these rumors.

### *Other Texts*

In addition to the above texts which are specific to individual controversies, I will also be analyzing a number of texts which are relevant to multiple attack-defense speech-sets. These texts include comments by Democratic vice presidential candidate Joe Biden, McCain, Obama, and Palin during the presidential and vice presidential debates. I will also analyze *kategoria* and *apologia* which were delivered in speeches made during the Republican and Democratic nominating Conventions.

Finally, I will provide a three-pronged evaluation of the effectiveness of the image repair strategies in each crisis. Following the model used by Blaney and Benoit (2001) in their analysis of Bill Clinton's image repair discourse, I will judge the effectiveness via (1) the internal criteria of consistency and plausibility, and (2) the external criteria of news coverage and public opinion polls (including exit polls). The news coverage was drawn from the *New York Times* because of its national reach and its agenda-setting influence (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). I consulted the Internet web site, Pollingreport.com opinion polls and news coverage for exit polls. As an additional external criterion, I will consult election outcomes from the various primary contests as well as the general election. Using the method described above, the third prong of the evaluation will identify the role of *kairos* and judge the *kairotic* effectiveness or timeliness of the *apologia*.

## Chapter Four

### “Not the Person that I Met Twenty Years Ago”

On March 13, 2008, ABC News aired and reported on video excerpts from the sermons of Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Wright had been Barack Obama’s pastor for twenty years at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. The video montage, which ABC News had generated from “dozens of Rev. Wright’s sermons, offered for sale by the church” (Ross & El-Buri, 2008, ¶ 5), almost immediately went into repeated broadcast on the Internet and television (Luo, 2008; Wright, 2008). The sermons included the declaration that “blacks should not sing ‘God Bless America’ but ‘God damn America’” (Ross & El-Buri, 2008, ¶ 1). The videos also showed Wright’s argument that the U.S. had invited the 9/11 attacks through its own terrorist actions, namely, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and U.S. sponsored “state terrorism against Palestinians and black South Africans” (Ross & El-Buri, 2008, ¶ 9). As Obama’s longtime pastor, Wright’s combative and inflammatory remarks seemed to contradict “Obama’s campaign’s focus on racial unity” (Williams, 2008, p. A1). Electorally, Wright’s seemingly radical remarks on race presented an obstacle to competing for working-class white voters with then-Democratic primary rival Hillary Clinton and eventual Republican nominee John McCain (Williams, 2008).

The initial news report by ABC News triggered numerous attacks from Obama’s opponents in multiple forms. Some attacks took the form of political ads which either

attacked Obama directly or attacked Obama's political allies for their associations with Obama's "extreme" ideals (Luo, 2008, ¶ 8). Responding to the controversy, Obama, campaigning in Philadelphia days before the Pennsylvania primary, delivered a March 18, 2008 speech, commonly referred to, thereafter, as Obama's "Speech on Race."

On April 25, 2008, Wright was a guest on the PBS News program, *Bill Moyers Journal*. Following a lengthy interview about Wright's views on race, religion, and the role of the United States in domestic and international policy, the topic turned to Obama, misperceptions of Obama's faith and education (namely that Obama was a Muslim and educated in a terrorist school), and Wright's reactions to Obama's "Speech on Race." Following his appearance on *Bill Moyers Journal*, Wright embarked on a speaking tour, highlighted by speeches to the NAACP in Detroit on April 27 and to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on April 28. These nationally televised and widely reported-on speeches were once again hailed as controversial and inflammatory. The National Press Club speech reinforced the inflammatory views presented in the recorded sermons but added to the controversy Wright's claim "that the AIDS epidemic was a racist plot," the pastor's praise for Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, and Wright's comparisons of "U.S. troops to the Roman legions that killed Christ" (Wright, 2008, ¶ 9-11).

On April 30, 2008, Obama held a press conference in which he attempted to repair the damage inflicted to his image by his associations with Wright. A month later, on Friday May 30, Obama sent a letter to Trinity Church, formally resigning his and his family's membership and held a news conference the next day, answering questions about the resignation.

In this chapter, I will begin by detailing the *kategoria* (persuasive attacks) against Obama on the basis of his associations with Reverend Wright. I will then analyze the image repair strategies employed by Obama during his March 18, 2008 “Speech on Race,” his April 30, 2008 press conference, and his Friday, May 31, 2008 news conference. Finally, I will evaluate the effectiveness of Obama’s image repair discourse, including analysis of the *kairotic* effectiveness of the *apologia* and *kategoria*.

### *Kategoria*

Throughout the controversy, Obama’s political opponents and media critics repeatedly made the following accusations: Obama must have either heard the controversial sermons or must have heard about them, yet he remained a member of the congregation, suggesting that he did not disagree with the statements being made. Further, if Obama did disagree with Wright, he should have either challenged the controversial ideals presented or left the church. Some critics questioned the parenting choices of Barack and Michelle Obama in allowing their daughters to hear the controversial sermons. Finally, Obama’s critics provided his remarks and those of Wright as evidence that Obama’s candidacy did not represent change, but rather, that Obama was just another politician.

The significant persuasive attacks on Obama regarding the Reverend Wright controversy came from a variety of different sources. The main source was the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, himself. The recordings of Wright’s sermons served as a catalyst for attacks from Obama’s political opponents and critics in the media. Even though Obama had not, himself, uttered the controversial remarks of Reverend Wright, Obama’s long-term association with Wright made the candidate vulnerable to attack.



Jamieson (1992) noted that political campaigns often seek to use such associations to link their candidates to the positive and their opponents to the negative. Jamieson (1992) called these associations “apposition,” explaining the practice as the tendency of campaigns to “ally the favored candidate with things uncritically accepted, such as flag and freedom, and tie the opponent to such viscerally noxious things as the murder of innocent men, women, and children” (p. 44). Thus, it matters not whether or not Obama ever expressed sentiments similar to Wright; mere apposition of Obama with the negative images and ideas of Jeremiah Wright served as a damaging blow to Obama’s candidacy.

Although echoed by numerous other journalists and columnists, the attacks by media critics were most frequently and succinctly provided by conservative syndicated columnist, Charles Krauthammer. For example, arguing that Obama must have known about his pastor’s views, Krauthammer (2008) commented, “Obama says he missed church that day. Had he never heard *about* it?” (p. A17). Krauthammer (2008) also bluntly raised the questions, “Why didn't he leave that church? Why didn't he leave -- why doesn't he leave even today?” (p. A17). Later, in the same column, Krauthammer (2008) concluded his persuasive attacks against Obama:

But Obama was supposed to be new. He flatters himself as a man of the future transcending the anger of the past as represented by his beloved pastor. Obama then waxes rhapsodic about the hope brought by the new consciousness of the young people in his campaign. Then answer this, Senator: If Wright is a man of the past, why would you expose your children to his vitriolic divisiveness? This is a man who curses America and who proclaimed moral satisfaction in the deaths of 3,000 innocents at a time when their bodies were still being sought at Ground

Zero. It is not just the older congregants who stand and cheer and roar in wild approval of Wright's rants, but young people as well. (p. A17)

Here, Krauthammer suggested inconsistencies in Obama's message of hope and change, while also questioning the manner in which Obama raises his children.

Fox News and National Public Radio commentator Juan Williams also attacked Obama's relationship with Wright: "This is a man who he chose to be associated with. It's not a family member... [the relationship] speaks to his character, and it speaks to the judgment which is the basis on which Barack Obama has been running" (Welch, 2008, ¶ 9-10). Here, Williams, like Krauthammer, likened Obama's ideals to those of Wright while also attacking Obama's character and questioning his judgment. Williams also distinguished between one's (presumably admissible) associations with a family member and one's associations with a minister. Republican pollster Tony Fabrizio further advanced that argument: "You get to pick your minister. You don't pick your grandma" (Babington, 2008, ¶ 15).

Obama's two most prominent political opponents were his principal adversary in the Democratic primary campaign, Hillary Clinton, and the then-presumed and eventual Republican presidential nominee, John McCain. Hillary Clinton at first refrained from explicitly attacking Obama on the topic of Wright. However, as Patrick Healy (2008) of the New York Times observed, Clinton's campaign implicitly conveyed the senator's disapproval of the Wright associations:

Clinton advisers have asked their allies not to talk openly about the issue, for fear it could create a voter backlash and alienate black Democrats. They also say Mr.

Obama, of Illinois, is in enough trouble over Mr. Wright that they do not need to foment more. (p. 18)

The statement by Clinton's surrogates provided an unstated, yet obvious, condemnation of Obama's association with his pastor.

Clinton eventually attacked Obama more explicitly for his loyalty to the controversial pastor. Perhaps inspiring the subsequent comments of Williams and Fabrizio (see above), Clinton, campaigning in Pennsylvania prior to her primary contest against Obama, told reporters:

Given all we have heard and seen, he would not have been my pastor. We don't have a choice when it comes to our relatives -- we have a choice when it comes to our pastors and the churches we choose to attend. (McNulty & O'Toole, 2008, p. A-1)

Thus, Clinton also questioned why Obama did not leave the church if he disagreed with the remarks made by Reverend Wright.

During a presidential primary debate between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, held in Philadelphia prior to the Pennsylvania primary, Clinton again attacked Obama for his associations with Wright: "It's clear that as leaders that we have a choice about who we associate with, and who we kind of give our seal of approval to. These are problems, and they raise questions in people's minds" (Milligan & Helman, 2008, p. A1). In this attack, Clinton not only questioned Obama's association with Wright but also his leadership ability. In the same debate, Clinton again made it clear that Obama actively chose Wright as his pastor: "You get to choose your pastor. You don't choose your family, but you get to choose your pastor. And when asked a direct question, I said I

would not have stayed in the church” (Zremski, 2008, p. A1). Clinton again questioned Obama’s judgment and this time offered, as an alternative to voters, what she would have done in a similar situation.

Although McCain attacked Wright directly, officially, McCain frequently and openly denounced attacks on Obama for his associations with the pastor, going as far as to request that his allies cease and refrain from Wright related attacks on Obama (we cannot know if McCain secretly appreciated the continued attacks). However, McCain still on occasion, would volunteer that he would have acted differently than Obama. Further, while denouncing Wright-based attacks, McCain still acknowledged that Jeremiah Wright was a legitimate issue: “I can understand why Americans, when viewing these kinds of comments [Wright’s comments], are angry and upset” (Cooper, 2008, p. 21). Thus, McCain, while decrying attacks against Obama, endorsed anger at Obama’s pastor, which would naturally be associated with Obama.

Intentionally or unintentionally, McCain was largely unsuccessful in his public attempts to halt negative Wright-themed advertising against Obama. Thus, Republican state parties and independent political groups were another source of attacks on Obama for his associations with Wright. One ad, run by the North Carolina Republican Party, gained national attention. The ad’s narrator begins “For 20 years, Barack Obama sat in his pew, listening to his pastor” (Luo, 2008, ¶ 3). Then, images of Wright’s sermons appear on the screen, accompanied by Wright’s, by then, familiar plea for God to not bless but damn America. The narrator then attacks the two Democratic candidates for North Carolina governor, both endorsers of Obama, declaring that they ought to “know

better” (Luo, 2008, ¶ 6). The ad closes with the declaration that “He’s [Obama’s] too extreme for North Carolina” (Luo, 2008, ¶ 7).

The advertisement makes more direct and explicit attacks on Obama than most of the senator’s critics ventured to make--namely that Obama was “extreme.” The ad also went beyond others’ attacks on the associations between Obama and his pastor made by others; the ad associated *other* Democratic Party candidates with Wright’s “extreme” views. The advertisement originated on the party’s web site and eventually aired briefly on television. The spot drew wide news coverage because it was the first political ad to incorporate Jeremiah Wright into attacks on Obama and other Democrats, but also because John McCain, while publicly demanding that the ad be withdrawn, brought further attention and scrutiny to the message.

Wright, identifying himself as a supporter of Obama, had not, at least initially, attacked the senator directly. However, during the Bill Moyers interview, Jeremiah Wright, whether he intended to or not, provided an additional, implicit attack on Obama’s genuineness. Moyers, referring to Obama’s speech on race, asked Wright, “in that speech in Philadelphia, [Obama] had to say some hard things about you. How, how did it go down with you when you heard Barack Obama say those things?” Wright responded, “He’s a politician, I’m a pastor. We speak to two different audiences. And he says what he has to say as a politician... He does what politicians do.” This was quite a damning statement against a politician whose campaign had attempted to transcend “politics as usual.” As Peter Canellos (2008) of the *Boston Globe* commented, “Obama’s personal pastor did more than anyone else to take the glow off his campaign by dismissing the Illinois senator as just ‘a politician’” (p. A8).

Thus, to review, during the controversy over remarks made by Obama's pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, the candidate faced these accusations: (1) Obama must have either heard or, at least, known about Wright's controversial sermons, yet he remained a member of the congregation, suggesting that he did not disagree with the statements being made; (2) if Obama did disagree with Wright, he should have either challenged the controversial ideals presented and/or severed his relationship with Wright and left the church with his family; and (3) Obama's remarks and those of his pastor were evidence that Obama's candidacy did not represent change, but rather, politics as usual.

#### *Apologia in the Speech on Race*

Obama's image repair discourse spans three phases, demarcated by his three major speaking occasions during the Wright controversy: the March 18, 2008 "Speech on Race," the senator's April 29, 2008 press conference responding to Wright's comments on PBS's *Journal* and the pastor's speeches to the NAACP and National Press Club; and Obama's May 31, 2008 news conference discussing the senator's decision to leave Trinity church. In this section, I will discuss Obama's image repair efforts on each of these occasions. I begin with the "Speech on Race."

Analysis of Obama's Speech on Race revealed that he employed seven of the strategies identified in image repair theory. Obama most frequently used bolstering in this speech but also used simple denial, provocation, defeasibility, transcendence, differentiation, and attack accuser. I will begin by discussing Obama's use of simple denial. I will then discuss Obama's attempt to evade responsibility through the use of defeasibility and provocation and conclude with analysis of Obama's attempts to reduce offensiveness.

### *Simple Denial*

Given the constant availability on cable television and the Internet of video evidence to the contrary, Obama could not conceivably deny that Reverend Wright had made the comments attributed to him. Nor could Obama deny his membership in the church. Obama could have plausibly denied that he had been present on the days that the sermons had been delivered. However, as several of the accusations suggested, it was unlikely that he had not heard about Wright's controversial messages. Barring these possibilities for denial, Obama instead chose to address the accusations that his membership in the church signaled the senator's agreement with Wright's sermons:

We've heard from my former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, [who] use[d] incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation--that rightly offended white and black alike. I have already condemned, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Rev. Wright that have caused such controversy. (Obama, 2008, March 18 ¶ 22-23)

In this passage from the Speech on Race, Obama implicitly denies that Wright is his minister, referring to the reverend as his "former pastor." More importantly, in this excerpt, Obama places Wright's words in negative context and condemns the message, thus denying that he shares the notions expressed by his (former) pastor.

Despite Obama's denials that he shared the admittedly denigrating views of Wright, he later in the speech seeks to deny that these views are the views of the pastor he knows:

Not once in my conversations with him have I heard him talk about any ethnic group in derogatory terms, or treat whites with whom he interacted with anything but courtesy and respect. He contains within him the contradictions -- the good and the bad -- of the community that he has served diligently for so many years.

(Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 40)

In the Speech on Race, Obama had admitted (and decried) Wright's controversial remarks moments earlier, yet in this instance of denial, Obama claims that he never personally, at least in conversations, had experienced such disrespectful displays by Wright. It may be that Obama is simply denying that he ever heard negative sentiments from Wright in a given context, but it seems more likely that Obama is denying that the controversial statements that Wright is under fire for represent the norm.

#### *Provocation*

Obama also employed provocation for the remarks made by Wright. Arguing that Wright was not entirely responsible for the thoughts he had shared, Obama suggested that his pastor had been instigated:

The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through -- a part of our union that we have yet to perfect. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 46)

Rather than accepting that Wright is an angry racist or that he is guilty of inciting these ideas in members of his congregation (such as Obama), Obama argues that endemic racism provoked Wright's comments. The Reverend Wright and, by extension, members



of his (mostly black) congregation are not wholly responsible for any racist ideas they might express.

Our nation's history of racism enacted through slavery, segregation, and discrimination, ("a part of our union that we have yet to perfect") produced the anger expressed by Wright: This is the reality in which Rev. Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted... For the men and women of Rev. Wright's generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years... And occasionally it [the anger] finds voice in the church on Sunday morning, in the pulpit and in the pews. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 55, 59-61)

Obama was arguing that it is natural that those (including Jeremiah Wright) who lived through our darkest periods of history will still harbor anger and resentment. Plus, since the history of our nation belongs to all of us, and racism is something that *we* have yet to perfect, by extension, we are all partly responsible for the ideas articulated by Jeremiah Wright. Thus, Wright cannot be held *entirely* responsible for his angry comments, and, given Obama's requisite (as an American) sensitivity to that anger, he cannot be held responsible for listening to Wright's angry sermons, even if he did not agree with everything said.

#### *Defeasibility/Bolstering*

Obama next attempted to escape responsibility for some of the remaining accusations by employing the strategy of defeasibility, combining it with elements of the

strategy of bolstering. Given that these strategies relied on one another, they are analyzed together.

Obama had already condemned the words of Wright, but he was not yet ready to condemn the man. Likewise, Obama was not prepared to condemn himself for having associated himself with the pastor. However, facing attacks that he should have left the congregation at Trinity after hearing, or hearing about, Wright's inflammatory remarks, Obama had to justify his loyalty to Wright and the senator's enduring membership in the church:

I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother -- a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe. These people are a part of me. And they are a part of America, this country that I love. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 41-42)

Obama acknowledges that Wright has said unacceptable things, but compares his relationship with Wright to his relationship with his grandmother. It is not possible for him to disown either person, despite the negative things that he or she may say. Obama's inability to disown Wright, as his critics had called for him to do, represents an application of defeasibility. He had no choice but to remain loyal to his longtime pastor.

The above passage also demonstrates Obama's blending of defeasibility with the strategy of bolstering. By stating that the racial and ethnic stereotypes uttered by

Obama's grandmother make him "cringe," the senator was attempting to bolster his image by showing that he is offended by such undesirable language. Further, Obama bolstered his image by stressing the love and loyalty that he has for both his grandmother and his pastor. Loyalty is most often a desirable characteristic, and Obama was pointing out his loyal qualities. Obama also employed bolstering in declaring that "they [his grandmother and Wright] are part of America, this country that I love." Obama loves his country, and he presumes that his audience is likely to hold a more positive image of a presidential candidate who loves his country.

### *Bolstering*

Obama used bolstering on multiple other occasions, separate from his combination of the strategy with defeasibility. Answering the accusations that he shared the allegedly divisive and racist ideals expressed by Wright, Obama sought to bolster his image by demonstrating for the audience that in which he really believed:

I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together -- unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction -- towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren. This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own American story. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 10-11)

Obama's inclusive and optimistic rhetoric bolsters his image. He acknowledges others' (such as Wright's) dissenting opinions when he says that we "have different stories" and do not "look the same way or " come from the same place." However, he presents his idealistic view that everyone has "common hopes" and wants "to move in the same direction. Obama's favorable perceptions of Americans reflect well on his image. Further, by complimenting "the decency and generosity of the American people," Obama further bolsters his image, as we tend to look more favorably upon those who look favorably toward us.

Obama again used bolstering when portraying himself as someone who is willing to deal with difficult issues:

I suppose the politically safe thing would be to move on from this episode and just hope that it fades into the woodwork. We can dismiss Rev. Wright as a crank or a demagogue, ... as harboring some deep-seated racial bias. But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Rev. Wright made in his offending sermons about America -- to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 43-45)

Obama will not take the easy way out. He will not just dismiss that which we, in society, may disagree with. He will not ignore the issue of race. He will not oversimplify. Rather, Obama is someone who is brave enough, strong enough, determined enough to provide the leadership to deal with the issue.

Obama again praised the country and, in return as a leader in the nation, bolstered his own image: "America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we

have already achieved gives us hope -- the audacity to hope -- for what we can and must achieve tomorrow” (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 79). Obama’s faith in the nation is again a source of bolstering. The senator used bolstering by praising the genius and the hopefulness of the nation that he is a part of. If the nation has genius and hope, then, as an American, Obama also has these qualities. And, again, praising the nation gives favorable audience perceptions back to Obama. Further, by praising America, Obama enacts the role of a patriot.

### *Bolstering/Transcendence*

In Obama’s final application of bolstering, he again combined the strategy with another image repair strategy, this time, transcendence. He again bolstered as he reiterated his faith in the American people, but he also suggested that there was a higher concern:

But I have asserted a firm conviction -- a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people -- that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 79)

In this passage, Obama’s associations with Wright are not even specifically mentioned, but Obama is still defending himself against the accusations that he shares Wright’s pessimistic and racist views. Obama’s image is again bolstered by his confidence in Americans. However, Obama’s faith in God is also a source of bolstering, as a majority of Americans hold that a president’s religious faith is an important character trait.

Obama’s faith in God also suggests a higher calling--higher than petty concerns with the “racial wounds” inflicted upon (or by) Jeremiah Wright. It is more important to

concern ourselves with God's will--that we "continue on the path of a more perfect union." This charge transcends concerns about Obama's pastor or Obama's relationship with his pastor. Thus, Obama combines bolstering and transcendence to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Reverend Wright, showing that not only does he not share Wright's views, but that there are more important endeavors than dwelling on the racial sins of the past.

### *Transcendence*

Obama also applied the strategy of transcendence without the use of bolstering. Answering the attacks of those who asked why he ever associated with Wright or why he did not or would not join another church, Obama sought to describe his experiences at Trinity United Church of Christ and the positive influence that Reverend Wright had had on his life in the past. By reducing the offensiveness of Wright, Obama, by extension, was attempting to reduce the offensiveness of the senator's associations with his controversial pastor:

The man I met more than 20 years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another; to care for the sick and lift up the poor. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 30)

Obama is attempting to explain that there is more to Jeremiah Wright than the depictions seen on the internet and cable news. There are more positive values, more important values than those attributed to Wright in news reports and political attack advertisements. The Christian doctrines of loving one another and helping the sick and poor are far more important and enduring than the recent controversial statements.

Obama also used transcendence to show that Wright had done and continued to do great things, “housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS” (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 31). These noble social services far outweigh the negative sentiments expressed in a handful of sermons.

Obama also quoted from his book, *Dreams From My Father*, in which he had recounted his first experience in a Trinity church service:

People began to shout, to rise from their seats and clap and cry out, a forceful wind carrying the reverend's voice up into the rafters....And in that single note -- hope! -- I heard something else; at the foot of that cross, inside the thousands of churches across the city, I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones. Those stories -- of survival, and freedom, and hope -- became our story, my story; the blood that had spilled was our blood, the tears our tears; until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world. (Obama, 2008, March 18, 2008, ¶ 33-34)

The brief sermon snippets aired on ABC News and hundreds of other programs and web sites were not representative of the more important messages delivered at Trinity. The translation of Bible stories into meaningful allegories for modern struggles; these were the true and noble, and far transcendent, meanings taken from typical Trinity sermons. Obama used transcendence to show that he had not left Trinity because these inspiring

sermons were more typical and were far more consequential than occasional, heat of the moment rants.

Obama concluded his argument of transcendence by summarizing the value of the Trinity experience and Wright's role in that experience: "The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and yes, the bitterness and bias that make up the black experience in America" (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 38). Obama was arguing here that there are, admittedly, negative aspects of the church, as there are in any community, but that the many competing dichotomies provide a unique experience. The struggles, the bitterness, the bias--they are all admittedly present, but the successes and the love are more important.

Similarly, answering to those among his attackers who questioned the Obama family's persisting attendance at Trinity, Obama sought to justify the connection: "And this helps explain, perhaps, my relationship with Rev. Wright. As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me. He strengthened my faith, officiated my wedding, and baptized my children" (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 39). Wright's imperfections are overshadowed by the vital role that he has played as a part of meaningful events in the lives of Obama and his family.

### *Differentiation*

Obama further attempted to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Jeremiah Wright through employ of the strategy of differentiation. Obama's use of transcendence represented an attempt to show that the positive aspects of the presidential candidate's Trinity experience outweighed the negative aspects. Obama's use of



differentiation attempted to repair Obama's image by arguing that the edited sermon snippets seen on television and the internet were not representative of the typical Trinity experience:

Did I know him to be an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic and foreign policy? Of course. Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely -- just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed. But the remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's effort to speak out against perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country -- a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America, a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 24-26)

Obama acknowledged that he knew of Wright's occasional controversial leanings. However, he separates these "simply controversial" views and attempts to protest "perceived injustice" from the remarks aired by ABC News, remarks that represent "a profoundly distorted view of this country." Essentially Obama is arguing, "Yes, I knew he said some controversial things, and yes, I disagreed with many of those things. But nothing I ever heard in church approached the divisive views you all have seen on TV and the Internet."

Obama also used differentiation in the above excerpt from his “Speech on Race” when he submitted “Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely -- just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed” (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 24). Here, Obama again challenges the notion that he likely agrees with all of the allegedly radical notions of his pastor. This time, Obama responds to the accusation by contending that there is a difference between sitting in a religious service (or even belonging to a religious body) and agreeing with everything said during that service or by that body. Essentially, Obama argues that it is possible for parishioners to disagree with their clergy, differentiating between listening to a speaker and pledging allegiance to the arguments presented by the speaker.

Later in the speech, Obama again sought to differentiate between his personal beliefs and the beliefs of his pastor:

The profound mistake of Rev. Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress has been made; as if this country -- a country that has made it possible for one of his own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black, Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old -- is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know -- what we have seen -- is that America can change. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 78-79)

In this passage, Obama drew a clear distinction between Wright's espoused belief that the United States has not made any progress on racism, and Obama's more optimistic view that America has changed and that it is capable of even greater change. Thus,

differentiation was used significantly by Obama to refute accusations that his beliefs were those of his pastor.

### *Attack Accuser*

The final strategy used by Obama was another method of reducing the offensiveness of accusations, attacking accusers. In this instance, Obama challenges his accusers, particularly his conservative and Republican attackers, who might claim that Wright's race-based anger is somehow radical, unique, or out of step with the feelings of whites. Obama counters that: "In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community" (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 64). Thus, Obama warns his attackers that they should consider the racially-based anger present in white communities when attacking the senator's pastor and fellow church members.

Obama later goes into greater detail, taking to task Republicans and conservatives who preyed on race-based resentment:

Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren't always expressed in polite company. But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation. Anger over welfare and affirmative action helped forge the Reagan Coalition. Politicians routinely exploited fears of crime for their own electoral ends. Talk show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism. (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 68-69)

Here, Obama takes some of the attacks leveled at him and his church (that the church is a haven for hate and anger) and turns them back on Republicans such as Reagan and

conservative commentators, arguing that these political figures are guilty of using race as a wedge issue. Thus, Obama reduces the offensiveness of *kategoria* leveled at his candidacy by suggesting that, in comparison, his attackers are guilty of worse race-based transgressions.

#### *Apologia* in Obama's April 29 Press Conference

Over a month after Obama's "Speech on Race," Wright's appearances on PBS's *Journal* with Bill Moyers, his speech to the NAACP in Detroit, and his speech to the National Press Club had fueled revived criticism over Obama's ties to the controversial minister. Although there were now fresh controversies to serve as fodder for attacks against Obama, he faced the same attacks as in his previous speaking occasion. So, on April 29, 2008, Obama held a press conference in which he renewed his image repair discourse. In the press conference, Obama again, as in the Speech on Race, used the strategies of simple denial, defeasibility, bolstering, differentiation, transcendence, and attack accuser, though he did not renew his use of provocation. Additionally, in the April 29 press conference, Obama also used the strategies of minimization and corrective action.

#### *Simple Denial*

Even after his largely positive reception of Obama's Speech on Race, the presidential candidate still faced the accusation that he shared the controversial beliefs of his pastor. Seeking to deflect this attack, Obama again turned to simple denial in his April 29 press conference:

But what I do want him [Wright] to be very clear about, as well as all of you and the American people, is that when I say I find these comments appalling, I mean

it. It contradicts everything that I'm about and who I am. And anybody who has worked with me, who knows my life, who has read my books, who has seen what this campaign's about, I think, will understand that it is completely opposed to what I stand for and where I want to take this country. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 12-13)

Obama is clearly denying that he shares Wright's beliefs. He emphasizes the denial further by not just denying that he agrees with Wright's recent speeches but by labeling the reverend's remarks as "appalling."

Later in the press conference, Obama again denies any similarity between his world view and the world view of Wright:

And obviously, he's free to speak out on issues that are of concern to him and he can do it in any ways that he wants. But I feel very strongly that -- well, I want to make absolutely clear that I do not subscribe to the views that he expressed. I believe they are wrong. I think they are destructive. And to the extent that he continues to speak out, I do not expect those views to be attributed to me.

(Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 38)

Here, Obama acknowledges his pastor's right to feely speak his opinions, but rejects any suggestion that Wright's views represent his views of those of his campaign. Not only does he not subscribe to the views, but he condemns the views as wrong and destructive. Obama also seems to offer a warning to those who might not heed his denial, noting that he no longer wants to see these ideals associated with him, further strengthening the denial.

In addition to denying that he shared the beliefs of Reverend Wright, Obama also denied the accusation (by Wright and others) that the rejection of Wright's messages was purely political maneuvering:

And what I think particularly angered me was his [Wright's] suggestion somehow that my previous denunciation of his remarks were somehow political posturing. Anybody who knows me and anybody who knows what I'm about knows that -- that I am about trying to bridge gaps and that I see the -- the commonality in all people. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 20)

In this defense, Obama further denies that he subscribes to Wright's divisive rhetoric, and he explicitly and flatly rejects Wright's argument that Obama was only speaking out against the pastor and his speeches because of political expedience.

Obama also used simple denial to claim that his campaign should have any responsibility for Wright's actions: "And I want to be very clear that moving forward, Reverend Wright does not speak for me. He does not speak for our campaign. I cannot prevent him from continuing to make these outrageous remarks" (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 11). The senator argues that Wright is not a member of the campaign, does not speak for the campaign, and therefore, Obama should not be held accountable for any objectionable comments which the reverend may make.

### *Defeasibility*

Obama also used the strategy of defeasibility in defending himself against accusations that he should have left the church if he did not agree with the views espoused by its clergy:

Now, I've already denounced the comments that had appeared in these previous sermons. As I said, I had not heard them before. And I gave him the benefit of the doubt in my speech in Philadelphia, explaining that he has done enormous good in the church. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 6)

Obama is attempting to evade responsibility for his continued membership in the church and associations with Wright by explaining that he had not heard the more controversial messages before they appeared on television. He also argues that, given Wright's positive past, it was natural to not further investigate the pastor's sermons but rather give "him the benefit of the doubt." Thus, Obama cannot be held responsible for remarks that he had not heard or for his associations with a man that he assumed did not hold views so different from his own.

Obama made a similar argument, later in the speech, again claiming that he had not heard Wright's objectionable remarks and thus cannot be held responsible:

During the course of me attending that church, I had not heard those kinds of statements being made or those kinds of views being promoted. And I did not vet my pastor before I decided to run for the presidency. I was a member of the church. So you know, I think what it says is that, you know, I have not, you know, I did not run through -- run my pastor through the paces or review every one of the sermons that he had made over the last 30 years. But I don't think that anybody could attribute those ideas to me. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 26-27)

In this passage, once again, Obama makes clear that he cannot be held accountable for remarks that he did know about. But he goes a step further, arguing that it is not realistic to expect that he would have reviewed every single sermon in a thirty year period looking

for controversial information (as ABC News had done). Since he could not reasonably be expected to have known everything that Wright has said in the past, Obama's critics cannot reasonably hold him accountable for the words of his pastor.

### *Bolstering*

Obama's use of bolstering was not as frequent in his press conference as it had been in his "Speech on Race." Still, Obama accentuated his more positive qualities in an attempt to reduce the offensiveness of his relationship with Wright:

I have spent my entire adult life trying to bridge the gap between different kinds of people. That's in my DNA, trying to promote mutual understanding to insist that we all share common hopes and common dreams as Americans and as human beings. That's who I am. That's what I believe. That's what this campaign has been about. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 2)

Obama highlights the conciliatory spirit of his campaign and his campaign's dominant theme of hope. Obama reminds his audience that he believes in mutual understanding and that he shares the hopes and dreams of all Americans. By doing so, Obama hopes to reduce the offensiveness of any association that voters may make between him and the presumably uncommon hopes and dreams of Reverend Wright.

### *Differentiation*

Obama also used differentiation to reduce the offensiveness of the accusations against him. The most prominent persuasive attack against Obama was that his long time associations with Reverend Wright and Obama's membership in Wright's church suggested that Obama held the same controversial beliefs and values demonstrated by Wright. With his use of differentiation, Obama attempted to delineate differences



between the relationship he shared with Wright and the views that clips of Wright's sermons had shared with the nation: "I have been a member of Trinity United Church of Christ since 1992. I have known Reverend Wright for almost 20 years. The person I saw yesterday was not the person that I met 20 years ago" (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 4).

Obama is arguing that the Jeremiah Wright seen at the National Press Club was a different man than the man he had known personally. Reinforcing the importance of the distinction, Obama later repeated the argument, "Well, look, as I said before, the person I saw yesterday was not the person that I had come to know over 20 years" (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 23). Jeremiah Wright's message at the National Press Club was not the message that Obama had heard in church or in personal conversations. Obama may have agreed and ascribed to some of Wright's former views, but this was a different message, one Obama did not ascribe to.

Another example of Obama's differentiation between his own views and the views of Wright was when he explained that the two men stood for different things:

What we saw yesterday out of Reverend Wright was a resurfacing and, I believe, an exploitation of those old divisions [created by politics]. Whatever his intentions, that was the result. It is antithetical to our campaign. It is antithetical to what I am about. It is not what I think American stands for. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 10)

Obama clearly differentiates between Wright's values and his own. Wright stands for divisive politics. Obama stands for unity. Wright stands for one thing; Obama's campaign and America stand for another thing. Thus, Obama reduces the offensiveness of the *kategoria* that he and Wright share the same beliefs by clearly differentiating.

### *Minimization*

Minimization was another strategy that Obama used to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Wright, as he attempted to explain the extent of the religious guidance he had received from Wright: “You know, he was never my, quote-unquote, ‘spiritual adviser.’ He was never my ‘spiritual mentor.’ He was -- he was my pastor” (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 64-65). To Obama’s critics who claimed Obama’s presence in Wright’s church meant that Wright held significant influence over Obama’s ideals, this minimization served as a rebuttal. One follows the advice of his or her adviser; one seeks to model his or herself after his or her mentor. Wright filled neither of these roles in his relationship with Obama. Wright was *just* a pastor.

### *Transcendence*

Like bolstering, differentiation, and minimization, transcendence is another strategy for reducing the offensiveness of an event or action. Obama used transcendence by arguing that there are more important issues than divisive politics:

I have spoken and written about the need for us to all recognize each other as Americans, regardless of race or religion or region of the country; that the only way we can deal with critical issues, like energy and health care and education and the war on terrorism, is if we are joined together. And the reason our campaign has been so successful is because we had moved beyond these old arguments. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 9)

Obama, his campaign, and his supporters have been able to recognize the transcendent issues of the campaign; he invites his critics to make this same realization and put aside meaningless attacks on Obama for his associations with Wright.

Further attempting to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Wright, Obama used transcendence to remind his audience that the focus should not be on Wright but on the problems of the country:

I'm particularly distressed that this has caused such a distraction from what this campaign should be about, which is the American people. Their situation is getting worse. And this campaign has never been about me. It's never been about Senator Clinton or John McCain. It's not about Reverend Wright... And the fact that Reverend Wright would think that somehow it was appropriate to command the stage, for three or four consecutive days, in the midst of this major debate, is something that not only makes me angry but also saddens me. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 14-15)

Wright is not important, nor is Obama's connection to Wright. Equally unimportant are Obama's fellow presidential candidates, Clinton and McCain. To the point, none of the attacks about Obama and Wright are important, whether they are made by Clinton or McCain or Wright or anyone else. What *is* important, what is most important, is the American people. Obama is devaluing the attacks made by his critics, and attempting to redirect them to the greater concerns of the campaign and the country.

Obama later reinforced his defense against the taint of his relationship with Wright. He again argued that the American people, not the controversial reverend, should be the focus:

You know, after seeing Reverend Wright's performance, I felt as if there was a complete disregard, for what the American people are going through and the need for them to rally together to solve these problems. You know, now is the time for

us not to get distracted. Now is the time for us to pull together. And that's what we've been doing in this campaign. And, you know, there was a sense that that did not matter to Reverend Wright. What mattered was him commanding center stage. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 33-35)

Answering attacks that Wright is representative of Obama's agenda, the senator points out that it is not just Obama's political and media critics who have lost sight of what is most important. Reverend Wright has also put himself ahead of the best interests of the nation. Obama uses transcendence to remind everyone that helping the American people is far more important than Wright or those who seek to tie Obama to Wright.

Obama also employed transcendence to justify why he was still a member of Trinity United Church of Christ despite the spectacle that had seemingly developed around the congregation and its clergy:

And, you know, when I go to church it's not for spectacle. It's to pray and to find - - to find a stronger sense of faith. It's not to posture politically. It's not -- you know, it's not to hear things that violate my core beliefs. (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 41)

In this passage, Obama explains that he still attended Trinity because of the "stronger sense of faith" that he was able to gain by going to services. This is the reason that he goes to any church in the first place, and it is the reason why he still goes to Trinity despite the controversy and spectacle.

This example of image repair also responds to the accusation that Obama is "just a politician." He is not there to prop up his political character as "someone who goes to

church.” He is there to worship and grow spiritually. This noble concern trumps any other motives that his attackers may suggest Obama has for going to church.

### *Attack Accuser*

Obama also sought to reduce the offensiveness of the *kategoria* against him by attacking one of his accusers, Reverend Wright. Recall that Wright had obviously not attacked Obama for sharing the controversial views expressed in the sermons. Instead, Wright attacked Obama’s attempted separation from him as politics: “He says what he has to say as a politician” (*Bill Moyers Journal*, 2008, ¶ 128), suggesting that Obama’s beliefs are closer to Wright’s than Obama can admit publicly. Obama rejects this accusation and attacks Wright for it:

They [Wright’s comments at the Press Club] certainly don’t portray accurately my values and beliefs. And if Reverend Wright thinks that that’s political posturing, as he put it, then he doesn’t know me very well. And based on his remarks yesterday, well, I may not know him as well as I thought, either.

(Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 5)

Obama declares that Wright is wrong, and challenges the assertion that Wright knows him well enough to make these accusations. Further, Obama insinuates that Wright has changed, and perhaps betrayed Obama, when the senator concedes that “I may not know him [Wright] as well as I thought.” Obama is attacking Wright for misrepresenting himself as well as Obama and his campaign. Wright is not as he had presented himself to Obama in the past.

### *Corrective Action*

Obama used corrective action to respond to the accusation that had he disagreed with Wright's sermons, he should have challenged the controversial ideas. Obama claims, "I've already denounced the comments that had appeared in these previous sermons," but seeks to settle any additional concerns by rejecting Wright's more recently conveyed beliefs and values about the greatness of Louis Farrakhan and the U.S. government spreading AIDS and engaging in terrorism: "They offend me. They rightly offend all Americans. And they should be denounced. And that's what I'm doing very clearly and unequivocally here today" (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 6-7).

Having used corrective action to respond to attacks that he had not denounced the espoused beliefs of Reverend Wright, Obama next sought to use corrective action to answer those who asked why he still associated with his pastor. "I want to use this press conference to make people absolutely clear that obviously whatever relationship I had with Reverend Wright has changed as a consequence of" Wright's speeches to the NAACP and National Press Club (Obama, 2008, April 29, ¶ 37). Obama's critics, and even some of his supporters, had questioned why he continued to maintain a relationship with Obama. Therefore, Obama used corrective action to explain to his audience that he and Wright no longer shared the relationship they once had had.

### *Apologia* in Obama's May 31 News Conference

Over a month after Obama had ended his relationship with Wright, declaring that the minister was not the man he once knew, image problems persisted for Obama. In part, these problems had been renewed by new video showing yet another controversial minister speaking at Obama's church. This time, Reverend Michael Pfleger, a guest

speaker at Trinity, had ridiculed Hillary Clinton, pretending that he was her, crying because there was “a black man stealing my [Clinton’s] show” (Raum, 2008, ¶ 17). In addition to the Pflieger controversy’s renewed focus on Obama’s church, the original Wright-associated attacks still persisted. Exit polling in Indiana and Pennsylvania (two primary contests that Obama had lost to Clinton) suggested that the controversy may have damaged Obama’s image among voters in those states (Gilbert, 2008; Miller, 2008).

So, Obama returned to the work of defending his image from attacks on his associations with Jeremiah Wright. Information had leaked to the press that the Obama family had written to Trinity resigning their membership in the church. After the leak, the campaign announced a news conference, held in Aberdeen, South Dakota on May 31, 2008. In the news conference, Obama’s image repair discourse relied on the strategies of simple denial, defeasibility, and corrective action. Because Obama’s use of simple denial and defeasibility build on his use of corrective action, I begin with analysis of the latter.

### *Corrective Action*

In his previous press conference, Obama had already used corrective action, denouncing Wright in an attempt to quell accusations that his allegiance to Wright meant that he must share the views of Reverend Wright. However, Obama still faced accusations that his continued membership in the church signified complacency regarding the rhetoric of the church. This might not have been a problem, given that Wright had retired from Trinity. However, the emergence of Reverend Pflieger’s sermon removed that possibility because the controversy at Trinity remained. By leaving the church, Obama hoped to put an end to any new controversy and repair his image.

In this excerpt from the May 31 news conference, Obama articulates his corrective action and the reasoning behind it:

My suspicion at that time [after the National Press Club episode], and Michelle, I think, shared this concern, was that it was going to be very difficult to continue our membership there so long as I was running for president. The recent episode with Father Pfleger I think just reinforced that view that we don't want to have to answer for everything that's stated in a church. (Obama, 2008, May 31, ¶ 14)

Obama resolves that the only way to end questions about his associations with the church and its controversies is to leave the church. Plus, the corrective action is meant to fix another problem:

On the other hand, we also don't want a church subjected to the scrutiny that a presidential campaign legitimately undergoes... I don't want Reverend Moss to have to look over his shoulder and see that his sermon vets or if it's potentially problematic for my campaign or will attract the fury of a cable program. And so, I have no idea how it will impact my presidential campaign. But I know it's the right thing to do for the church and for our family. (Obama, 2008, May 31, ¶ 14)

Obama explains that this corrective action is not only a defense against attacks on his candidacy, but that it is also for the good of the church. Just as he does not want to be held accountable for the acts of his church, Obama does not want his church to suffer because of one of its high-profile members.

### *Simple Denial*

During his interview with Bill Moyers, Reverend Wright had introduced the attack that Obama's speeches on race relations and the denouncement of Wright's



sermons were political posturing. Since that time, other critics of Obama had also joined in this accusation. Now, there was a suggestion that Obama's latest move (leaving the church) was further political posturing and again, not representative of his true convictions. Obama immediately denied this charge:

I reject that notion which I think is a very cynical one that I would join a church simply to maneuver politically. And I am offended by the suggestion. Point number one. Point number two, if I had wanted to be politically convenient then presumably when the problem surfaced with some of Reverend Wright's statements the day of my announcement, presumably that's when I would have thought about distancing myself from the church. (Obama, 2008, May 31, ¶ 22)

Obama denies that he would join (or leave) a church just for political gain. He backs up his denial by noting that it would have been more politically beneficial to leave the church when he first announced his candidacy. Since he stayed with the church as long as possible, he cannot be guilty of political posturing.

Obama next reinforced his denial that his choice of church was an element of political posturing: "I am not going to approach this [looking for another church] as a political exercise... I am not going to approach it with the view of figuring out how to avoid political problems" (Obama, 2008, May 31, ¶ 24). Just as his previous church choice was not a political calculation, his family's next choice of a church will also be apolitical.

### *Defeasibility*

Since Reverend Wright's sermons had first aired on television news and the Internet, Obama had faced the accusation that he must share the ideals espoused at his

church. To the contrary, using defeasibility, Obama argued that it was not possible to find a church where one would agree with everything said there: “Obviously I think in whatever church you join there's going to be things the pastor says or a guest pastor says that you don't agree with” (Obama, 2008, May 31, 2008, ¶ 16). Since it is impossible to find a church where you agree with everything that the minister says, Obama’s accusers cannot expect him to find the perfect church; he was thus left with his imperfect choice of Trinity.

### Evaluation

The effectiveness of Obama’s image repair discourse on the subject of Reverend Jeremiah Wright will now be evaluated on the basis of the internal criteria of internal consistency, plausibility and *kairotic* effectiveness. I will then provide public opinion polls, news coverage, and election outcomes as external evidence for the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the *apologia*. In order to evaluate Obama’s image repair discourse, it is important to keep in mind the persuasive attacks that he faced: (1) Obama must have either heard at least known about Wright’s controversial sermons, yet he remained a member of the congregation, suggesting that he did not disagree with the statements being made; (2) if Obama did disagree with Wright, he should have either challenged the controversial ideals presented and/or severed his relationship with Wright and, with his family, left the church; and (3) Obama’s remarks and those of his pastor were evidence that Obama’s candidacy did not represent change, but rather, politics as usual.

#### *Internal Evidence*

*Simple denial.* Regarding the *kairotic* effectiveness of Obama’s use of denial, the degree of urgency for each of Obama’s three speeches, the time constraints, and the

audiences tell much about the influence of *kairos* in these speech sets. The series of primary elections, as well as the impending general election each represented both significant urgencies and constraints. The closeness of Obama's primary contest with Hillary Clinton and the competitiveness of Obama's eventual match-up with John McCain both made the Wright matter very urgent. In fact, the seemingly non-step flow of primary contests made the urgency relentless. Obama could not afford to wait out the controversy or even sacrifice one primary contest by not responding to the charges because there was seemingly always another election just days away. Plus, the cycle of primary contests presented an ever-changing audience. Granted, there was always a national audience, but Obama had to make more tailored appeals to the electorate in each individual state primary and caucus. Thus, *kairos* played a significant role in the effectiveness of Obama's use of denial.

Denial is most appropriate when the accused is innocent of that of which he or she is accused. Thus, if Obama had truly never heard (or heard about) any of Wright's controversial beliefs and values, denial would be an appropriate strategy. However, it does not seem plausible that Obama, even if he had never actually been in church on the day of one of the objectionable sermons, would not at least have heard from a fellow member of the congregation about Wright's "distorted view of this country" (Obama's words). Plus, the argument that Obama had heard Wright say 'controversial things, but not that controversial' seems inconsistent. How is an observer to know what Obama considered controversial and what he considered distorted? Finally, this use of simple denial is *kairotically* weak because the strategy has no long-term application. Even if audiences accept Obama's claim that he had never heard about the distorted views *before*,

he has heard of them now. Once Wright's remarks were revealed to everyone, Obama could no longer plead ignorance. Thus, this denial could have only been effective temporarily and was not effective overall.

Obama also denied that his actions were the product of political posturing. Considering that this defense was issued in the situation of a political campaign, this denial seems absurd. Arguably, in a political campaign, everything a candidate says is political posturing or maneuvering. It may be that the posturing is consistent with a candidate's actual convictions. However, the words still represent political maneuvers. The constraint of the situation of a political campaign foils the *kairotic* effectiveness of this use of denial.

Despite the above failings of denial, other examples of Obama's denials were better conceived. Many people have acquaintances, even close friends, with whom they have stark disagreements. Therefore, Obama's denials that he shared Wright's controversial views seem perfectly plausible.

*Provocation.* Obama attempted to argue that Wright's anger and the willingness of his congregation to listen were provoked by endemic racism. Rightly so, this country's history of racism is a source of anger for many Americans of all races. However, few of these Americans respond to that anger in the manner that Wright did. Thus, it does not seem plausible that Wright's remarks were solely the result of provocation by societal racism. In addition, this strategy does not seem necessary unless Obama is himself, admitting to allowing his anger at racism to cause him to express the sentiments of Wright. In fact, because Obama had already denied that he shared Wright's sentiments, this use of provocation seems inconsistent. Finally, the audience is a

constraint in this rhetorical situation that inhibits provocation from being a *kairotically* viable strategy. Although some of Obama's audience have likely been victims of racism, there are likely more in the audience who have never been victims of racism and thus cannot empathize with Reverend Wright or with those who may share his views.

*Defeasibility.* Defeasibility was applied in three different fashions. First, the strategy was used to answer the accusation that Obama should have denounced Wright and terminated his relationship with the pastor. Obama claimed that request was not possible because it would be paramount to denouncing and rejecting his grandmother just because she might have also held racist beliefs. This argument is a flawed one. First, it was Wright, not Obama's grandmother who had made the statements under scrutiny. And (as pointed out by Hillary Clinton and others), since Obama would conceivably have a different relationship with his grandmother than his pastor, the analogy seems to be flawed. Second, *kairos* and consistency damage the effectiveness of this argument. Even if Obama's audience had accepted this rationale in the initial rhetorical situation, the strategy was nullified in the subsequent rhetorical situation in which Obama *did* denounce Reverend Wright. Under these new constraints, Obama's prior use of defeasibility creates two new possibilities, neither desirable: The first possibility is that Obama was a liar, since he clearly *could* denounce and end his relationship with Wright. The other possibility is that, under similar dire circumstances, Obama would be capable of denouncing his grandmother and ending his relationship with her. Thus, this strategy failed because the changing *kairos* made Obama's argument look inconsistent.

Defeasibility was also used by Obama to argue that he could not have known about every single thing that Wright had said. It *is* unrealistic to expect Obama to review

hours of video, as ABC News had done, to find the most controversial remarks. However, there remains the expectation that he would have heard about the most shocking remarks made by Wright. Obama also used defeasibility to claim that there is no such thing as a perfect church, no such person as an entirely uncontroversial minister. This application of defeasibility does seem both plausible and consistent. Further, it is not time bound, and is likely to appeal to multiple segments of Obama's audience.

*Bolstering.* Bolstering was a well-conceived strategy of Obama in each of his speech sets. Bolstering works because it can help to counter the negative associations of Wright by reminding the audience of Obama's many positive qualities which had allowed him to make it so far in the quest for the presidency. Specifically, Obama's acclaiming of his love of and hope for the country presented an effective contrast with Wright's list of atrocities allegedly committed by the United States. Bolstering is also an ideal strategy with respect to *kairos*. Bolstering worked well on each occasion that he employed it. Because Obama never contradicted any of his positive attributes that he called to attention, there were no changing circumstances that weakened this strategy. Finally, Obama's positive message of hope was one of his strengths throughout his campaign because it appealed to wide segments of the population. Therefore, the audience did not present any constraints on the *kairotic* effectiveness of the message. Thus, bolstering was an effective strategy for Obama.

*Minimization.* Minimization was only used once by Obama, but it was used effectively to deflate the significance that some of Obama's critics had attributed to his relationship with Wright. Obama argued that Wright was *just* his pastor and not his spiritual adviser. Although some in Obama's audience may equate their clergy with

spiritual advisers, it is plausible that many others can identify with Obama's use of minimization. Further, although Obama expressed regret at the deterioration of his relationship with Wright, he never contradicted his claim that Wright was just a pastor, remaining consistent in this argument. Thus, some audience members might have had different experiences with their pastors, but the consistency of the message and the lack of other constraints also make this message *kairotically* effective.

*Differentiation.* The strategy of differentiation was also a well-conceived form of *apologia* for Obama. Differentiation allowed Obama to plausibly reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Wright by redefining the nature of their acquaintance. Obama's clear delineations between what he believed and what Wright had espoused provided effective and plausible distinctions.

Yet, the most powerful use of differentiation was Obama's declaration that Wright was not the person that he had met twenty years earlier. This was a plausible claim, since most people in Obama's audience likely knew someone in their life who had changed (possibly dramatically so) over the course of a long term relationship. This incarnation of differentiation also elicits empathy for Obama because it seems that he has been betrayed or misled by a friend. This strategy is also *kairotically* effective because it is not inconsistent with Obama's previous image repair strategies. Although it is unlikely that Wright changed overnight, it is quite possible that Obama came to this realization overnight, or, as he watched the National Press Club speech.

This strategy also showed deference to *kairos* because Obama waited as long as he could to declare that he no longer knew Wright the way he used to. The fact that Obama waited to use this strategy until later in the controversy suggests that Obama was

being patient with his pastor and trying to give him every leeway possible before concluding that the relationship was beyond salvation. Obama's loyalty and patience are constraints in this rhetorical situation. They hamper him from denouncing Wright earlier. However, when the senator finally does express sadness at the realization that Wright has changed, the timing magnifies Obama's loyalty and patience in the eyes of his audience.

One might argue that Obama should have denounced Wright sooner. However, if Obama had immediately denounced his pastor, the timing may have made him more vulnerable to accusations that he was being politically expedient, rather than painfully arriving at a difficult decision. Instead, Obama chose the opportune time to separate the Jeremiah Wright of the past from the Jeremiah Wright of the present.

*Transcendence.* Recall from the review of literature that transcendence was a frequently used strategy in contexts of religious *apologia* because of the effectiveness of appeals to God's higher power. Obama's application of transcendence in response to demands that he leave his church and denounce his pastor was equally effective, at least initially. Obama effectively reduced the offensiveness of his relationship with Wright by telling the audience in his "Speech on Race" that Trinity "serves the community by doing God's work here on Earth" (Obama, 2008, March 18, ¶ 31). Obama argued that Wright's controversial sermons were outweighed by the good *deeds* done by Wright and his church, and this likely seemed plausible for a largely Judeo-Christian audience who believe that one can redeem themselves through good deeds.

However, this strategy eventually deteriorated. Wright's increasingly inflammatory remarks to Moyers, the NAACP, and the National Press Club, placed constraints on Obama's image repair efforts that gradually weakened the *kairotic*



effectiveness. Thus, a strategy that began as a successful one eventually became ineffective because the *kairos* of the message had changed.

Obama also, initially, used transcendence to argue that the goals of his campaign and the policies that his administration would enact were too important to be dragged down by divisive political attacks. However, as the audience demanded more explanation for Wright's comments, it became evident that the pastor's remarks were impeding the campaign and consequentially, this application of transcendence also became ineffective and was abandoned in the May 31 news conference.

*Attack accuser.* Obama's use of attack accusers to deflect criticism from Wright and himself on to talk show hosts and conservative commentators seems unproductive. Although these parties may have, themselves, been guilty of the same racism that Wright (and by extension, Obama) was accused of, there was no evidence offered that conservatives were currently making the same controversial remarks that Wright was shown to have made. Thus, in this situation, Obama did not adequately meet the demands made by the constraints in the rhetorical situation. Specifically, he did not adequately provide evidence that his critics, themselves, were guilty of the accusations they were making. Obama's defense against Wright's accusations of political posturing was a better conceived use of attacking his accuser. This strategy made more sense because Wright had already been vilified and attacked; thus it was easy for Obama to join the attacks and in doing so, lessen the perceived association between himself and Wright. This application was also, *kairotically*, well-conceived because the attacks appealed to the rhetorical audience and the situation's exigencies demanded that Obama contradict Wright on some level, even if only to attack how well the pastor knew the senator.

*Corrective action.* Obama's use of corrective action worked well as a defensive strategy. When charged with wrong-doing, it is expected that the accused will attempt to make amends for his or her actions. One of the primary attacks against Obama was that he should have left the church and denounced Wright to prove that he did not condone the beliefs expressed in the church. Obama eventually answered this call by both denouncing Wright and leaving Trinity. One might argue that Obama's use of corrective action was not executed quickly enough. However, he was constrained by the desire to remain loyal to the long-term relationships with Wright and others in the church. When Obama did *eventually* leave the church, his actions were decried by some as political expedience. If he had *immediately* denounced Wright and left the church, the corrective action would have seemed even more motivated by politics rather than convictions. Thus, Obama's management of the constraints of his relationships with the church and Wright and his management of the timing of his corrective action made this strategy *kairotically* effective.

#### *External Evidence*

*Polling and election outcomes.* A *Wall Street Journal*-NBC poll conducted March 24-25 (approximately a week after Obama's Speech on Race) suggested that Obama's image repair had worked to satisfy questions about his association with Wright, as 55% said they were satisfied compared to 32% who replied they were dissatisfied (Poll, 2008, March 28). A *New York Times*/CBS News poll of registered voters, conducted May 1-3, (days after Obama's press conference denouncing Wright) found that 60% of voters approved (compared to 23% who disapproved) of how Obama had handled the situation with Wright (Nagourney & Connelly, 2008, May 5). However, the same

poll found that 47% believed Obama had acted to help himself politically, versus 34% who believed Obama had denounced Wright because the senator genuinely disagreed with Wright's comments. Further evidence for the mixed effectiveness of Obama's *apologia* was provided by his narrow loss to Hillary Clinton in the Indiana primary on the same night of his convincing Obama win in North Carolina.

Exit polls taken during primary contests between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama at the time of the controversy also provide a measure of the effectiveness of Obama's *apologia*. A poll taken following the Pennsylvania primary (held April 22, 2008), which Clinton won by 10%, found that one in five voters said race was important and that Clinton won 59% of those voters (Miller, 2008). Further, Clinton won 75% of white voters who said race was important (Miller, 2008). Although it is likely that at least a portion of these figures are due to previously existing prejudices, the Wright controversy undoubtedly helped Clinton to win over more white voters, and there was clearly room for improvement in the effectiveness of Obama's race-related image repair discourse.

Further, the results of a *Newsweek* poll, conducted closer to the general election (October 22-23, 2008) suggest that voters' satisfaction with Obama's explanations had degraded somewhat. Asked about the concern that "Obama might share the views of Jeremiah Wright, his former pastor, on race," 27% said it was a major concern; 19%, a minor concern, 50%, not a concern, and 4% responded that they were unsure (Pollingreport.com, 2008, October 22-23). Thus, although half of voters were not at all concerned that the senator and his pastor might share views on race, 46% thought it was at least a minor concern, a substantial jump from the 32% who had earlier in the spring

stated they were dissatisfied with Obama's explanations. The polling drop suggests that renewed discussion of the issue by independent groups during the general election phase, combined with Wright's sustained public appearances following the "Speech on Race," had somewhat eroded Obama's originally effective image repair discourse.

Ultimately, Obama won the two contests that mattered most: he beat Clinton to win the Democratic nomination and went on to convincingly defeat Republican John McCain in the general election. However, exit polls in the 2008 general election suggest that Wright was not a significant factor given the weight of the economy as a deciding issue among voters in a nation experiencing a financial crisis: A Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll conducted November 1-2, 2008 (days before the election) showed that 49% of all voters rated the economy as the most important issue (the next closest ranking was terrorism and national security at 9%) (Pollingreport.com, 2008, November 1-2). Obama was favored 53-39% over McCain to handle the financial crisis and 55-39% to handle the economy (Pollingreport.com, 2008, October 17-19). Thus, it is difficult to know if Obama's associations with Wright would have been a more significant issue had the economy not imploded. To summarize, looking at polls and election outcomes, it seems that although Obama's "Speech on Race" was well received, there are mixed results to support the effectiveness of Obama's subsequent defenses.

*Commentary.* Sampling of *New York Times* coverage of the Wright controversy also suggests that the initial image repair discourse in the "Speech on Race" was effective but weakened by Wright's subsequent televised appearances and Obama's delayed responses. Review of the newspaper's commentary between speeches and in the week after the final press conference revealed the following findings.

Following Obama's "Speech on Race," Janny Scott of the *New York Times* found Obama's use of bolstering to be effective: "Mr. Obama invoked the fundamental values of equality, opportunity, fairness, [and] social justice" (2008, March 19, p. 14). Scott continues, "He confronted race head-on, then reached beyond it to talk sympathetically about the experience of the white working class and the plight of workers stripped of jobs and pensions" and in this passage, conveys her approval of Obama's use of transcendence. Thus, Scott provides further opinion on the evidence of the effectiveness of Obama's use of bolstering and his *early* use of transcendence.

A March 20, 2008 letter to the editor also praised Obama's use of transcendence: "It was indeed transcendent. It went far beyond the issue of his relationship to his church and pastor. It directly confronted the most serious problem in our country, and displayed a self-awareness and a penetrating insight into the race issue as it affects blacks and whites" (*New York Times*). Thus, readers also appreciated the initial use of transcendence by Obama.

Columnist Maureen Dowd, also commenting on the "Speech on Race," mentioned Obama's comparisons between rejecting his pastor and his grandmother:

Obama went to great pains to honor the human dimension of his relationship with his politically threatening "old uncle," as he calls him. Displaying his multihued, crazy-quilted DNA, he talked about cringing when he heard the white grandmother who raised him use racial stereotypes and confess her fear of passing black men on the street. (Dowd, March 19, 2008, p. 19)

In this excerpt Dowd offers praise for Obama's use of defeasibility. However, recall that the defeasibility was not only found plausibly ineffective because of the invalid

comparison between Wright and Obama's grandmother but was found *kairotically* ineffective because Obama later *did* eventually reject Wright. Dowd does not yet have this perspective.

Dowd (March 19, 2008) also mentioned an instance of attack accuser: "He rightly struck back at right-wing hysteria-mongers. 'Talk-show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism,' he said, 'while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism'" (p. 19). Here, despite the above arguments that attacking conservatives was a red herring, Dowd also affirms Obama's use of attack accusers.

In a March 20, 2008 opinion-editorial, columnist Nicholas Kristof also recognized the validity of differentiation:

Mr. Wright has indeed made some outrageous statements. But he should be judged as well by his actions -- including a vigorous effort to address poverty, ill health, injustice and AIDS in his ministry. Mr. Wright has been frightfully wrong on many topics, but he was right on poverty, civil rights and compassion for AIDS victims. (p. 27)

Like Obama, Kristof sees the differences between Wright's actions of the past and his "frightfully wrong" views on other more recent topics. Thus, Kristof's realization that one could differentiate between Wright's good deeds and bad beliefs validates Obama's use of this defense.

In a March 25, 2008 opinion-editorial, Bob Herbert argued that the speech was, as Wright had declared, political:

The Philadelphia speech was obviously political, designed to limit the damage that the sermons by the Rev. Jeremiah Wright were inflicting on Mr. Obama's campaign. But the theme of the speech was both legitimate and powerful, and it ought to resonate with fair-minded Americans, regardless of whether they support Mr. Obama for president. (p. 27)

This comment seems to discount the effectiveness of Obama's simple denial that he was politically posturing and his attacks on Wright for claiming so. However, Herbert actually is arguing that even though the speech was political, it was still an important and worthy piece of rhetoric. Thus, Obama seems to have effectively used attack accuser and denial also.

Finally, an April 30, 2008 editorial in *The New York Times* provides, in the opening paragraph, evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's use of corrective action:

It took more time than it should have, but on Tuesday Barack Obama firmly rejected the racism and paranoia of his former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright Jr., and he made it clear that the preacher does not represent him, his politics or his campaign. (p. 18)

The editorial praises Obama's rejection of his pastor and confirms that the corrective action was successful in noting, "he made it clear," meaning that Obama's use of corrective action (and also his use of denial) left no question about Obama's disagreements with the controversial beliefs of Wright. However, the editorial criticizes the *kairotic* effectiveness of Obama's corrective action, when it notes "It took more time than it should have," attacks the timing specifically, the tardiness of the defense.

## Conclusion

Analysis of Obama's image repair discourse in his March 18, 2008 "Speech on Race," his April 29, 2008 press conference, and May 31, 2008 news conference shows that Obama used nine different image repair strategies. Obama most often and most effectively used strategies to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Reverend Wright. He effectively bolstered his image, minimized and differentiated the attacks against him, and attacked his accusers. Obama's use of transcendence was also, initially an effective strategy for reducing the offensiveness, but became less effective after Obama denounced and divorced Wright. The presidential candidate also effectively used corrective action. Further, Obama successfully denied that he shared Wright's beliefs, though he was not able to effectively deny that he knew about Wright's beliefs. Also ineffective was Obama's use of provocation. Evidence shows that Obama's image suffered significant damage. Overall, however, Obama's success with reducing the offensiveness and corrective action allowed him to somewhat repair his image and maintain enough support to overcome Hillary Clinton's primary challenge and eventually defeat John McCain.



## Chapter Five

### “Forty Years ago, when I was 8 Years Old”

On September 11, 2001 the *New York Times* reported on an interview of William (Bill) Ayers, conducted in conjunction with the publication of his book, *Fugitive Days*. The book and the interview both discussed Ayers’ 1970s experiences as a member of the Weather Underground. The Weather Underground advocated and engaged in violence as a means of protesting U.S. policies regarding the Vietnam War and race relations (Smith, 2001). As a member of the Weather Underground, Ayers claimed credit for “bombings of New York City Police Headquarters in 1970, of the [U.S.] Capitol building in 1971, the Pentagon in 1972” (Ayers was never prosecuted for the bombings due to statutes of limitations and improper FBI investigative procedures) (Smith, 2001, p. E1). The opening sentence of the *New York Times* story quoted Ayers’ reflections on his violent activities: “I don’t regret setting bombs... I feel we didn’t do enough” (Smith, 2001, p. E1). Ayers’ then little known neighbor in the Hyde Park district of Chicago, Illinois state Senator Barack Obama, would eventually fall prey to this quote, as it became a familiar sound byte used in persuasive attacks against the senator’s character.

Over six years later, senator Barack Obama was a Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States, and the senator’s associations with Ayers suddenly became newsworthy. British conservative columnist Peter Hitchens was the first to bring

to public attention the connection between Barack Obama and William Ayers. In his February 3, 2008 column in London's *Mail on Sunday*, Hitchens wrote:

His [Obama's] list of contributions shows one for \$200 from a certain William Ayers. Can this possibly be the same William Ayers, now a Chicago professor, who used to plant bombs in the Seventies and has said: ["I don't regret setting bombs. I feel we didn't do enough?"] His partner, Bernardine Dohrn, once declared war on the US government. (p. 2)

Nearly three weeks later, on February 22, 2008, Ben Smith, who writes a politics blog for the political news website, *Politico*, reported that the relationship between Obama and Ayers went beyond the extent of campaign donor-recipient, declaring, "Obama once visited '60's radicals" (¶ 1). In his blog, Smith reported on a 1995 campaign stop by Obama (then running for the state Senate in Illinois) at the home of Ayers and Dohrn. Smith also reported that Obama and Ayers had "served together on the board of a Chicago foundation" (2008, ¶ 7).

Still, the controversy remained relatively muted for the next several weeks, receiving only scant news coverage. In fact, a LexisNexis Academic database search of U.S. Newspapers and Wires from February 22, 2008 through April 15, 2008 yielded a total of only 45 results that even mentioned both Obama and Ayers. The controversy did not attract extensive coverage among the mainstream media until the April 16, 2008 Democratic presidential primary debate between Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. During the debate, held in Philadelphia prior to the Pennsylvania primary, moderator George Stephanopoulos questioned Obama about his associations with Ayers, and Clinton was quick to follow with her own insinuations (O'Toole & Mauriello, 2008).

In the coming weeks, Republican nominee John McCain began to raise questions about Obama's associations with Ayers (Cooper, 2008). Further *kategoria* by McCain; his running mate, Governor Sarah Palin; and their supporters emerged during the general campaign in the form of attack ads, stump speeches, and debates.

Unlike his responses to attacks for his associations with Reverend Wright, Obama did not deliver major speeches or news conferences dedicated solely to the topic of his association with William Ayers. However, Obama did engage in image repair discourse through the channels of a statement by a campaign spokesperson, a campaign web site posting, television and radio advertisements, and debate responses.

I begin this chapter by recounting significant instances of *kategoria* leveled by Clinton, McCain, Palin, and the independent conservative organization, American Issues Project. I will then analyze Obama's image repair discourse on the topic of Ayers. This chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the effectiveness of Obama's discourse and an assessment of the role of *kairos* in the speech sets.

### *Kategoria*

Obama's political opponents used his relationship with Ayers to make a number of persuasive attacks on the senator. First, Obama was accused of not being forthright about the extent of his relationship with Ayers. Second, Obama was attacked for continuing his relationship with Ayers, even after, on September 11, 2001, *The New York Times* published the activist's remorseless remark that he felt the Weather Underground "didn't do enough." Third, Obama's critics claimed that the friendship was evidence of poor judgment. Fourth, much like the accusations made of Obama for his associations with Reverend Wright, Obama's attackers claimed that his relationship with Ayers (a

terrorist according to Obama's attackers) implied that he shared the former Weatherman's political views and was unpatriotic. In addition to these accusations, which were made by multiple rhetors and spanned the 2008 primary and general campaign cycles, Hillary Clinton made an additional claim during the primary campaign. She argued that Obama's associations with Ayers were evidence that Obama had not been fully vetted and thus, would be too vulnerable to Republican attacks during the general election.

Hillary Clinton had sought, throughout the campaign, to depict Obama as inexperienced and untested. During the April 16, 2008 Democratic primary debate, with the help of moderator George Stephanopoulos, she furthered this line of attack, using Ayers as evidence. Stephanopoulos began, "Can you explain that relationship [with Ayers] for voters, and explain why it won't be a problem?" (Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 3). Clinton persisted:

So it is -- you know, I think it is, again, an issue that people will be asking about.

I think that this is an issue that certainly the Republicans will be raising. And it goes to this larger set of concerns about, you know, how we are going to run against John McCain. So we know that they're going to be out there, full force.

And you know, I've been in this arena for a long time. I have a lot of baggage, and everybody has rummaged through it for years. And so therefore, I have, you know, an opportunity to come to this campaign with a very strong conviction and feeling that I will be able to withstand whatever the Republican sends our way.

(Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 11-13)

By noting that the Ayers association is an issue that she believes Republicans will raise, Clinton effectively raises and legitimizes the issue herself. Further, by stressing her own extensive vetting, Clinton shows, that in contrast, Obama has not been tested to withstand the Republican attacks.

Clinton also initiated attacks in the debate that would be revisited by Obama's conservative and Republican opponents:

I also believe that Senator Obama served on a board with Mr. Ayers for a period of time, the Woods Foundation, which was a paid directorship position. And if I'm not mistaken, that relationship with Mr. Ayers on this board continued after 9/11 and after his reported comments, which were deeply hurtful to people in New York, and I would hope to every American, because they were published on 9/11 and he said that he was just sorry they hadn't done more. And what they did was set bombs and in some instances people died. (Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 10-11)

In this example of *kategoria*, Clinton not only points out the extent of the relationship between Obama and Ayers (they were not just acquaintances but worked together); Clinton also criticizes Obama for maintaining his relationship with Ayers, even after his comments were published (by coincidence) in *The New York Times* on September 11, 2001. The key word in this attack is *continued*. Clinton suggests here that if Obama had worked with Ayers but then discovered his persisting radical beliefs and distanced himself that he might be forgiven. However, Clinton's observation that Obama *continued* the relationship after 9/11 further calls into question Obama's judgment and ideals.

In the first quoted debate excerpt, Clinton offers another attack that was repeated by Republicans: “So it is -- you know, I think it [the relationship with Ayers] is, again, an issue that people will be asking about.” McCain revived the attack in his October 15, 2008 debate with Obama: “But as Senator Clinton said in her debates with you, we need to know the full extent of that relationship” (§ 206). In each of these instances, both Clinton and McCain are suggesting that Obama is not being completely forthright about the extent of his relationship with Ayers. McCain further reinforced this argument later in the debate:

And it's not the fact -- it's not the fact that Senator Obama chooses to associate with a guy who in 2001 said that he wished he had [would] have bombed more, and he had a long association with him. It's the fact that all the -- all of the details need to be known about Senator Obama's relationship with them. (The Third, 2008, § 223).

Again, Obama’s candor is questioned as McCain accuses his fellow senator of not disclosing the extent of his relationship with Ayers.

McCain again repeated this accusation in an Internet ad, titled “Ayers,” which originally aired October 9, 2008 at the McCain-Palin web site: “They’ve [Ayers and Obama have] worked together for years. But Obama tries to hide it. Why? When their relationship became an issue, Obama just responded, ‘This is a guy who lives in my neighborhood.’ That's it? Americans say, ‘Where's the truth, Barack?’” (Ayers, 2008). Here, Obama’s explanation of his association with Ayers is questioned; the McCain ad questions the legitimacy of Obama’s explanation. The narrator also directly accuses Obama of hiding his work with Ayers and of withholding the truth.

The advertisement, “Know Enough,” paid for by the independent 527 group, American Issues Project, also made accusations that Obama has not been open about the nature of his ideals or his relationship with Ayers: “Beyond the speeches, how much do you know about Barack Obama? What does he really believe? Do you know enough to elect Barack Obama?” (Know enough, 2008). Once again, this advertisement clearly questions Obama’s candidness regarding the Ayers relationship.

McCain also repeated Clinton’s attack on Obama for standing by Ayers, even after his 2001 comments regretting that his group had not done more: “And it's not the fact -- it's not the fact that Senator Obama chooses to associate with a guy who in 2001 said that he wished he had have bombed more, and he had a long association with him” (The Third, 2008, ¶ 223). Despite the fact that McCain claims that Obama’s associations are *not* the point, by making mention of them, McCain *does* make a point out of them. McCain is also careful to point out that Obama “*chooses* to associate with a guy.” Obama actively chooses Ayers’ company--even after Ayers expressed, in 2001, his regret that he had not done more. This wording seemingly harkens back to Clinton’s criticism of Obama’s for his association with Jeremiah Wright, when she told audiences that you choose who your pastor is.

In the ad, “Ayers,” the McCain campaign argued, “But Obama’s friendship with terrorist Ayers isn’t the issue. The issue is Barack Obama’s judgment and candor” (Ayers, 2008). The ad ended with the narrator concluding, “Barack Obama. Too risky for America” (Ayers, 2008). This ad attacks Obama’s judgment as well as his honesty. In addition, accusations of Obama being dishonest and having poor judgment serve as evidence that Obama’s presidency would represent a risk for America. The exact risk is

not stated, but the ominous themes of terrorism suggest that America's security and safety might be at risk in an Obama presidency.

Several accusers sought to emphasize the extent and nature of Obama's relationship with Ayers. The McCain campaign's ad, "Ayers," (2008) made such attacks: "Barack Obama and domestic terrorist Bill Ayers. Friends. They've worked together for years. Obama launched his political career in Ayers' living room. Ayers and Obama ran a radical 'education' foundation together." Having established that the two were close friends, or at least colleagues, attackers then detailed Ayers' negative actions:

We know Bill Ayers ran the "violent left wing activist group" called Weather Underground. We know Ayers' wife was on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list. We know they bombed the Capitol. The Pentagon. A judge's home. We know Ayers said, "I don't regret setting bombs. ...I feel we didn't do enough." (Ayers, 2008) Here, the McCain campaign has established Ayers' controversial and unrepentant past. All that remains is to tie Obama to terrorist ideas: "But Obama's friendship with terrorist Ayers isn't the issue." The campaign can say that the friendship "isn't the issue," but by labeling Ayers a terrorist and Obama the friend of a terrorist, the negative association has already been made.

The independent 527 group, American Issues Project, takes the same approach in their *kategoria* against Obama:

Consider this: United 93 never really hit the Capitol on 9/11. But the Capitol was bombed 30 years before by an American terrorist group called Weather Underground. They declared war on the U.S., targeting the Capitol, the Pentagon, police stations, and more. One of the group's leaders, William Ayers, admits to



the bombings, proudly saying later, “We didn't do enough.” Some of the members of the group Ayers founded even went on the kill police. But Barack Obama is friends with Ayers, defending him as, quote, “respectable” and “mainstream.” Obama's political career was launched in Ayers's home, and the two served together on a left-wing board. Why would Barack Obama be friends with someone who bombed the Capitol and is proud of it? (Know enough, 2008)

As with the McCain advertisement, American Issues Project details Ayers' objectionable ideals and actions, and associates Obama with those beliefs and actions by labeling Obama as Ayers' friend.

During the April 16 Democratic primary debate, Stephanopoulos also raised questions about Obama's relationship with Ayers and the relationship's ramifications for perceptions of his patriotism:

But first a follow-up on this issue, the general theme of patriotism in your relationships. A gentleman named William Ayers, he was part of the Weather Underground in the 1970s. They bombed the Pentagon, the Capitol and other buildings. He's never apologized for that. And in fact, on 9/11 he was quoted in *The New York Times* saying, “I don't regret setting bombs; I feel we didn't do enough.” An early organizing meeting for your state senate campaign was held at his house, and your campaign has said you are friendly. Can you explain that relationship for the voters and explain to Democrats why it won't be a problem? (¶ 2-3)

Although Clinton chose to use Stephanopoulos' question to attack Obama as being unvetted and vulnerable (see above), the moderator's question still serves to raise questions about Obama's patriotism and his associations.

As part of a stump speech in Colorado on October 4, 2008, Sarah Palin never mentioned Ayers' name, yet she was still more specific in her accusations than others had been:

Turns out one of Barack's earliest supporters is a man who, according to the New York Times, and they are hardly ever wrong, was a domestic terrorist and part of a group that quote launched a campaign of bombings that would target the Pentagon and US Capitol. Wow. These are the same guys who think patriotism is paying higher taxes. (Phillips, 2008, ¶ 4)

Like others, Palin identified Ayers as both a terrorist and a supporter of Obama. However, the last sentence in the above excerpt, "These are the same guys who think patriotism is paying higher taxes," is a reference to a September 18, 2008 quote by Obama's running mate, Joe Biden, who suggested that he and Obama believed "that paying higher taxes is 'patriotic'" (Falcone, 2008). Thus, Palin compares Biden's and Obama's ideas of patriotism to those of terrorists.

Palin went on to contrast her view of American with Obama's view:

This is not a man who sees America as you see it and how I see America. We see America as the greatest force for good in this world. If we can be that beacon of light and hope for others who seek freedom and democracy and can live in a country that would allow intolerance in the equal rights that again our military men and women fight for and die for for all of us. Our opponent though, is

someone who sees America it seems as being so imperfect that he's palling around with terrorists who would target their own country? (Phillips, 2008)

In this portion of her stump speech, Palin further attacks Obama's view of America as one that does not view America as standing for freedom, democracy, or equal rights. She makes it clear that she believes that Obama sees America as imperfect. In fact, the Alaska governor made her most damning accusation by arguing that Obama sees America as so imperfect that he would ally himself with terrorists who would seek to harm the imperfect nation. Thus, not only should Obama's associations be questioned, but so should his patriotism and perhaps even his loyalty to his country.

In summary, the Ayers-related attacks on Obama were: (1) that Obama's associations with Ayers were evidence that Obama had not been fully vetted and thus, would be too vulnerable to Republican attacks during the general election; (2) that Obama was not being forthright about the extent of his relationship with Ayers; (3) that Obama had wrongly continued his relationship with Ayers, even after the activist's 2001 remark that he felt the Weather Underground "didn't do enough;" (4) that Obama's friendship with Ayers was evidence of poor judgment; and (5) that Obama's relationship with Ayers (a terrorist according to Obama's attackers) implied that the senator shared the political views of a terrorist and was unpatriotic. I now turn to Obama's defenses against these *kategoria*.

### *Apologia*

Unlike the "Speech on Race" and the two news conferences which comprised Obama's most significant defenses against attacks on his associations with Reverend Wright, there were no definitive speeches delivered by Obama on the topic of William

Ayers. Instead, Obama's image repair efforts are represented by messages in the senator's debate appearances, his paid advertising, and statements delivered by Obama's campaign staff on his behalf. In these messages, Obama used a total of five different image repair strategies: simple denial, bolstering, differentiation, transcendence, and attack accuser. I will now analyze Obama's use of these strategies in: the April 16, 2008 Democratic primary debate in Philadelphia; an Obama campaign television ad, "Ayers Response," which first aired August 25, 2008; a campaign statement issued by a member of Obama's staff; an Obama campaign radio ad, "Ayers Response," which first aired October 14, 2008; the 3<sup>rd</sup> presidential debate between Obama and McCain; and a brochure available on Obama's web page.

#### *Democratic Primary Debate in Philadelphia*

In responding to remarks by Obama's opponent, Senator Hillary Clinton, and the debate moderator, George Stephanopoulos of ABC News, Obama used the strategy of simple denial to deny that he shared Ayers' ideals and the strategies of differentiation, attack accuser, and bolstering to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with William Ayers.

*Simple denial.* Answering accusations that Obama's association with Ayers suggested that the two had similar beliefs and values, Obama used simple denial to attempt to counter this claim:

And the notion that somehow as a consequence of me knowing somebody who engaged in detestable acts 40 years ago when I was 8 years old, somehow reflects on me and my values, doesn't make much sense, George. The fact is, is that I'm also friendly with Tom Coburn, one of the most conservative Republicans in the

United States Senate, who during his campaign once said that it might be appropriate to apply the death penalty to those who carried out abortions. Do I need to apologize for Mr. Coburn's statements? Because I certainly don't agree with those either. (Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 6-8)

Obama denies that any associations he had with Ayers signal agreement with Ayers' radical acts. Noting that he was only 8 years old at the time of Ayers' accused terrorism, Obama uses simple denial to reject the notion as nonsense. Further, comparing his association with Ayers to his association with Oklahoma senator, Tom Coburn, Obama uses denial to demonstrate that he does not necessarily agree with the extreme views of his friends.

Obama again used simple denial to deflect accusations that Obama's relationship with Ayers signaled shared ideals:

So this kind of game, in which anybody who I know, regardless of how flimsy the relationship is, is somehow -- somehow their ideas could be attributed to me -- I think the American people are smarter than that. They're not going to suggest somehow that that is reflective of my views, because it obviously isn't.

(Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 9)

Obama rejects the allegation that his views are the same as anyone he has a relationship with.

*Differentiation.* In addition to evading responsibility for Ayers' actions and beliefs, Obama also sought to reduce the offensiveness of his relationship with the Chicago professor. Obama first used differentiation in the previously quoted excerpt, implying that his relationship with Ayers was not close but, "flimsy" (Democratic debate,

2008, ¶ 9). In doing so, Obama admitted that he had some kind of relationship with Ayers, but differentiated from a close relationship.

Obama again used differentiation at another point in the debate to distinguish between a close (influential) relationship and a casual relationship:

This is a guy who lives in my neighborhood, who's a professor of English in Chicago, who I know and who I have not received some official endorsement from. He's not somebody who I exchange ideas from on a regular basis.

(Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 5)

Obama admits that he knows Ayers and has had interactions with him, but he seeks to define his relationship with Ayers as an acquaintance, rather than a close friend or influential adviser. Further, Obama's labeling of Ayers as "a professor" provides an alternative to critics who more often used the label of "terrorist."

*Attack accusers.* Obama also attacked his accuser during the Democratic presidential debate. Recall that Hillary Clinton had attacked Obama for his associations with Ayers, claiming that Obama's relationship with the professor was evidence that Obama had not been sufficiently vetted and that he would be an easy target for Republicans in the general campaign. Obama defended himself against this accusation by turning it back on Clinton:

I'm going to have to respond to this just really quickly, but by Senator Clinton's own vetting standards, I don't think she would make it, since President Clinton pardoned or commuted the sentences of two members of the Weather Underground, which I think is a slightly more significant act than me -- than me

serving on a board with somebody for actions that he did 40 years ago.

(Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 14, 17)

Obama's response suggests that Clinton's associations with the Weather Underground are more cause for concern than are Obama's. In doing so, he attempts to weaken Clinton's persuasive attack.

*Bolstering.* Finally, Obama used bolstering to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Ayers: "What I've been able to display during the course of this primary is that I can take a punch. I've taken some pretty good ones from Senator Clinton" (Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 18). In this image repair attempt, Obama highlights his toughness, further countering claims by Clinton that he will make an easy mark for Republicans. Obama also bolstered by pointing out that Obama was either as competitive or more competitive than Clinton in hypothetical match-ups against McCain: "I am looking forward to having a debate with John McCain, and I think every poll indicates that I am doing just as well, if not better, in pulling together the coalition that will defeat John McCain" (Democratic debate, 2008, ¶ 19). Here, Obama points out that not only has he shown himself to be resilient but that current polling actually proves that he is a formidable adversary for McCain in the general election. Thus, once more, Obama discounts accusations that his associations with Ayers make for a doomed candidacy.

Thus, during the Democratic primary debate in Philadelphia, Obama used the strategy of denial to reject allegations that he shared the ideals of William Ayers. Obama also used differentiation, attack accuser, and bolstering to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Ayers.

*“Ayers Response” (Television)*

As is often the case in political campaigns, Clinton’s accusations in the Democratic primary resurfaced as ammunition for Republican attacks in the general election. Thus, Obama’s *apologia* continued in the general phase of the campaign. In a television advertisement that first aired August 25, 2008, Obama used simple denial, transcendence, and attack accuser in his image repair discourse.

*Simple denial.* Obama employed the strategy of simple denial to defend himself against the accusation that Obama should be held accountable for Ayers’ discretions of the past: “McCain knows Obama denounced Ayers’ crimes, committed when Obama was just eight years old” (Ayers response [television], 2008). Again, Obama returns to the strategy of denial to claim that he cannot be held responsible for what Ayers had done before Obama had met him or even knew of him. Additionally, Obama has denounced Ayers’ illegal activity, so he cannot bear any responsibility for the lack of remorse Ayers demonstrated in his 2001 comments.

*Transcendence.* In his TV spot, Obama redirected his defense to John McCain, arguing that he should concern himself with more important topics: “With all our problems, why is John McCain talking about the Sixties? Trying to link Barack Obama to radical Bill Ayers?” (Ayers response [television], 2008). Obama’s argument is that McCain is focused on the past, talking about relatively meaningless topics such as Ayers, when he should be focused on the real problems of the country.

*Attack accuser.* The remainder of the television spot sought to place Obama’s relationship with Ayers in the context of McCain’s faults: “Let’s talk about standing up for America today” (Ayers response [television], 2008). Here, Obama implies that he



will stand up for America. The narrator in the spot continues, “John McCain wants to spend \$10 billion a month in Iraq. Tax breaks for corporations that ship jobs overseas. Selling out American workers. John McCain, just more of the same” (Ayers response [television], 2008). Obama redirects attention to John McCain’s transgressions, suggesting that these are actions that are actually worthy of criticism. Further, if John McCain is selling out American workers, he is not standing up for America as Obama does. Finally, the words “John McCain, just more of the same,” are accompanied in the ad by the visual of John McCain standing together with the then-historically unpopular sitting president, George W. Bush. Thus, Obama turned the tables on McCain by reminding the audience of the elder senator’s unpopular associates. Plus, the words “more of the same” and a visual of the outgoing president further make that case that McCain is focused on the past.

*Statement by Obama Campaign Spokesman*

On October 4, 2008, Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin delivered a stump speech in which she declared that Obama was “palling around with terrorists who would target their own country” (Phillips, 2008, ¶ 5). Recall that Palin also used pronouns and words like “opponent” to create strategic ambiguity, further blurring differences between the beliefs and aspirations of William Ayers and members of the Democratic ticket. In reporting on Palin’s stump speech, Phillips (2008) wrote in her blog that “Hari Sevugan, a spokesman for the Obama campaign, fired back almost immediately in a statement” (¶ 11). Sevugan, writing on behalf of Obama, applied the image repair strategies of attack accusers and simple denial.

*Attack accuser.* Sevugan's statement began by attacking Obama's accuser, stating that, "Governor Palin's comments, while offensive, are not surprising, given the McCain campaign's statement this morning that they would be launching Swiftboat-like attacks in hopes of deflecting attention from the nation's economic ills" (Phillips, 2008, ¶ 11). This image repair message seeks to persuade the audience that Palin's remarks should be regarded by voters as "offensive" rather than a cause for concern about Barack Obama. Further, the *apologia* associates the McCain campaign with the 2004 attacks on Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, whose Vietnam War service record aboard a U.S. Navy swift boat was questioned by a conservative activist group called, Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. The association is especially stinging, since McCain was one of the Republicans who, at the time, denounced the attacks by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and defended Kerry's service record (Coile, 2004). Therefore, this attack not only associated the McCain campaign with dirty politics but portrayed McCain as a hypocrite, reducing the effectiveness of Palin's attack and the associations she attempted to make between Obama and Ayers.

This *apologia* message contains another example of attack accusers. Employing a tactic already used in the other analyzed Ayers defenses, Sevugan's statement again asserts that the McCain campaign was challenging Obama's character because McCain was unwilling or incapable of confronting the more important concerns of the nation's ailing economy. The campaign statement concluded with the declaration that, "What's clear is that John McCain and Sarah Palin would rather spend their time tearing down Barack Obama than laying out a plan to build up our economy" (Phillips, 2008, ¶ 11). Again, the statement attacks the priorities of McCain and Palin, arguing that Palin's

attacks are evidence that smears against Obama take precedence over economic recovery proposals.

*Simple denial.* Sevugan's statement on behalf of the Obama campaign also denied that Obama and Ayers had a close relationship: "In fact, the very newspaper story Governor Palin cited in hurling her shameless attack made clear that Senator Obama is not close to Bill Ayers, much less 'pals'" (Phillips, 2008, ¶ 11). Here, Sevugan simply denies that Obama and Ayers have a close relationship; specifically, the statement denies that the two are "pals," as Palin had claimed in her stump speech. As evidence for the denial, Sevugan cites the same news story that Palin had cited, further cutting into the credibility of Palin's attack.

The Obama campaign also employed simple denial in the, by then, familiar argument that Obama had "strongly condemned the despicable acts Ayers committed 40 years ago, when Obama was eight" (Phillips, 2008, ¶ 11). As in earlier cases, the defense was that Obama could not be held accountable for things that had happened when he was in elementary school, particularly since Obama had offered contemporary denouncements of the acts.

*"Ayers Response" (Radio)*

Obama used both television and radio buys to deliver his Ayers-related *apologia* to voters. In a radio spot which first aired October 14, 2008, (also titled "Ayers Response") Obama used the strategies of simple denial, attack accuser, and transcendence, as he had in the television advertisement.

*Simple denial.* In the radio spot, Obama again used the strategy of simple denial to argue that he could not be associated with Ayers' controversial history because the

senator was only 8 “when Ayers committed crimes in the ‘60’s” (Ayers response [radio], 2008). Further, it was not logical to attribute Ayers’ beliefs to Obama because “Obama condemned those despicable acts” (Ayers response [radio], 2008). Obama denied that he shared any affinity for Ayers’ 1960’s activities.

The radio ad also denied accusations that Ayers was a close and influential associate of Obama: “Ayers has had no role in Obama’s campaign and will have no role in his administration” (Ayers response [radio], 2008). This utterance has the effect of denying Ayers’ past, present, and future influence over Obama’s leadership of the nation.

*Attack accuser.* Obama also attacked his accusers in the radio advertisement by asserting that McCain had sunk to character attacks because the campaign could not make a productive contribution to the debate on how to revive the national economy. The radio spot opens with the narrator explaining that “John McCain’s campaign told the press if the election’s about the economy, he’ll lose. Now, as Americans lose their jobs and savings, McCain’s resorting to desperate attacks the press calls quote, smears and false” (Ayers response [radio], 2008). These statements suggest to the listener that McCain is not attacking Obama on Ayers because it is a legitimate concern but because the senator from Arizona is not credible on the more crucial issue of the economy. The narrator concludes: “And John McCain? With no plan to fix our economy, smears are all he has left” (Ayers response [radio], 2008). McCain has to resort to dirty politics; he has nothing of substance to contribute to the nation’s financial crisis.

*Transcendence.* Having applied the strategy of attack accuser to reduce the offensiveness of McCain’s accusations about Ayers by claiming that McCain had no plan for the economy, Obama turned to transcendence to demonstrate to voters that he *did*

know what was important: “Obama says this campaign should be about how to fix our economy, help small businesses and homeowners on Main Street, and crack down on Wall Street abuses” (Ayers response [radio], 2008). This application allowed Obama to use his stated concerns of helping Americans recover from an economic depression and protecting them from financial predators to trump McCain’s relatively unimportant accusations about Obama’s associations with William Ayers.

### *Third Presidential Debate*

The day after Obama’s radio advertisement hit the airwaves defending the senator against attacks related to Ayers, Obama appeared on live television with John McCain in the third and final presidential debate between the two candidates. In the debate, Obama faced direct attacks from McCain regarding his relationship with William Ayers. To repair his image after these *kategoria*, Obama turned to the strategies of simple denial, differentiation, bolstering, and attack accuser.

*Simple denial.* Obama used simple denial to reject the accusations that Obama’s acquaintance with Ayers signaled that Ayers’ ideas were influential in Obama’s campaign or governing philosophy: “Mr. Ayers is not involved in my campaign. He has never been involved in this campaign. And he will not advise me in the White House. So that's Mr. Ayers” (The Third Presidential Debate, 2008, ¶ 213). Obama explicitly denies any involvement by Ayers in his current campaign, and rejects the notion that Obama, if elected to the White House, will ever seek the council of Ayers.

Later in the debate, McCain attempted to renew accusations that Obama was not being forthright about his relationship with Ayers, saying to Obama, “you launched your political campaign in Mr. Ayers' living room.” Obama responded directly with simple

denial: “That’s absolutely not true.” McCain then retorted, “And the facts are facts and records are records,” and again, Obama used simple denial: “And that’s not the facts” (The Third Presidential Debate, 2008, ¶ 219-222). McCain had confronted Obama with direct accusations, attempting to persuade the debate’s viewing audience that Ayers was a significant voice in Obama’s political life, and Obama flatly denied the accusations.

Obama further used simple denial in the debate, as he had in previous venues, to reject any projections of Ayers’ violent past onto Obama: “Forty years ago, when I was 8 years old, he engaged in despicable acts with a radical domestic group. I have roundly condemned those acts.” Thus, Obama once again claimed that his age at the time of the Weather Underground bombings proved he had no involvement in what Ayers had done long ago. Obama further points out that he has already consistently denounced the violence, further reinforcing his denial of sympathy for Ayers’ past.

*Differentiation.* Obama’s defense against the Ayers attacks focused mostly on defending himself in relation to Ayers rather than actually defending Ayers. However, guarding against those who would view Obama unfavorably despite the nature of the relationship between him and Ayers, Obama also sought to define Ayers: “So let’s get the record straight. Bill Ayers is a professor of education in Chicago” (The Third Presidential Debate, 2008, ¶ 210). Recall that Obama had, in previous defenses, referred to Ayers as a professor. However, prefaced with the plea, “let’s get the record straight,” this statement serves as an example of differentiation. By stating what Ayers is (a college professor), Obama also implicitly differentiates from what Ayers is not (or at least not currently): a terrorist.

*Attack Accuser.* Facing direct, live and televised attacks from John McCain during the third presidential debate, Obama used attack accuser to reduce the offensiveness of McCain's barbs. Brushing off the significance of the Ayers connection, Obama attacked the focus of the Republican campaign for the presidency: "And I think the fact that this has become such an important part of your campaign, Senator McCain, says more about your campaign than it says about me" (The Third Presidential Debate, 2008, ¶ 210). In this piece of *apologia*, Obama weakens the Ayers attacks, while simultaneously suggesting that McCain's prolonged interest in the Ayers issue was evidence that McCain did not have anything more important to add to the presidential contest.

*Bolstering.* Accusations that Obama held questionable company and had worked toward radical ends had raised concerns about Obama's judgment. Obama used bolstering to reduce the offensiveness of his controversial associations by discussing his acceptable, if not laudable associations:

Let me tell you who I associate with. On economic policy, I associate with Warren Buffett and former Fed Chairman Paul Volcker. If I'm interested in figuring out my foreign policy, I associate myself with my running mate, Joe Biden or with Dick Lugar, the Republican ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, or General Jim Jones, the former supreme allied commander of NATO. (The Third Presidential Debate, 2008, ¶ 217)

Obama's list of mainstream current or former members of the business world (Buffet), the federal government (Volcker), his own party (Biden), McCain's party (Lugar), and

the United States military (Jones) presents an impressive and diverse list of associations to overshadow Obama's controversial associations with Ayers.

### *Fight the Smears*

On June 12, 2008, the campaign published on its web site a page and printable PDF flyer (with identical text) titled, "Fight the Smears: The Truth about Barack Obama and William Ayers" (Helman, 2008). The brochure echoed the image repair strategies used in previously analyzed message forms. However, because several other "Fight the Smears" web pages will be examined in greater depth in the next chapter, this Ayers "Fight the Smears" page bears analysis in this chapter. The Ayers "Fight the Smears" page is relatively unique among the other defenses in the series, since Obama had offered significant discourse in other venues on the topic of Ayers. Most of the other "Fight the Smears" attacks had not been addressed at depth by Obama or his surrogates through other channels. Thus, analysis of the Ayers "Fight the Smears" page not only reinforces the image repair efforts of other messages but provides a point of analysis between the corresponding *kategoria* and the persuasive attacks responded to in the other "Fight the Smears" pages. In the web page, Obama used the strategies of simple denial, differentiation, and bolstering.

*Simple denial.* The web page uses simple denial three times. The page begins by identifying the charges brought by the McCain campaign and then plainly denies that Obama and Ayers have a closer relationship:

Smear groups and now a desperate McCain campaign are trying to connect Barack to William Ayers using age-old guilt by association techniques. Here's



the truth: the smear associating Barack to Ayers is “phony,” “tenuous,” — even “exaggerated at best if not outright false. (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 1)

Obama references guilt by association accusations that McCain supposedly has made. He then denies these accusations by presenting the “truth” that the associations are exaggerated if not completely false.

The web page also cites a *New York Times* article’s denial that Obama’s association with Ayers represents sympathy for the professor’s radicalism: “Here’s what the *New York Times* reported on the connection: But the two men do not appear to have been close. Nor has Mr. Obama ever expressed sympathy for the radical views and actions of Mr. Ayers” (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 4). Here, Obama uses the press to deny claims that Ayers’ is representative of Obama’s views.

Obama’s web page applied simple denial a third time, recycling his argument from other texts. In fact, the web page uses the same denial on three different occasions, attempting to reinforce the idea that Obama cannot be linked to events involving Ayers actions of the past: “Smear groups and the McCain campaign are trying to connect Obama to acts Ayers committed 40 years ago — when Barack was just eight years old” (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 3). Again, in the next paragraph, the strategy is repeated as part of a quote from a *New York Times* report: “Mr. Ayers, whom he has called ‘somebody who engaged in detestable acts 40 years ago, when I was 8’” (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 4). The document offers the defense a third time: “But he was an eight-year-old child when Ayers and the Weathermen were active, and any attempt to connect Obama with events of almost forty years ago is ridiculous” (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 6).

Each of these instances of denial makes the same claim: that it is implausible to link Obama and Ayers, since Ayers committed the acts when Obama was young, long before the two men met or had any interaction together. This claim also serves to remind the audience that the McCain campaign is focused on the past and the status quo, contrasted with Obama's forward-looking message of change. Finally, the third instance of the denial argument states that "any attempt to connect Obama with events of almost forty years ago is ridiculous." Thus, the audience is further dissuaded from holding Obama accountable for Ayers' actions, lest they face ridicule.

*Differentiation.* Obama's web site also used the strategy of differentiation. As in previous texts, the Obama campaign sought to clarify Ayers' standing in the community and define him as a professor, rather than a terrorist:

William Ayers is a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, with whom Barack served on the board of an education-reform organization in the mid-1990's. According to the Associated Press, they are not close: "No evidence shows they were "pals" or even close when they worked on community boards years ago. (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 2)

Obama not only differentiates between Ayers' current life as a college professor (rather than a terrorist), but he also differentiates between the alleged and actual relationship between he and Ayers. Obama admits that he and Ayers worked together but claims that there is a difference between working with someone and being a close friend. Citing an Associated Press report that specified the relationship between Ayers and Obama as one-time co-workers, Obama uses the strategy of differentiation to admit that he worked on

“community boards” but were never “pals’ or even close.” Note that the differentiation from the label “pals” responds directly to Sarah Palin’s word choice in her stump speech.

*Bolstering.* Finally, Obama used bolstering as a strategy to reduce the offensiveness of his past interactions with William Ayers: “Barack has publicly denounced Ayers’ radical actions from the 1960’s: Senator Obama strongly condemns the violent actions of the Weathermen group, as he does all acts of violence” (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 5-6). Obama highlights his firm condemnation of the Weather Underground’s violent protests as well as violence in general. Obama bolsters his passivity, creating contrast with the audience’s perceived savagery of the actions of Ayers and the Weather Underground. In creation of such contrast, Obama further lessens the severity of his ill-perceived associations with Ayers as well as discounting notions that he sympathizes with such ideals.

#### Evaluation

I now turn to evaluation of the effectiveness of Obama’s William Ayers *apologia*. I will begin by providing evaluation on the bases of internal consistency, plausibility, and *kairotic* effectiveness. Next, I will provide external evidence to reinforce my evaluation of the effectiveness of Obama’s image repair rhetoric. To provide a fitting evaluation of Obama’s *apologia*, one must first recall the exigencies of the rhetorical situation; that is, the *kategoria* that Obama was responding to. Obama faced persuasive accusations that his associations with Ayers were evidence that the presidential candidate had not been fully vetted and thus, would be too vulnerable to Republican attacks during the general election; that he was not being honest about the extent of his relationship with Ayers; that he had inappropriately continued his relationship with Ayers, even after his 2001 remark

that the former protestor felt the Weather Underground “didn’t do enough;” that Obama’s relationship with Ayers was evidence of bad judgment; and that Obama’s alleged friendship with Ayers (perceived as a terrorist by Obama’s attackers) implied that the senator shared the political views of a terrorist and was unpatriotic.

### *Internal Evidence*

*Simple denial.* Denial typically serves rhetors well when they are innocent of the accusations against them. Obama effectively used denial to reject assertions that he maintained a close friendship with Ayers. Many people, especially public figures, have acquaintances whom they occasionally or temporarily work with, yet do not have close relationships with. It is quite possible that Obama and Ayers had such a relationship.

Obama was also able to integrate evidence from a story in *The New York Times* that declared that “the two men do not appear to have been close” (AyersSmear, 2008, ¶ 4). Providing external evidence to corroborate Obama’s claims added to the plausibility of the senator’s denial. Plus, citing the source also specifically strengthened the denial of Sarah Palin’s claims that Obama and Ayers were pals, since Palin had used the same *New York Times* article to make her case. Contradicting Palin with her own evidence makes the denial even more definitive. Therefore, simple denial works well to deflect accusations that Obama and Ayers were close friends.

In addition to denying that he and Ayers were close friends, Obama also effectively denied that his associations with Ayers were evidence that he was supportive of or even sympathetic to Ayers violent past. Although only Obama can ever know what he truly believes, the strategy of simple denial was a plausible response for two reasons. First, Obama had already denied that he and Ayers were close friends, thus weakening

the connection between the two and consequently their beliefs. Second, even if the two had been close, one does not necessarily hold the same beliefs as his or her friends.

Therefore, denial was a plausible response to these accusations as well.

Obama further used denial effectively to stem allegations that Ayers was an influential voice in Obama's leadership. Obama explicitly denied that Ayers had ever or would ever have any role in his presidential campaign. He also denied that Ayers would ever have any role in Obama's presidency. These attacks were also logical, since, having established that he and Ayers were not close and did not share the same beliefs, it is not likely that someone of this description would be influential in one's campaign or administration.

Obama additionally used denial in an attempt to refute associations that Obama's opponents made between him and Ayers. In each of the six texts analyzed in this chapter, Obama used nearly identical applications of denial, arguing that Obama could not be associated with things that Ayers had said and done "40 years ago when Obama was just eight years old." Although Obama was consistent in his use of this defense, it has some logical flaws. First, Obama is not being accused of bombing the Capitol or the Pentagon or police stations. Obama not knowing Ayers at age 8 does not exclude him from being friends with the accused terrorist later in life. He is accused of being friends with someone who aided in those acts, and he is accused of being sympathetic to such acts. Second, the passage of forty years does not necessarily make it more or less likely that Obama would be sympathetic to events of the past.

The strategy was somewhat more effective when combined with differentiation (as it was in three of the six texts). It was arguably not effective for Obama to claim that

his age at the time of the Weather Underground bombings precluded him from being friends with Ayers or agreeing with his ideas. However, when Obama adds that Ayers is a different person (a college professor) than he was in the past (a terrorist), denial based on the passage of time becomes somewhat more effective in countering accusations of friendship and shared ideas.

Obama's application of simple denial was a *kairotically* effective strategy as well. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, the Ayers controversy received scant media coverage when the connection first surfaced. At that point, there was no urgency to respond, and the Obama campaign wisely refrained (no need to deny an accusation that the audience is unaware of). As the issue gained traction in the news, it produced a high volume of media coverage dedicated to investigating, reporting, and interpreting the relationship between Obama and Ayers. The increase in coverage also translated into increased criticism from Obama's critics. Consequently, as the amount of attention paid to the issue grew, the urgency changed and eventually demanded a response from Obama. In this manner, all of Obama's Ayers *apologia* suggest that the presidential candidate acted prudently, with deference to *kairos*, responding to accusations only when demanded by the exigencies and constraints of the rhetorical situation.

Media coverage was not the only constraint that influenced the timing of Obama's *apologia*. Obama was also forced to respond when confronted with direct accusations during the debates. Obama did not use simple denial in his April 16, 2008 debate with Hillary Clinton. He did, however, employ simple denial when facing McCain. Obama twice used simple denial to immediately contradict accusations by McCain. During a live debate, the audience is witness to all attacks by one's opponent. As a result, the urgency

to respond is greater. Thus, the *kairos* of the situation demanded a response by Obama, and simple denial was an appropriate defense, consistent with his previous *apologia*.

*Differentiation.* As argued under the previous sub-heading, differentiation was effectively used in conjunction with simple denial. By claiming that Ayers conducted a different life as an educator in the 1990s and 2000s (when Obama knew him) than he had conducted in the 1960s and 1970s as an accused terrorist (when Obama was 8), Obama effectively limited the offensiveness of his relationship with Ayers. Obama's claim that he and Ayers shared the relationships of acquaintances and fellow board members and not the relationships of friends or pals also represented a plausible application of differentiation, as many in Obama's audience can likely identify with these varying degrees of association.

As with the case of other instances of Ayers-related image repair discourse, Obama's use of differentiation was *kairotically* effective in that he only responded to the accusations when the exigencies of the rhetorical situation demanded it. However, since simple denials based on Obama's age at the time of Ayers' alleged terrorist activity were more effective when combined with differentiation, it would have been more effective for Obama to use differentiation more consistently throughout his image repair discourse. More consistent use of differentiation would have better met the constraints placed on the strategy of simple denial and, consequently, would have better demonstrated *kairos*.

*Bolstering.* Bolstering was another strategy that Obama used to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with William Ayers. Recall that Obama first bolstered his reputation in the debate with Hillary Clinton, pointing out that he had better polling numbers than Clinton in match-ups against the eventual Republican nominee, John

McCain. This was effective because the higher polling numbers provided objective evidence to counter Clinton's *kategoria* that Obama was not tough enough or tested enough to win an election against the seasoned McCain.

Obama also effectively bolstered his bipartisanship and his ability and willingness to work with people of diverse ideologies. McCain and others had argued that Obama's association with Ayers was evidence that he might share Ayers' beliefs. By highlighting his history of associating with Republicans, Democrats, and independents, Obama portrays himself positively while also plausibly demonstrating that one can associate with others without adhering to their worldviews.

Obama's use of bolstering was also *kairotically* effective because his realization of and adaptation to the exigencies and audience of the rhetorical situation. Obama had been accused of radical associations in the cases of both Jeremiah Wright and William Ayers. Public scrutiny of these relationships demanded rhetorical action. Further, John McCain's accusations in a live, televised debate added additional urgency to the exigencies of the situation. Their candidate's ideals challenged, Obama's supporters and potential supporters needed reassurance that his acquaintance with Ayers did not signify ascription to Ayers' beliefs and actions. Obama's bolstering of his work with Warren Buffet, former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, Democratic Senator Joe Biden, Republican Senator Dick Lugar, and General Jim Jones offered timely and convincing evidence that Obama's important relationships are with diverse, yet respected individuals.

*Transcendence.* John McCain, Sarah Palin, and members of their campaign staff frequently argued that Obama's relationship with Ayers bore closer examination. Obama's employ of transcendence worked effectively to counter those arguments.



During the third presidential debate, McCain declared “But as Senator Clinton said in her debates with you, we need to know the full extent of that relationship [with Ayers]” (The Third Presidential Debate, 2008, ¶ 206). Obama’s use of transcendence did not deny that voters needed to know that information; instead Obama used the strategy to argue that there was far more important information for voters to know. Given the comparative and historic weight of issues such as the economy and foreign affairs, it was perfectly plausible that there *were* more important issues (see external evidence for confirmation of the public agenda).

One reason transcendence worked well was because Obama had already established, through his use of simple denial and differentiation, that his relationship with Ayers was not an issue to be concerned with. On the heels of those arguments, Obama employed transcendence to explain to the audience what they *should* be concerned with (McCain’s proposals for economic recovery, fighting Wall Street corruption, etc.). This argument served to remind voters of what they should be aware of. Thus, transcendence worked well because Obama showed deference to his audience. Further, transcendence was consistent with Obama’s other defenses, thusly meeting the constraints of the rhetorical situations. Therefore, Obama’s employ of transcendence with respect to the constraints and the audience of the rhetorical situation suggests that his discourse took advantage of *kairos*.

*Attack accuser.* Obama attacked his accusers on multiple occasions with mixed results during the Ayers controversy. Obama was effective in his use of attack accuser when he combined the strategy with the use of transcendence. Obama had suggested that there were more important issues than his association with Ayers. He then attacked

McCain, arguing that the senator from Arizona did not have any valuable contributions to make on the important issues (the economy, the financial crisis, health care, etc.). This attack was a plausible strategy, since the McCain campaign, not Obama, had introduced the Ayers controversy to the debate. It was thus arguable that if McCain had thought other issues more important, he would have talked more about those issues at the expense of the Ayers issue. Instead, McCain chose the reverse, discussing Ayers at the expense of discussion of issues such as economic recovery or health care reform.

Obama also employed attack accuser with success when he attacked McCain and Palin for engaging in smear politics. Again, since the tenuous link between Obama and Ayers was not seen as a substantial issue in comparison to issues like the financial crisis, and since Palin, in particular, had made the Obama-Ayers connection a centerpiece of her stump speeches, the Republican presidential and vice presidential candidates were susceptible to the counterattack by Obama.

Each if these two instances of attack the accuser also seized on *kairos*. First, the strategies were not inconsistent with other applied image repair strategies. To the contrary, as discussed, the strategy of attack accuser worked particularly well with transcendence when the strategies were used in the same texts. Second, attack accuser met the demands of the rhetorical situation, especially during the debates when, promptly and opportunistically, Obama attacked and weakened his accusers and the accusations made against him.

Obama was less effective when he attempted to attack his accusers with the same “guilt by association” arguments that he faced. First, Obama attacked Hillary Clinton for her husband’s (former President Bill Clinton’s) pardon of members of the Weather

Underground. Presumably, it was Bill Clinton, not Hillary Clinton, who made the decision (warranted or not) to pardon the Weathermen. By attacking Hillary Clinton for the pardon, Obama was just as guilty of attacking Senator Clinton for her associations as she was of attacking Obama for his. This was an illogical and hypocritical attack; he might have just as soon accused Senator Clinton of dishonesty on the basis of her husband's lies about the Monica Lewinsky affair.

Equally hypocritical was Obama's application of attack accuser in an attempt to associate McCain with sitting President George W. Bush. Even though McCain had often supported his formal rival (Bush) in recent years, the attack was somewhat of a red herring, since the counterattack had no relevance to the charges of Obama's association with Bill Ayers. Therefore, this instance of attack accuser was ineffective due to the irrelevance and hypocrisy of the strategy.

These latter two applications of attack accuser also failed to grasp the *kairos* of the rhetorical situation, since the strategy failed to meet the constraint of relevance. Although the attacks may have played well with certain segments of Obama's audience (i.e., firm Obama supporters and Clinton opponents in the primary and firm Obama supporters and McCain opponents in the general election), overall, these applications of attack accuser did not fit the rhetorical situation and were thus, *kairotically* ineffective.

#### *External Evidence*

*Polling and election outcomes.* A search of the opinion polling database PollingReport.com yielded no polls on the Ayers-Obama connection from the Democratic primary period. However, Clinton only briefly acknowledged the issue, and it was a much more significant point of attack for the McCain-Palin campaign. Still, the

fact that Clinton abandoned the issue may provide some insight into the success (or lack thereof) of her attacks on the topic. Further, Obama's victory over Clinton for the Democratic nomination at the very least suggests that Obama was able to prevent the Ayers issue from derailing his campaign.

Polling from the general campaign period suggests that Obama was largely successful in attempts to deny that he had a significant relationship with William Ayers. A CNN Opinion Research Corporation poll of adults who watched the third presidential debate on October 15, 2008 (the debate containing the McCain attacks and Obama defenses analyzed in this chapter) found that 51% believed that Obama's connection to Ayers did not matter at all, and 11% believed that it did not matter much. In contrast, only 23% believed that the connection mattered a great deal, and 14% believed that the connection mattered somewhat (Pollingreport.com, 2008, October 15).

Likewise, Obama's strategy of transcendence seems to have been effective in arguing that his past relationship with Ayers was not a relatively legitimate issue. An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll conducted October 16-18, 2008 found that 60% of likely voters deemed the issue "not legitimate," compared to only 37% who viewed the issue as legitimate (3% were undecided) (Pollingreport.com, 2008, October 16-18). Obama's strategy was also a winner with voters who thought there were more important issues. In a Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll taken November 1-2, 2008, 49% of likely voters named "economy and jobs" as the most important issue; only 9% named terrorism and national security as the most important issue, and only 6% identified ethics and government corruption as the most important (Pollingreport.com, November 1-2, 2008). Even among Republicans, the split for these three issues was 33%-19%-7%, respectively

(Pollingreport.com, November 1-2, 2008). Thus, Ayers and even broader concerns about ethics and terrorism were far less important to voters than the issues of the economy.

Obama's use of attack accuser to charge McCain with engaging in smear tactics may have resonated with many voters also. An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll of registered voters, taken October 8-11, 2008, found that 68% of voters thought Obama had mainly addressed the issues in the campaign compared with 26% who thought he had mainly attacked his opponent. Conversely, pollsters found that 59% of registered voters believed McCain had mainly attacked his opponent, while only 35% thought that McCain had mainly addressed the issues (Pollingreport.com, 2008, October 8-11).

Finally, Obama defeated McCain in an electoral landslide as well as in the popular vote, which represented "the largest [margin of victory] of any Democrat since Lyndon Johnson's 1964 landslide" (Balz, 2008, p. A01). Although Obama's victory certainly cannot be attributed solely to his handling of the Ayers issue, it can at least be said that Obama defended himself effectively enough to avoid voters attributing great importance to the relationship. Having successfully cast the Ayers relationship as unimportant, Obama was elected by voters who presumably selected him on the basis of other issues. Driving voters toward issues other than Ayers represented a success for Obama's image repair discourse.

*Commentary.* Comments culled from the pages of *The New York Times* provide another source of evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's William Ayers *apologia*. The commentary most often provided evidence to reinforce the effectiveness of Obama's employ of transcendence. Reporters, columnists, editorials, and letters to the editor all reflected the idea that there were more important topics, more important issues, than

Obama's relationship with Ayers. An October 16, 2008 letter to the editor from Houston said:

And now John McCain wants Americans to be angrier about William Ayers than about the global economic meltdown. As a thirtysomething voter, I'd like to see more concern for the present and the future than for events 40 years in the past.

(After the last, 2008)

Obama's use of transcendence seems to have resonated with this letter writer, who believes that the economy is a more important topic than William Ayers or anything else that happened 40 years earlier.

A October 16, 2008 column by Patrick Healy expressed a similar sentiment, suggesting that Obama's use of transcendence had worked to reduce the offensiveness of McCain's Ayers *kategoria*:

Mr. McCain grew angry as he attacked Mr. Obama over his ties to William Ayers, the Chicago professor who helped found the Weather Underground terrorism group. Suddenly, Mr. McCain was no longer gaining ground by showing command on the top issue for voters, the economy; he was turning tetchy over a 1960s radical. (p. 26)

Based on this excerpt, it seems that Obama's argument that 'McCain should concern himself with the economy rather than Bill Ayers' reverberated with the columnist.

An editorial published on the same day expressed the same approval of the transcendence argument:

Mr. McCain again raised Mr. Obama's old and meaningless acquaintance with William Ayers, a violent, 1960s radical who served with Mr. Obama on charitable

foundations. Mr. McCain ended up seeming angry and desperate. Mr. McCain's biggest problem is that he has no big ideas for fixing the country's problems.

(The final debate, 2008, p. 30)

Again, Obama's use of transcendence is validated, as the author of the editorial clearly agrees with the argument that McCain was pursuing the "meaningless" relationship with Ayers at the expense of the major problem of the economy.

Arguments in *The New York Times'* October 8, 2008 editorial provide evaluation of Obama's use of attack accuser. The editorial decried McCain's attacks on Obama for his associations with Ayers. However, at the same time, the authors criticized Obama for using equally irrelevant attacks: "We were disappointed to see the Obama campaign air an ad (held for just this occasion) reminding voters of Mr. McCain's involvement in the Keating Five savings-and-loan debacle, for which he was reprimanded by the Senate" (Politics of attack, 2008, p. 30). The Keating Five ad (and the accompanying documentary available at [keatingeconomics.com](http://keatingeconomics.com)) were not analyzed for this study, since the ad did not directly respond to the Ayers controversy. However, the *New York Times* editorial generally reinforces the negative evaluation of Obama's use of attack accuser to (at times hypocritically) target McCain's irrelevant and spurious relationships.

In another October 8, 2008 story, Maureen Dowd did not directly praise Obama's combination of attack accuser and transcendence, but her adaptation of Obama's image repair arguments is certainly good evidence of their effectiveness. The columnist echoed Obama's application of the strategies:

But if McCain loses, he will have contributed to his own downfall by failing to live up to his personal standard of honor... John McCain has long been torn

between wanting to succeed and serving a higher cause. Right now, the drive to succeed is trumping any loftier aspirations... McCain aides have been blunt in their need to change the subject from the economy. But, as with Bush Senior's re-election campaign, slithery character attacks don't scare as well when Americans are already scared about keeping their jobs and retirement savings. (p. 31)

Dowd, like Obama, suggests in this column that McCain is engaging in smear politics at the cost of more important issues. Thus, the inconsistent external evaluation of attack accuser reinforces the internal evaluation that Obama had mixed success with the strategy.

Similarly, an October 12, 2008 column by Frank Rich demonstrated the effectiveness of Obama's use of simple denial as the author repeated Obama's *apologia*: "Obama can hardly be held accountable for Ayers's behavior 40 years ago" (p. 10).

Likewise, a voter with a unique perspective on the Ayers controversy agreed with Obama's denial: William C. Ibershof, lead federal prosecutor of the Weathermen in the 1970s wrote in a letter to the editor: "I am amazed and outraged that Senator Barack Obama is being linked to William Ayers' terrorist activities 40 years ago when Mr. Obama was, as he has noted, just a child" (Prosecuting Weathermen, 2008, p. 32).

In the same letter, Ibershof's unique point of view also provides evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's use of differentiation to draw distinctions between the Ayers of the 1960s and 1970s, and the Ayers of present day: "Although I dearly wanted to obtain convictions against all the Weathermen, including Bill Ayers, I am very pleased to learn that he has become a responsible citizen" (Prosecuting Weathermen, 2008, p. 32). The Ibershof letter also provided evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's effort to



differentiate between Obama's service with Ayers on a board and his adherence to Ayers' violent acts: "Because Senator Obama recently served on a board of a charitable organization with Mr. Ayers cannot possibly link the senator to acts perpetrated by Mr. Ayers so many years ago" (Prosecuting Weathermen, 2008, p. 32).

Dowd (2008, April 20) was less impressed by Obama's use of differentiation, at least during the primary stage of the campaign:

Obama defended him [Ayers] with a line that only the eggheads orbiting his campaign could appreciate. Ayers, he said, is "a professor of English in Chicago." Obama has to prove to Americans that, despite his exotic background and multicultural looks, he shares or at least respects their values and understands why they would be upset about his associations with the Rev. Wright and an ex-Weatherman. (p. 11)

Dowd assesses Obama's use of differentiation as ineffective, arguing that the distinction between a professor of English (actually education) and an accused terrorist will not resonate with Americans. However, given the other evidence for the effectiveness of this strategy, it may be that the differentiation eventually *did* resonate with voters later in campaign.

*The New York Times* commentary also provides evidence for the effectiveness of bolstering as an Obama image repair strategy. Nationally syndicated conservative columnist David Brooks wrote of Obama:

He doesn't have F.D.R.'s joyful nature or Reagan's happy outlook, but he is analytical. That's why this William Ayers business doesn't stick. He may be

liberal, but he is never wild. His family is bourgeois. His instinct is to flee the revolutionary gesture in favor of the six-point plan. (2008, p. 33)

Brooks' assessment of Obama reflects the candidate's use of bolstering to highlight his positive qualities (specifically his analytical style and his middle class roots) in contrast to the Ayers allegations. The columnist's declaration that the "Ayers business doesn't stick" is evidence that Obama has effectively used bolstering to reduce the offensiveness of his relationship with the accused terrorist. A former Congressman from Minnesota also provided evidence that Obama's bolstering had hit its mark. Republican Vin Weber simply declared, "People think he's basically a decent guy" (Nagourney, 2008, ¶ 23). These positive evaluations, by Republican and conservative observers, no less, provide additional evidence that Obama effectively bolstered his image.

Finally, there is mixed commentary evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's use of the strategy of simple denial. An October 16, 2008 letter to the editor from New York read:

Your editorial refers to Senator Barack Obama's relationship with William Ayers as a "meaningless acquaintance." It is anything but. It does not make the senator a terrorist, nor does it suggest that he shares Mr. Ayers's views. What it does is speak to his judgment in the same manner that his willingness to sit down and negotiate with international tyrants without preconditions is anathema to many.

In both cases, he lends legitimacy to outlaws. And that is not meaningless. (After the last, 2008, p. 32)

For this reader, Obama's denial of the significance of his relationship with Ayers is unpersuasive. Instead, the letter writer questions Obama's judgment and counters the

senator's denial with the claim that his association with Ayers "lends legitimacy to outlaws."

Two other writers of letters to the editor, both from Chicago, were more convinced by Obama's denials. One wrote:

That they [Ayers and Obama] now live in the same neighborhood and share deep concerns about education has nothing to do with Bill Ayers's past, and shame on the McCain campaign for suggesting that it does and going back to the horrendous tactics that were so repulsive in the 50s. (4 weeks to go, 2008, p. 30)

This writer accepts Obama's denial that he has a significant relationship with Ayers, noting that they have nothing more in common than their neighborhood and concern for education. Further, the author seems to compare the McCain campaign's attacks to Senator Joseph McCarthy's attacks on some Americans' spurious ties to communism during the 1950s.

Another writer also was convinced by Obama's denial of guilt by association: "If we buy into her [Sarah Palin's] guilt by association, a lot of us Chicagoans are suspect. The faculty, students and administration of the University of Illinois, which hired Mr. Ayers as a professor, must all be terrorists" (4 weeks to go, 2008, p. 30). The writer uses sarcasm to echo Obama's denial of the connection between him and Ayers, which was made by Palin and others. Thus, there is limited and mixed commentary evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's use of denial.

### Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of Barack Obama's *apologia* in response to *kategoria* on the topic of the presidential candidate's associations with former Weather

Underground member William Ayers. Obama's image repair discourse took the form of debate remarks, comments by campaign staff, web site postings, and radio and television advertising. The analysis showed that Obama had used the strategies of simple denial, bolstering, differentiation, transcendence, and attack accuser. Denial, used successfully, was used most frequently and in the most consistent form, and transcendence, though not used in every text, was demonstrated to be the most effective strategy. Bolstering and differentiation were also consistently effective. Attack accuser was found to be effective in some incarnations and ineffective in others, based on criteria of logic and achievement of *kairos*. Simple denial was evaluated as effective on the basis of internal evidence and polling but garnered mixed reviews in *The New York Times* commentary. Overall, internal evidence and polling suggest that Obama effectively used image repair rhetoric to deny, evade responsibility for, and reduce the offensiveness of accusations regarding the presidential candidate's relationship with Ayers.

## Chapter Six

### “Fight the Smears”

On June 12, 2008, Barack Obama’s campaign launched a new website at <Fightthesmears.com> (Helman, 2008). The web site sought to use the Internet as a tool to respond to widespread rumors about the senator’s candidacy--specifically, rumors that had either originated on or spread through the Internet. Some attacks were initially launched by independent groups through web ads and e-mails. Others began as blog entries. Although it is impossible to prove with certainty how many of the rumors about Obama and his candidacy started on-line, what is known is that many of the rumors spread through e-mail campaigns (Helman, 2008; Madden, 2008).

This chapter focuses on the persuasive attacks in three of these rumors and Obama’s efforts to defend his image against the attacks. Specifically, this chapter examines attacks that questioned Obama’s citizenship, patriotism, and religious beliefs and affiliation. Just as these attacks spread largely through the Internet, Obama’s campaign most frequently used the Internet to respond to the attacks. Thus, this chapter provides analysis of Obama’s image repair discourse delivered via the “Fight the Smears” website. By the conclusion of the campaign, Fightthesmears.com contained links to 28 different web pages, each of which responded to a different attack. Among these were web pages about the previously discussed controversies over Obama’s associations with Jeremiah Wright and William Ayers. The *kategoria* and *apologia* regarding Obama’s

citizenship, patriotism, and religious beliefs and affiliation were chosen for analysis in the current chapter because they represented prominent and substantial image problems for Obama, yet were dealt with largely outside of the mainstream campaign dialogue (Madden, 2008).

Because this chapter deals with three separate sets of persuasive attacks and image repair discourse, it necessitates a slightly different organization than the two previous chapters. The remainder of this section provides the genesis of the Fight the Smears web pages and an overview of their consistent format. Then, for each “smear” and its corresponding Obama campaign “truth,” there will be an individual section providing an analysis of the *kategoria*, the *apologia*, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the image repair strategies on the basis of internal and external criteria. I then conclude the chapter by summarizing the frequency and effectiveness of the various strategies in each speech set.

The majority of the persuasive attacks that spawned the Fight the Smears web pages were unpublished. They circulated most often through the forwarding of e-mails or so-called viral e-mail campaigns (Vitello, 2008; Bosman & Broder, 2008). However, Obama suggested that it was “not just a random sort of viral thing,” suggesting that some of the attacks were being “systematically fed into the bloodstream” (Bellantoni, 2008, p. A01). Either way, it was “nearly impossible to trace these e-mails back to their sources,” according to Democratic pollsters (Madden, 2008, ¶ 8). Because there are no published primary sources to draw upon for analysis of the *kategoria*, this chapter relies on media reports of the attacks and on websites that catalogued some of the attacks or so-called rumors.

Each of the three websites analyzed below used a consistent format containing a main page for the defense in html format. Prominently featured on this page was the principal message responding to the attacks. Additionally, in the left column of the main page, visitors to the site could click on a link to obtain a PDF version of the principal message that could be printed for distribution to their friends. However, given that the PDF contained identical text to that of the principal message, the PDF was not analyzed to avoid redundancy.

At the bottom of the main page for each “smear,” visitors to the site could browse a list of excerpts from news stories corroborating Obama’s positions on the given rumor. Each excerpt was accompanied by a hyperlink to the full story. Although these news stories were not composed by the Obama campaign, the excerpts were strategically selected and republished by the campaign to defend Obama’s image. Thus, these texts were included in analysis of Obama’s image repair strategies.

Finally, there were two separate e-mail scripts in plain text that could be used to “Share the Facts” and “Tell a Friend.” The “Share the Facts” script was accompanied by directions to “Copy the text below and paste it into your email.” The “Tell a Friend” script was preceded by the following appeal: “Invite your friends to spread the truth about Barack. You can even import your contacts to make it easier. Don’t worry – we don’t hold on to any of the email addresses you share.” This request was followed by fields allowing a supporter to enter up to ten e-mail addresses and to supply his or her own email, first name, and last name. Below these was the field containing the scripted image repair response, needing only to be personally signed by the supporter and sent to his or

her contacts. The image repair strategies used in the principal message, news story excerpts, and e-mail scripts for each website are analyzed below.

### Barack's Faith

#### *Kategoria*

Obama faced accusations that he either was a former Muslim or currently a Muslim posing as a Christian. As either corollaries to or evidence for these claims, Obama was also said to have attended a madrassa (an Islamic school) and to have been sworn into the U.S. Senate using a *Koran*, rather than a Christian *Bible* (Helman, 2008; Kristof, 2008; Kuhnhenh, 2008). For example, Bellantoni (2008) reported on the e-mails sent to Missouri voters prior to the state's primary on February 5, 2008: "One contained the false rumor about Mr. Obama's faith and erroneously claimed he was not sworn into office on the Bible" (p. A01). Helman (2008) also accounted for these rumors: "And there has been plenty in those shadows: that Obama is a Muslim (he is not); that he was sworn into office on the Koran (the Bible was used)" (p. A1).

Evidence suggests that the attacks were present in the electorate's consciousness. Focus groups conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that "seven out of 12 independent Virginia voters taking part said they thought Obama was a Muslim" (Madden, 2008, ¶ 2). Members of the same focus groups "questioned his patriotism, saying he needs to prove he's 'for America'" (Madden, 2008, ¶ 2). Further, beliefs about Obama's faith were shown to influence vote choice among Democrats and independent voters. According to a poll conducted June 18-29, 2008 by the Pew Research Center, 90% of Democrats who believed Obama to be a Christian responded that they supported him for president. By comparison, support was at only 62% among Democrats who



either believed Obama to be a Muslim or were not sure because they had heard different things (Dimock, 2008). Among independents, those who believed Obama was a Christian were equally divided between McCain and Obama. However, those who believed Obama was a Muslim preferred McCain over Obama by a margin of 50% to 34% (Dimock, 2008).

### *Apologia*

In responding to the attacks detailed above, Barack Obama used the strategies of simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, transcendence, minimization, and differentiation.

*Simple denial.* Simple denial of the religious rumors most frequently appeared in the form of excerpts from media stories at the bottom of the main page. A link to CNN streaming video was accompanied by a caption that read, “A CNN report debunks the Muslim hoax” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s faith, 2008). The caption rejects the idea that Obama is a Muslim and labels the accusation a hoax, suggesting that the claims are fraudulent.

The Obama campaign also cited the website, FactCheck.org, declaring that the organization “Debunks Muslim Smears” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s faith, 2008), thus providing additional denial of claims that Obama is a Muslim. Obama’s website also provides an excerpt from the FactCheck.org article:

Many emails have claimed that Obama was educated in an Islamic madrassa.

Factcheck.org says “this allegation was quickly shown to be false.” And “news

stories in *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* found no merit in the madrassa claim. (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008)

This excerpt responds specifically to the accusation that Obama was formally schooled in an Islamic institution. The FactCheck.org excerpt rejects the accusation and provides three other press sources that corroborate the denial.

Under the heading "*Newsweek* Also Debunks Muslim Smears," Obama provides a blurb from the *Newsweek* magazine article, which also applies simple denial to reject accusations made about the senator's faith: "Barack Obama has never been Muslim and never practiced Islam" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008). Plus, the heading for a *Boston Globe* report further employed simple denial: "The Boston Globe Debunks Muslim Smear Too" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008). The excerpted *Boston Globe* report also stated that Obama "was never a practicing Muslim" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008). This statement also served as simple denial.

Finally, simple denial was implicitly used in a "Share the Facts" e-mail script, which read, "Barack Obama was actually sworn into the Senate on his family Bible" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008). Although variations on this utterance would be classified as bolstering, the word "actually" implies a denial because to say that Obama was *actually* sworn in on the Bible rejects claims that he was sworn in by other methods.

*Bolstering.* Obama used bolstering to highlight positive aspects of his faith and religious activities to reduce any perceived offensiveness of associations he had allegedly

had with Islam. In the website's principal message, the campaign stated, "Barack Obama is a committed Christian. He was sworn into the Senate on his family Bible. He has regularly attended church with his wife and daughters for years." Each of these positive statements was designed to outshine negative images of Obama that voters may have held based on rumors they had heard that Obama was Muslim or sworn into the U.S. Senate using a Koran.

These remarks were reinforced by Obama's use of bolstering in the "Share the Facts" script: Obama "regularly attended church with his wife and daughters for years. That's the truth -- Barack Obama is definitely a committed Christian" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008). Again, Obama is not just a Christian in the demographic sense, but is a *committed* Christian, suggesting that he is serious about his Christian faith. And, it is not just Barack Obama who is a practicing Christian, but his entire family. Plus, the mention of Obama's wife and daughters further highlights favorable aspects of his biography.

Finally, bolstering was used by Obama through excerpts from news stories. A *Boston Globe* excerpt bolstered Obama's membership in the United Church of Christ, suggesting that he does not just attend, but is committed to the church as a member of the congregation. Plus, a *Newsweek* article was quoted to say that:

As an adult, Obama turned to Christianity in the late '80s in Chicago, at Trinity United Church of Christ, where he was baptized, married, and baptized his kids. As a new U.S. senator, Obama took his oath on the family Bible. (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008)

This excerpt again reinforces that Obama was sworn into the Senate using the Bible.

More over, this story notes that the oath was taken on the *family* Bible. The insertion of the word “family” may suggest to some in the audience that there is a history of Christianity in the family, since family Bibles are often passed from generation to generation. At the least, the family Bible is a specific and special Bible, belonging to Obama and not just a random Bible. Thus, accusations about Obama’s Muslim past are also reduced. In addition, Obama’s history with Trinity is emphasized. This is not just a church that was joined out of political convenience as some rumors alleged. Instead, this was a church that Obama had been a member of for two decades, a church that he had been baptized in, married in, and taken his children to be baptized in. The role of the Christian church in Obama’s life is bolstered, and any perceived offensiveness of the Muslim accusations are diminished.

*Attack accuser.* Obama used the Fight the Smears website to attack those who spread rumors about his faith. First, in the principal message, Obama derided the accusers: “But shameful, shadowy attackers have been lying about Barack’s religion, claiming he is a Muslim instead of a committed Christian” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s faith, 2008). By labeling them shameful and shadowy, Obama seeks to discredit and dishonor his attackers, weakening the claims against him. Obama continued, “When people fabricate stories about someone’s faith to denigrate them politically, that’s an attack on people of all faiths” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s faith, 2008). Obama further points out the dishonorable attacks by the rumor spreaders, accusing them of making up stories for political gain.

*Transcendence.* Obama’s assault on his accusers for their insults and attacks on all people of all faiths transitions well into Obama’s use of transcendence. Obama is not

only attacking his accusers for their trades in rumor but is declaring that they are guilty of greater crimes than mere defamation of the senator's character. When Obama declares, "...that's an attack on people of all faiths," he is declaring to voters that the attacks used against him go beyond his presidential campaign; those who attack Obama's religion attack everyone of any religion. Additionally, in an e-mail script, Obama declares, "I don't know who starts these nasty rumors about his faith, but they're really insulting to people of all faiths" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008). This example of transcendence also serves to implicitly defend those who *are* Muslim, by noting that in using Islam as a slur, the attackers have insulted all Muslims (and Christians and Jews, etc.), not just Obama.

Obama also used transcendence in the closing of both of his e-mail scripts on the webpage: "Together we can make sure these negative and divisive attacks don't affect this election" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's faith, 2008). Obama uses transcendence in the e-mail scripts to include all voters in the cause, making the attack politics a problem not just for Obama but for anyone who cares about the election. The election, not the attacks on Obama's faith, is what is most important. Obama argues his supporters must be sure to focus on the election rather than political rumors.

*Minimization.* Thus far, the analyzed examples of Obama's *apologia* in the "Barack's Faith" webpage were used to discredit and discount the accusations against him. Obama also used minimization and differentiation to reduce the offensiveness of the Muslim rumors. However, with these two strategies, Obama sought to more directly and logically address the rumors. First, Obama used an example of minimization from *Newsweek* to demonstrate that although he had had experience in Islamic education, the

experience was brief and inconsistent: “Obama’s only personal contact with Islam came as a boy when he moved to Jakarta, Indonesia, with a stepfather who mixed his Islam with Hindu and Animist traditions” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s faith, 2008). This message stressed that the “only” time Obama ever encountered Islam personally was when he was very young. Obama also uses minimization to further reduce the perceived offensiveness of his associations with Islam by arguing that even his encounters with Islam were with a variation that mixed Hindu and Animist traditions. Therefore, this hybrid practice was certainly not a fundamentalist variety of Islam. Obama’s use of the *Newsweek* article further minimized his exposure to Islam by noting that even though he had studied Islam in Indonesia, the Islamic studies were only once a week.

*Differentiation.* The *Newsweek* article cited by the Obama campaign also used differentiation to describe the senator’s education in Indonesia: “In five years there, Obama attended a Roman Catholic school, then a public elementary school, where he sat through a class each week of religious studies” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s faith, 2008). The Obama campaign used the *Newsweek* article to acknowledge that Obama had attended school in Indonesia. However, the campaign differentiates between the accusation that Obama had attended an Islamic madrasa and the reality that he had attended a Catholic institution and a public school in Indonesia.

Obama used a portion of a *Boston Globe* report to differentiate between the Islamic beliefs and practices of some members of his family and his personal religious beliefs and practices: “Obama is a member of the United Church of Christ. His Kenyan paternal grandfather and Indonesian stepfather were Muslim (Fight the smears: The truth

about Barack's faith, 2008). This *apologia* serves to refute rumors that Obama was a former or current Muslim by showing that Obama's faith is not subject to the faith of some of his family. Two members of Obama's family practiced Islam, but Obama's faith differs from that of his stepfather and grandfather.

### *Evaluation*

The effectiveness of Obama's use of simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, transcendence, minimization, and differentiation will now be evaluated on the basis of both internal and external evidence. The external evidence will be provided in the form of public opinion polling, election outcome, exit polls, and commentary by *The New York Times*. But first, I provide internal evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's image repair on the basis of the *apologia's* internal consistency and plausibility and its *kairotic* effectiveness.

*Internal plausibility and consistency.* Obama effectively relied on the strategy of simple denial to refute allegations that he was a Muslim, citing news reporting to corroborate his denials. Further, he effectively denied the additional arguments that he had been sworn in on the Koran and that he had been educated in a madrassa by providing evidence to the contrary for each accusation. By all accounts, it seems that Obama was (and is) a Christian, and when one is innocent of accusations, simple denial is generally an appropriate strategy.

Bolstering was also an effective strategy for the senator because he used examples of how Christianity had played a role at various stages of his life, from his own Christian baptism and marriage to the Christian baptism of his children. Thus, bolstering not only

reinforced the denials that he was Muslim, but demonstrated to his audience *how* Christian he was.

Attack accuser was yet another effective strategy for Obama as it allowed him to not only deride his accusers for engaging in smear tactics, but to charge them with fabricating stories. Additionally, this attack served to implicitly scold those who would use the label Muslim (or any other religious designation) as a smear.

Equally effective was Obama's employ of the strategy of transcendence to argue that there were more important issues in the campaign than his faith. This not only served to shift attention away from questions about Obama's faith but onto issues such as the economy on which Obama was favored over McCain (see below). As with the attacks on his accusers, Obama's application of transcendence was also used to argue that the attacks on his faith were attacks on all people of faith; thus these smears were attacks that everyone should be offended by. Attacks on religion in general (Christian, Muslim, or otherwise) represented a threat far greater than the individual accusations about Obama's personal faith. Together, these examples of transcendence worked to argue that (1) Obama's faith was not an important topic for the campaign, and (2) nobody anywhere should be persecuted for his or her faith.

Obama's use of differentiation and minimization were less effective for the same reasons that transcendence and attack accuser were more effective. Attack accuser and transcendence defended people of all faiths, including himself and, presumably, Muslims. When Obama argued that his stepfather's and grandfather's faiths were different than his Christianity and that he had only briefly been exposed to inconsistent Islamic practices, Obama was suggesting that it was a good thing that he had only had limited connection



and exposure with the religion, failing to sustain the argument that one's faith should not be an election issue. While these strategies may have been politically expedient and effective, they were inconsistent with his strategies of attack accuser and transcendence.

*Kairotic effectiveness.* In considering the influence of *kairos* in the speech set, it is important to note the exigencies, constraints, and the audience. Recall that polling evidence suggested that beliefs that Obama was a Muslim were not only present but shown to influence vote choice among substantial numbers of Democratic and independent voters. In addition, multiple media reports (see above) demonstrated the prevalence of the Internet accusations about Obama's faith. Thus, it seems that there was an urgent need for Obama to respond to the attacks with image repair discourse.

One constraint of the rhetorical situation was consistent across almost all instances of Obama's image repair discourse, and that was that by repeating the attacks, Obama risked giving them even more attention than they had already received. However, as numerous media outlets had reported on the smears and Obama had received numerous campaign trail questions about the attacks, it was likely that most of Obama's audience had already heard the insinuations. Constraints that were more unique to this situation included Obama's family history with Islam and the risk of alienating Muslim voters in his audience. Obama may have implicitly insulted Muslims and his extended family through his use of denial, differentiation, and minimization of his history with Islam. However, Obama's use of attack accuser and transcendence to vilify those who would attack *anyone's* religion worked to counter any potential insult by defending those of Islamic faith (or any other religion). Further, Obama bolstered himself without doing so at the expense of his Muslim countrymen and women.

The Muslim contingent of Obama's audience has already been acknowledged. However, in the United States, the majority of Obama's audience was non-Muslim. And, despite the prejudiced nature of such preferences, voters tended to more often support Obama over McCain if they believed that Obama was Christian. Thus, despite ethical concerns that Obama may have been slighting his heritage or Muslim voters, politically, it was in his best interest to make clear that he was a Christian. Since Obama accomplished this while still arguing that one's religion should not matter, his combination of simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, differentiation, transcendence, and minimization demonstrated deference to *kairos*.

*Polling and election outcomes.* Over a month after the posting of the Fight the Smears website, beliefs still persisted that Obama was a Muslim. A Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll (2008, July 24) found that 10% of registered voters believed Obama was a Muslim, 5% said he was neither a Muslim or a Christian, and 27% said they did not know if he was a Muslim or a Christian. However, exit polls following the landslide general election victory for Obama found that "more than six in 10 [voters] cited the economy as the nation's top concern" (Fram, 2008, ¶ 7, 4). Thus, it seems that although there was lingering uncertainty about Obama's faith, these concerns were outweighed by issues such as the economy. In other words, it seems that Obama's image repair, particularly transcendence, may have been effective in convincing voters that there were more important issues than his faith.

*Commentary.* Several accounts in the pages of *The New York Times* provide evidence for the effectiveness of Obama's defenses against attacks on his faith. Vitello (2008) stated that Obama's Fight the Smears pages, launched in response to "Internet

rumors about its [the Obama campaign's] candidate's patriotism and his religion," could "take the negative power of viral marketing and bend it, like Superman, to send it back where it came from and beyond" (p. 3). In the same article, Vitello (2008) quoted Sid Bedingfield, a University of South Carolina journalism professor and former CNN chief of domestic news coverage, who commented that "The speed with which the Obama campaign can respond to allegations has been quite impressive" (p. 3). Rutenberg (2008) also attested to the effectiveness of the campaign's Internet defenses against "portrayals of Mr. Obama as Muslim," noting that the Fight the Smears website "allows its users to e-mail the information easily to friends" (p. 1).

Although none of these examples of commentary attests to the effectiveness of any one specific strategy, save, perhaps, denial, each of these excerpts provides evidence for the overall *kairotic* effectiveness of Obama's faith *apologia* on the Internet. Testimonials to the speed, ease of transmission, and power of the Internet image repair attest to the timeliness of the messages and their appropriateness to the urgency and audience of the rhetorical situation.

### *Summary*

To review, Obama faced accusations that he was or had been a Muslim, that he had attended a madrassa, or Islamic school, and that he had been sworn into the United States Senate using a Koran rather than a Bible. Obama's image repair discourse in response to these allegations was comprised of simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, transcendence, minimization, and differentiation. Upon consideration of the internal plausibility and consistency of the rhetoric, the discourse's *kairotic* effectiveness, polling, election outcomes, and commentary, it was found that Obama's use of simple denial,

bolstering, attack accuser, and transcendence were most effective. Differentiation and minimization were found to be less effective and possibly offensive to some segments of Obama's audience.

### Barack's Birth Certificate

#### *Kategoria*

Obama was accused of lying or concealing information about his citizenship. Polls gauging public opinion about Obama's citizenship were not available prior to the posting of the Fight the Smears web pages. However, news coverage of the campaign suggests that this was a prominent issue in the 2008 presidential campaign. An article on Salon.com declared that e-mails were "flying around the Internet with winking implications that Obama isn't really American (and worse than that, he's *African*, if you know what the writer means)" (Madden, 2008, emphasis original). The Madden article not only describes the citizenship accusations against Obama but also suggests that the author of the rumor was attempting to stoke racial fears using innuendo. Helman (2008) noted that conservative bloggers were making claims that Obama "was hiding something about his name or place of birth" (p. A1). Phrases such as "hiding something" and "he's African" (rather than saying that Obama is of African descent) are indicative of many of the internet rumors, which used insinuation and out of context facts to distort the truth (Madden, 2008).

#### *Apologia*

Obama used the strategies of simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, and transcendence to respond to accusations that he was not being honest about his natural born United States citizenship.

*Simple denial.* Simple denial was used by Obama to deny accusations that he was not telling the truth about his citizenship. The campaign used the following heading to introduce an article in *The Washington Post*, that provided evidence for Obama's citizenship: "*The Washington Post Debunks Smears, Confirms Barack's Citizenship*" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's birth, 2008). This heading at the start of the press clippings section simply, yet clearly declares that the attacks on Obama's citizenship are false. Obama, thusly used simple denial and a testimonial from *The Washington Post* to affirm that Obama was, indeed, a citizen.

The previously analyzed message was the only instance in which Obama explicitly denied that he was not an American citizen. However, Obama did provide evidence that he *was* an United States citizen. Providing evidence of innocence functions as denial. In the principal message of the Fight the Smears page about Obama's birth certificate, Obama attempts to refute the accusations against him: "The truth is, Barack Obama was born in the state of Hawaii in 1961, a native citizen of the United States of America" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's birth, 2008). By claiming that he was born in Hawaii, Obama unequivocally denies accusations that he was not a native born citizen of the United States of America. The webpage also provided a copy of Obama's birth certificate in the form of a JPEG image posted on the site. Thus, Obama provided evidence to contradict the accusations against him, thus denying the attacks.

Obama also provided evidence as a form of denial when he cited a FactCheck.org clarification about his citizenship:

When Barack Obama Jr. was born on Aug. 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Kenya was a British colony, still part of the United Kingdom's dwindling empire. As a Kenyan

native, Barack Obama Sr. was a British subject whose citizenship status was governed by The British Nationality Act of 1948. That same act governed the status of Obama Sr.'s children. Since Sen. Obama has neither renounced his U.S. citizenship nor sworn an oath of allegiance to Kenya, his Kenyan citizenship automatically expired on Aug. 4, 1982. (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's birth, 2008)

This excerpt explains that as the son of a British subject, Obama also once was a recognized British citizen, in addition to his U.S. citizenship. The FactCheck.org blurb also implies that briefly, Obama became a Kenyan citizen when the nation was granted independence from the United Kingdom. However, as the excerpt notes, Obama never renounced his U.S. citizenship, and any other citizenships that Obama might have had expired. In other words, this explanation denies challenges to Obama's U.S. citizenship by noting that additional citizenships are expired and meaningless in comparison to Obama's valid, native born U.S. citizenship.

*Bolstering.* Obama briefly combined bolstering with simple denial in his quotation from WashingtonPost.com: "Sen. Barack Obama is a Christian family man with a track record of public service" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's birth, 2008). The assertion that Obama "is a Christian family man with a track record of public service" serves as bolstering. Being a Christian family man and having a record of public service calls attention to some of Obama's positive qualities and in doing so weakens the attacks against him. This use of bolstering serves to both reduce and remove the offensiveness of the accusations against Obama.

*Attack accuser.* Obama attacked his accusers in an attempt to reduce the

offensiveness of their allegations that he was lying about his birth certificate. In the principal message, Obama claimed that those questioning his birth certificate were not merely concerned with verifying documents: “Smears claiming Barack Obama doesn’t have a birth certificate aren’t actually about that piece of paper — they’re about manipulating people into thinking Barack is not an American citizen” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s birth, 2008). Obama strikes back at his accusers by claiming that they are guilty of manipulation.

Obama took a similar tack in the website’s “Tell a Friend” script: “Smears claiming Barack Obama doesn’t have a birth certificate aren’t really about a piece of paper, though -- they’re about manipulating you into thinking Barack is different” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s birth, 2008). Obama again accuses his attackers of manipulation, but in this instance argues that the manipulations are aimed at exploiting difference.

A third instance of attack the accuser came in the “Share the Facts” script. Again, Obama’s campaign accused the rumor starters of manipulation but in this message also claimed that the accusers had a motive: “People who are determined to keep us divided start these rumors about Barack’s birth certificate to manipulate us into thinking he is not an American citizen” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s birth, 2008). Those who challenge Obama’s citizenship do so in an effort to prevent people from coming together. The message does not specify who is being kept apart or to what aim. Perhaps potential Obama supporters are being kept apart; perhaps Americans are being prevented from uniting as a country. In any event, those who smeared Obama were accused of being manipulative, of preying on people’s wariness of difference, and of using divisive

politics.

*Transcendence.* Obama's use of transcendence built on his claim that his accusers were intent on divisive politics. His "Share the Facts" e-mail script reassured supporters that "Together we can make sure these negative and divisive attacks don't affect this election" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's birth, 2008). As with Obama's employ of transcendence in the other e-mail scripts, this message acknowledges that there are divisive politics at work but that implied that it was most important to overcome the adversity for the greater cause of the election.

### *Evaluation*

To review, Obama employed simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, and transcendence to respond to accusations that he was hiding something about his citizenship. In this section, the plausibility and consistency of Obama's *apologia* will be evaluated as internal evidence for the effectiveness of the senator's image repair following challenges to his citizenship. Additionally, the *kairotic* effectiveness will be evaluated as internal evidence. Finally, *New York Times* coverage will be provided as the sole source of external evidence. Polling data measuring beliefs about the validity of Obama's citizenship could not be located.

*Internal plausibility and consistency.* Obama effectively used denial by presenting evidence for his native citizenship, while simultaneously rejecting any challenges to his citizenship. Given the numerous pieces of evidence in support of Obama's claim to native citizenship, simple denial was an ideal strategy to counter any accusations to the contrary. Seemingly, this strategy would have alone been sufficient. However, Obama sought to reinforce the denials with the use of bolstering. Bolstering



was effective because, having denied the accusations challenging his citizenship, Obama was able to argue that not only was he a native and legal citizen but a citizen with a record of public service. Again, bolstering, combined with denial was unnecessary but effective nevertheless.

Having established the legitimacy of his citizenship, Obama sought to further discredit the accusations against him by attacking those who had made them. Obama effectively made the argument that his accusers were attempting to manipulate voters using deception and prejudice. Obama also attacked his accusers as being divisive. This was a vague and potentially needless counterattack by Obama. However, when considered in the greater context of Obama's general campaign themes of unity and change, Obama successfully depicts his opponents as agents working against these noble interests.

Transcendence was again used effectively by Obama to argue that there were more important concerns than trivial and groundless accusations that Obama was not a native born citizen of the United States. Though potentially redundant when delivered with the same pleas in the other Fight the Smears pages, transcendence was particularly apropos in the context of the flimsy allegations about Obama's citizenship.

*Kairotic effectiveness.* Assessing the *kairotic* effectiveness of Obama's strategies requires consideration of the exigencies, constraints and audience in the rhetorical situation. Recall that an exigence is an urgency that demands rhetorical action. Although there is evidence that the challenges to Obama's citizenship were widespread, there is little evidence that the attacks represented an urgent threat. However, the Obama campaign likely theorized that it was better to respond and refute than to allow the claim

to further grow in stature on the Internet. Obama's birth certificate had been certified by the state of Hawaii, so there was no legitimate challenge to be met. Given the overwhelming evidence to dispute the false claims about Obama's citizenship, there were few, if any, constraints on the rhetorical situation. If anything, Obama risked giving legitimacy to the accusation by responding to it. However, as this strategic consideration had long since been abandoned in responses to other threats to Obama's image, there was really nothing hindering Obama's response.

Assuming that Obama's audience would be most persuaded by the very evidence that every other native born American voter used to prove his or her citizenship, Obama's use of his birth certificate to deny and bolster his native born status was the ideal response. The campaign quickly and clearly rejected the accusations using denial and bolstering and further diffused the controversy by using attack accuser, minimization, and transcendence. As noted above, there may have been a risk that the same transcendence defense had been too frequently used in other e-mail scripts. However, if ever there was an issue that was less important than others, it was the capricious attack on Obama's citizenship. Thus, the *apologia* in response to the citizenship charge was actually the opportune time (*kairos*) for transcendence.

*Commentary.* Freierman (2008) provided evidence that rumors challenging the veracity of the Obama birth certificate had flourished via streaming video as well, noting that a video "questioning Barack Obama's citizenship" was among the top videos on YouTube.com, even in the final month before the general election (p. 11). Thus, Obama was not able to stop the spread of the rumors. However, given the consistent dismissal of the law suits challenging his candidacy, the persistence of the rumor after Obama's

*apologia* does not appear to have inflicted persistent damage to Obama's image. Further, a report by Bosman and Broder (2008) described the Fight the Smears website as "a more robust response mechanism" to "potent, fast-moving rumors about his [Obama's] religion, his birthplace, and his patriotism" (p. 24). Thus, this *New York Times* report seems to find that Obama's Fight the Smears rhetoric took advantage of *kairos* in responding to rumors about Obama's nation of birth.

### *Summary*

To recap, Obama, faced with charges that he was not a native born citizen of the United States and thus not eligible to run for the presidency, responded most effectively with simple denial and bolstering. Further, the application of transcendence bore notable *kairos*. Finally, attack accuser was used with relative effectiveness as well.

### Barack's Love for Flag and Country

### *Kategoria*

Obama's campaign also used the Fight the Smears website to respond to attacks on the senator's patriotism after rumors circulated that he refused to pledge allegiance to the U.S. flag and that he refused to place his hand over his heart during recitation of the Pledge.

As with allegations about Obama's citizenship, there were no polls gauging public opinion about Obama's patriotism prior to the posting of the Fight the Smears web pages. Still, news coverage of the campaign suggests that Obama's patriotism became a significant topic during the 2008 presidential campaign. An article in *The Washington Times* provided accounts of voters in Pennsylvania and Indiana who asked Obama why he did not pledge allegiance to the flag or place his hand over his heart during recitation

of the pledge: “In Pennsylvania, Republican Margaret Miller of Newmanstown told Mr. Obama in a diner that she ‘had to ask’ about the rumor: ‘I’m going to ask you why you didn’t salute the flag’” (Bellantoni, 2008, p. A01). Later in the article, Bellantoni (2008) reported on a question asked during a South Bend, Indiana town hall: “I’ve been reading on the Internet that you believe as an American we should not have to pledge allegiance to the flag. Is that true?” (p. A01). These quotes are representative of the ideas perpetuated by the internet rumors about patriotism.

### *Apologia*

Obama used the Fight the Smears page, “The Truth About Barack’s Love for Flag and Country” to respond to attacks that targeted Obama’s patriotism. As with the pages on Barack’s faith and birth certificate, there were image repair messages in html format, plain text messages intended for e-mail use, and a PDF flyer. It is worth noting that, in addition to the Fight the Smears texts, Obama delivered a June 30, 2008 speech in Independence, Missouri on the topic of patriotism. In that speech, Obama briefly mentioned the Pledge of Allegiance as an example of one of his early memories of patriotism. However, the speech as a whole dealt more with broader ideas of what it means to be patriotic, and Obama never specifically addressed (as he did in the web pages) accusations that he refused to say the Pledge or place his hand over his heart when addressing the American flag. Further, a comparison of news coverage found that the June 30 speech on patriotism was a far less substantial news story than Obama’s March 18 Speech on Race, which received over four times the coverage.<sup>1</sup>

For these reasons, analysis of Obama’s patriotism *apologia* was confined to texts available at the Fight the Smears website. These texts include a brief excerpt of *The*

*Washington Post* story about the June 30, 2008 speech, which was provided by the campaign as external evidence for Obama's love of country. Obama's patriotism *apologia* included application of the strategies of simple denial, accident, attack accuser, differentiation, transcendence, and bolstering.

*Simple denial.* Obama's discourse included multiple denials of claims that he refused to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and that he refused to place his hand over his heart when addressing the flag. The first instance was in the principal message: "Fortunately, fraudulent emails pretending Barack won't say the Pledge or put his hand over his heart are easily refuted by a video of Barack doing precisely that on the floor of the United States Senate" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). Obama denies the accusations by labeling the e-mails as fraudulent and by saying that there is video that proves the e-mails false. Below this defense, Obama provided another denial on the webpage, accompanied by streaming video showing Obama saying the pledge and further repudiating the rumors: "Watch this video to see that the pledge of allegiance was said at a recent Obama event in New Hampshire. Smears claiming otherwise are completely false" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). Obama's campaign again denies the allegations, decrying the attacks as "completely false." Further, as on the birth certificate web page, Obama provides visual evidence to counter claims that Obama will not pledge allegiance to the U.S. flag.

Quoting an excerpt from the website Snopes.com, which had been cited as evidence by some of the very e-mails that attacked him, Obama again denied the allegations about the Pledge:

Back in October 2007, one of the hottest e-mail forwards was a picture capturing Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama standing in front of a U.S. flag (at an Iowa political event [Senator Tom Harkin's Steak Fry]) with his hands clasped in front of him during the playing of the U.S. national anthem. This photographic brouhaha soon mutated into a (false) claim that Barack Obama "refused to put his hand over his heart during the Pledge of Allegiance" and then into the (even more false) claim that "he refused to recite the Pledge of Allegiance at all." (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008)

Here, Obama relies on an independent website, one misleadingly cited by the opposition, to deny the accusations against him while also explaining to the audience the errant origins of the rumor. The Snopes.com excerpt denies the "hand over his heart" and Pledge recitation rumors by denouncing them as "false" and "even more false." Further, the website quote denies the foundation of the accusations by explaining that, in the picture at the center of the controversy, the Pledge was not even being recited.

The website's "Share the Facts" e-mail script again provided the aforementioned streaming video as evidence that the Pledge rumors were false:

Have you all seen the video of Barack Obama leading the Pledge of Allegiance on the floor of the U.S. Senate? It's posted right on his website, so these rumors about whether he's willing to do it are kind of silly. (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008)

In this instance of *apologia*, the accusations are denied, using the video as evidence for the denial. Plus, the message also denies the legitimacy of the rumors by calling them "silly."

Each of the above instances of denial specifically addressed the accusations that Obama refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance or place his hand over his heart during the recitation of the Pledge. However, these denials did not directly challenge general questions about Obama's patriotism. To deny these claims, Obama's campaign inserted image repair rhetoric into three other messages: the heading over the Snopes.com quote, the heading preceding an excerpt from an ABC News report, and the "Tell a Friend" e-mail script.

The Snopes.com heading read simply, "Snopes.com Debunks Patriotism Smear" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). The heading not only summarizes the excerpt below it, but serves to discredit any attacks on Obama's patriotism. Similarly, the ABC News heading read, "ABC News Also Debunks Patriotism Smear." Thus, as with the Snopes.com heading, any rumors disparaging Obama's patriotism are bunk. Further, the insertion of the word "also" strengthens the denial by reminding the audience that multiple sources have debunked the patriotism smears.

Finally, the Obama campaign's most definitive website rejection of the accusation that the senator was unpatriotic comes from the "Tell a Friend" e-mail script, which declared that, "These attacks on Barack's patriotism are completely false" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). The attacks about Obama's refusal to appropriately participate in the Pledge of Allegiance had individually been denied. Here, Obama identifies the rumors as attacks on his patriotism, and denies all of them by declaring them false.

*Accident.* In responding to attacks on his patriotism, Obama used a strategy that he had not used in any other image repair discourse analyzed in this dissertation. He evaded responsibility for the attacks on his patriotism by suggesting that, at times, the appearance that Obama is unpatriotic is accidental. To do so, Obama cited a *Washington Post* article that quoted Obama's aforementioned speech on patriotism in Independence, Missouri:

And yet at times over the last 16 months, my patriotism has been challenged — at times as a result of my own carelessness, more often as a result of the desire by some to score political points and raise fears about who I am and what I stand for. (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008)

Although the latter portion of this quote represents Obama's attacks on his accusers (see below), the first portion represents Obama's attempt to frame perceptions that he is unpatriotic as accidental, as a result of Obama's carelessness. Obama does not specify when he has been careless, but he attempts to evade responsibility for the perceptions by arguing they were accidental. In other words, he is not intentionally unpatriotic.

*Attack accuser.* Obama's campaign three times employed attack accuser on the Love for Flag and Country webpage. First, in the principal message, Obama's campaign attacked his accusers, labeling them "smear pushers" for "claiming he's [Obama's] not a patriot" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). By portraying his attackers as "smear pushers" who have targeted his patriotism, Obama removes any legitimacy that their criticism may have and reduces the offensiveness of their charges. The Obama campaign again attacked its accusers in the "Tell a Friend" e-mail script, saying that their accusations were "designed to play into the worst kind of stereotypes"



(Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). Obama does not specify what those stereotypes are, but by charging his accusers with exploiting stereotypes in general, Obama again weakens their credibility.

Third, Obama attacked his accusers by returning to the quote from Obama's patriotism speech in Independence, Missouri:

And yet at times over the last 16 months, my patriotism has been challenged — at times as a result of my own carelessness, more often as a result of the desire by some to score political points and raise fears about who I am and what I stand for.

(Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008)

Obama denies that he is unpatriotic by attacking his political enemies who employed the politics of fear to distort Obama's ideals for no other reason than political gain.

*Differentiation.* Obama used differentiation to reduce the offensiveness of accusations that he had not placed his hand over his heart and more broadly would not recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The webpage cited an excerpt of an ABC News story about the afore-mentioned Iowa Steak Fry photo which reported:

Obama said the photo was taken during the singing of the national anthem, not the pledge. "My grandfather taught me how to say the Pledge of Allegiance when I was 2," Obama said, his annoyance obvious. "During the Pledge of Allegiance you put your hand over your heart. During the national anthem you sing." (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008)

In this excerpt, Obama quotes the news story to differentiate between the national anthem and the Pledge. Obama acknowledges that he was guilty of not placing his hand over his heart during the singing of the national anthem, but not during the Pledge of Allegiance.

Further, Obama explains that his grandfather taught him to put his hand over his heart during the Pledge and to sing with the anthem, suggesting that he has different traditions regarding these patriotic acts.

*Transcendence.* Obama again used transcendence to suggest that questioning his patriotism was of little significance in comparison to the more important concerns of the nation. As part of the prime message, Obama encouraged viewers of his website to “move on to the real issues” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s love, 2008). Obama’s patriotism is not a real issue, and voters and critics should move on to more important criteria of choosing a president.

*Bolstering.* Obama frequently used bolstering in the Love for Flag and Country Fight the Smears page. In the principal message, the campaign wrote that “Barack Obama’s grandfather, a WWII veteran, taught Barack the Pledge of Allegiance when he was a little boy and helped inspire his love for America” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s love, 2008). This theme emphasizes Obama’s relationship with his grandfather. In doing so, the *apologia* highlight’s his grandfather’s patriotism and establishes that Obama comes from a patriotic family. Further, the defense explains to the audience that Obama’s grandfather was influential in teaching Obama, at an early age, patriotic values, values he still has.

More specifically, the campaign cited ABC News’ quotation of Obama’s annoyed claim that he was two years old when he learned the Pledge, specifying how little of a boy he was. The extraordinarily young age of two reinforces how long Obama has practiced the Pledge and bolsters his patriotism.

The title of the page, “The Truth About Barack Obama’s Love for Flag and Country” further bolsters Obama’s patriotism and reduces the offensiveness of any actions that may have called it into question. The principal message reinforces this love, petitioning the audience to “Make sure anyone who tries to smear Barack on his love for flag and country sees this page” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s love, 2008). Anyone who questions Obama’s patriotism (not just those who spread the Internet rumors) should see this webpage and realize how much Obama loves his country and its flag.

The bolstering of Obama’s patriotism is again reiterated in the heading for an excerpted Washingtonpost.com report: “*The Washington Post* Covers Barack’s Love For His Country” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s love, 2008). Here, by noting that the newspaper has covered his speech about patriotism, Obama implies that *The Washington Post* has recognized his patriotism. The speech quote reported in the excerpted report also provides examples of Obama bolstering his patriotic image:

“Throughout my life, I have always taken my deep and abiding love for this country as a given,” Obama said in the 29-minute address to about 1,150 people crowded into a gymnasium at the Truman Memorial Building, named for former president Harry S. Truman. “It was how I was raised. It was what propelled me into public service. It is why I am running for president.” (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack’s love, 2008)

In the quoted speech, Obama suggests that his patriotism is “a given,” something that should not be questioned. He again reminds the audience that he was raised (by his Grandfather) to love America. Further, Obama not only loves America, but his love of

country is what compelled him to public service and, presumably, what continues to drive his current quest for the presidency.

The reporting in *The Washington Post* excerpt also bolsters Obama's image as a popular candidate, noting that "about 1,150 people crowded into a gymnasium at the Truman Memorial Building, named for former president Harry S. Truman" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). The report implies Obama's popularity by implying that 1,150 people would not *crowd* into a gym if Obama was not worth listening to (or if he was not patriotic). Further, the reporter also does the campaign a favor by bolstering Obama's image through association with the patriotism of President Truman.

### *Evaluation*

Having identified and analyzed Obama's use of simple denial, accident, attack accuser, differentiation, transcendence, and bolstering, this section evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies, using the criteria of internal plausibility and consistency, *kairos*, polling, and commentary.

*Internal plausibility and consistency.* Once again, Obama's use of simple denial was the most direct and most effective image repair strategy. Given that patriotism is not a tangible quantity like someone's birth certificate, it is not quite as simple as just producing a government document to certify one's love of flag and country. However, there is also no certification stating that one is not patriotic. So, it was quite feasible to simply deny the claims. However, since one's patriotism cannot be so easily proven or disproven, Obama was wise to employ additional means of defense against the attacks. Using objective sources to refute the out of context photo from Harkin's steak fry

showing Obama not placing his hand over his heart was also a logical extension of the denial.

When one's patriotism is challenged, bolstering is as plausible a strategy as is denial for responding to the accusations. Obama effectively used bolstering to provide examples for the audience of all the ways in which he was patriotic, reducing the offensiveness of charges that he did not love his country.

The only flaw in Obama's bolstering was when he claimed that he had learned the Pledge when he was two years old. In multiple messages, Obama had claimed to have learned the pledge "when he was a little boy" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). Only in his website's excerpt of the ABC News story is Obama quoted as stating the exact age: "My grandfather taught me how to say the Pledge of Allegiance when I was 2,' Obama said, his annoyance obvious" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008). It is quite believable that Obama learned the Pledge of Allegiance as a little boy, as most Americans learn the Pledge when they are in their first year of elementary school. However, to learn it at age 2 seems a bit extraordinary, and, that Obama specified the age when "his annoyance [was] obvious" makes it seem more as if the exact age was made up or exaggerated. So, bolstering was effective overall, but seemed slightly exaggerated when Obama specified that he had learned the Pledge when he was 2.

In the case of the attacks on his patriotism, transcendence was an effective strategy for Obama once more. Throughout the controversy, it is the attacks that seem implausible, not Obama's patriotism. Why would one run for public office and aspire to lead his or her nation if he or she was not patriotic? Any answer to this question would

seem a farfetched one. As the attacks on Obama's patriotism already seemed baseless, transcendence was easily employed to dispatch the attacks as insignificant in comparison to the other pressing concerns of the nation.

When Obama's patriotism was challenged, when he was accused of not loving his country and not being loyal to its flag, it is understandable that he would become upset and attack others. The attacks seemed warranted and well-directed. However, one attack was somewhat vague and logically flawed. The "Tell a Friend" e-mail script's statement that attacks on Obama's patriotism were "designed to play into the worst kind of stereotypes" (Fight the smears: The truth about Barack's love, 2008) is unclear about the stereotype. Obama charges his accusers with appealing to "the worst kind of stereotypes." But without specifying what those stereotypes are, Obama is just as guilty of the dirty politics of omission and suggestion as are those whom he charges with these transgressions.

Obama's use of differentiation is of questionable effectiveness. Many in Obama's audience would expect the presidential candidate to place his hand over his heart during the recitation of the Pledge and the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner." So, for Obama to differentiate between the two seems pointless. However, his argument that his World War II veteran grandfather taught him this tradition somewhat justifies the delineation. Still, this seems a less effective strategy than Obama's other image defenses.

The least effective strategy used by Obama was accident. When Obama claims that perceptions that he is unpatriotic are partly the result of his own carelessness, he is attempting to evade responsibility for the perceptions. However, by evading some responsibility, Obama is also saddled with some blame for the perceptions. Further, his

admission of carelessness is vague; he does not specifically explain how he has accidentally contributed to his unpatriotic image. Although some in Obama's audience may have found it magnanimous or even mortifying to admit that he was, at times, guilty of lapses in patriotism, some may have seen the admission of carelessness as evidence that Obama was not as patriotic as he implied in his other discourse. Further, there is no regret or apology for the carelessness, so Obama does not solicit the potentially positive response that mortification might bring. As a result, Obama's use of accident is inconsistent with his other image repair strategies and suggests that Obama *is* unpatriotic at times.

*Kairoic effectiveness.* Examination of the exigencies, constraints, and audience of the rhetorical situation surrounding Obama's love of flag and country discourse yields insight to Obama's recognition of *kairos* in these *apologia*.

Warranted or not, a candidate's patriotism frequently becomes an issue in political campaigns. Although, as discussed above, it may seem irrational that an unpatriotic person would run for national office, voters do not take candidates' patriotism for granted (see *L.A. Times*/Bloomberg poll below). Thus, a challenge to one's patriotism represents an urgency that demands rhetorical action. In short, Obama had to respond to these accusations. Further, Obama's use of the Internet as a fast response ensured that the *apologia* would be delivered with opportune timing.

A constraint unique to this situation was the photograph that had circulated as supposed evidence that Obama refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance or place his hand over his heart during the recitation. The photo pictured other Democratic candidates with their hands over their hearts, yet Obama's hand was not over his. Given this constraint,

Obama could not completely deny the attack by claiming that the photo was entirely out of context. Obama instead claimed that the photo was taken during the national anthem and not the Pledge. However, this use of differentiation failed to overcome the constraint the photo had placed on the rhetorical situation. For Obama's audience to appreciate the differentiation that he was arguing, they would have also had to have shared Obama's tradition of putting your hand over your heart during the Pledge but not during the singing of the national anthem. This leap was even further, given that the other candidates had covered their hearts with their hands.

In order for a rhetor's message to achieve *kairos*, the speaker must meet the demands that the audience and constraints place on a rhetorical situation. Obama's use of differentiation in the patriotism defense failed to answer the question of why he was not covering his heart when other candidates were, and failed to persuade his audience that there were differences between national anthem etiquette and Pledge of Allegiance etiquette. Obama's differentiation was inappropriate for the rhetorical situation and thus *kairotically* ineffective.

Other constraints on the rhetorical action available to Obama were represented by the other strategies Obama had used. Obama frequently and effectively employed denial, bolstering, and transcendence to reject charges that he was patriotic, provide evidence of his lifelong love of country and flag, and reject patriotism as a comparatively valid issue, respectively. Thus, these strategies constrained Obama's effective use of strategies like differentiation, attack accuser, and accident, strategies that made Obama appear inconsistent and even hypocritical in his image repair efforts. Given the exigencies, constraints, and expectations of the audience, Obama's use of simple denial, shifting the



blame, bolstering, and transcendence were more *kairotically* effective than his applications of accident, differentiation, and attack accuser.

*Polling and election outcomes.* Months after the launch of the Fight the Smears web pages, questions about Obama's patriotism persisted. A *Los Angeles Times*/Bloomberg Poll, conducted August 15-18, 2008, found that 35% of those queried had questions about how patriotic Obama was, compared with only 9% who had questions about McCain's patriotism (Pollingreport.com, 2008, August 15-18). So, despite Obama's *apologia*, he still trailed McCain by 26 points among voters who questioned the candidates' patriotism.

However, 55% of voters still saw Obama's patriotism as strong, suggesting that a majority of Americans did think his patriotism was strong. Plus, the phrasing of the question may cause the results to be misinterpreted. The question asked: "Do you think Obama's patriotism is strong, or do you have questions about how patriotic Obama is?" (Pollingreport.com, 2008, August 15-18). Thus, those who answered in the affirmative most likely thought Obama's patriotism was strong; however, it is possible that those who had questions or responded that they were unsure (9%) at least thought Obama had average patriotism. Since there was no baseline polling to gauge perceptions of Obama's patriotism prior to the posting of the Fight the Smears pages, there is no way to see if Obama's image improved. However, the 55% who thought Obama had strong patriotism suggests that the image repair efforts were at least effective at maintaining positive image perceptions among a majority of registered voters.

Finally, returning to Obama's landslide victory over John McCain, it appears that overall, a plurality of voters likely found Obama patriotic enough to serve as president.

Plus, it appears that Obama was successful in his use of transcendence and convinced voters there were more important issues than his patriotism. Thus, polling and election results appear to confirm the overall effectiveness of Obama's image repair discourse.

*Commentary.* Returning to *New York Times* coverage of the controversy, Vitello's earlier referenced column is again applicable in analyzing the effectiveness of Obama's patriotism *apologia*. Recall that Vitello (2008) had introduced Obama's Fight the Smears pages as being launched as defenses against "Internet rumors about its [the Obama campaign's] candidate's patriotism and his religion" (p. 3). Patriotism was specifically mentioned as an attack against Obama. Vitello also suggested success for Obama's rejection of Internet attacks on his patriotism, saying that the Fight the Smears page could "take the negative power of viral marketing and bend it, like Superman, to send it back where it came from and beyond" (p. 3). Specifically, "send it back where it came from and beyond" sounds like acclaim for Obama's denials and use of attack the accuser. He refuses the accusations and turns them on those who sent them.

Without specifically mentioning Obama's use of a specific strategy, a July 20, 2008 letter to the editor from a reader in Newton, Connecticut praised the timeliness and urgency of Obama's responses to smears: "The Democrats have learned that silence is not a virtue, and the Obama campaign is quick to repudiate false charges and clarify distortions" (Letters Rush is, p. MM8). This letter writer not only affirms Obama's decision to respond but provides evidence for the rhetoric's *kairos*, since the letter praises the speed of the repudiation.

A final example of *New York Times* commentary provides specific praise for the effectiveness of Obama's bolstering in responding to attacks on his patriotism. The

examples of bolstering praised in the newspaper column actually come from Obama's first general election campaign television advertisement. However, the bolstering is the same, and the columnist specifically notes that this message is designed to respond to "smear e-mail and Internet innuendo about... his [Obama's] patriotism" (Bosman, 2008, p. 19). Thus, even though the strategy praised does not come from the Fight the Smears website, the ad uses a common strategy and responds to the same accusations.

Bosman's (2008) assessment of the ad notes that "With its flag pin and statements on patriotism -- the commercial is called "Country I Love" -- it seeks to put to rest any doubts about his devotion to the United States" (p. 19). Obama's love of country is bolstered in the television advertisement, as in the webpage. Bosman (2008) concludes that the positive images in the spot "say to Americans who only know Mr. Obama's name and face that there is little to fear" (p. 19). Obama's bolstering of his patriotism and mainstream values in the ad, as in the Fight the Smears page, is effective.

### *Summary*

Overall, Obama was effective in his speeches of self defense against *kategoria* that questioned his patriotism by accusing him of not putting his hand over his heart and refusing to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States. Obama's use of accident, attack accuser, and differentiation were questionable. However, by applying the image repair strategies of simple denial, transcendence, and bolstering in his webpage, Obama was able to overcome persuasive Internet attacks on his patriotism.

### Conclusion

The Internet represents a constantly evolving medium for political discourse. The 2008 presidential campaign witnessed unprecedented application of the Internet's

organizing and fundraising abilities. In addition though, for over a year prior to the election, the Internet also facilitated unprecedented attacks through blogs, websites, and viral e-mail campaigns. To respond to these accusations, Barack Obama and his campaign launched the Fight the Smears website. Fight the Smears was actually the main site for 27 different instances of web *apologia*. This chapter examined three of the most prominent speech sets of persuasive attack and defense; those about Obama's faith, his citizenship, and his patriotism.

First, Obama was accused of either being a former Muslim or a current Muslim posing as a Christian for political expediency. To strengthen this attack, Obama's accusers alleged that he had been sworn into the United States Senate using Islam's holy book, the Koran, rather than the Christian Bible. In addition, the Internet attacks also claimed that Obama had attended a madrassa or Islamic school (frequently labeled by the mainstream media as a fundamentalist school of Islam).

To respond to these attacks, Obama's Fight the Smears website titled "The Truth About Barack's Faith" used the strategies of simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, differentiation, transcendence, and minimization. Using internal and external evaluations of the rhetoric, including evaluations of the *apologia's kairos*, it was determined that simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, and transcendence were effective image repair strategies for Obama. Differentiation and minimization were found to be only somewhat effective in repairing Obama's image.

Second, Obama was accused of falsifying his citizenship, and as a result, his eligibility for the presidency was called into question. Obama's website dedicated to responding to these attacks most convincingly and effectively used the strategies of

simple denial and bolstering. Transcendence was also used somewhat effectively, as was attack accuser to a lesser degree.

Third, Obama's patriotism was questioned by his accusers. As evidence, the attackers presented a photograph taken during the primary campaign in Iowa. The photo showed Obama standing with other Democratic candidates, but Obama was the only one who did not have his hand over his heart. Although the photo was later proved to be of the singing of the national anthem, the attack claimed that Obama refused to pledge allegiance to the flag and that he would not place his hand over his heart.

In response to these accusations, Obama's campaign used a website called "Barack's Love of Flag and Country," which used a variety of strategies to defend Obama's image from the attacks. The strategies included simple denial, accident, bolstering, attack accuser, differentiation, and transcendence. Obama's image repair discourse was evaluated on the bases of its plausibility, consistency, and *kairotic* effectiveness, as well as evidence for effectiveness gleaned from polling and press commentary. The evaluations concluded that Obama's use of accident, differentiation and attack accuser were questionable but that simple denial, bolstering, and transcendence allowed Obama to repair damage done to his image as a patriot.

This chapter also provided analysis of the *kairotic* effectiveness of Obama's decision to respond to Internet-based attacks with Internet-based defenses. Overall, Obama's webpage *apologia* were found to effectively respond to the urgency of the accusations while addressing the constraints and expectations of Obama's audience of voters.

In conclusion, Obama made effective use of the Internet to deliver traditional image repair discourse through a unique channel that met the exigencies and constraints of the rhetorical situation while also addressing the expectations of the audience. Obama's frequent and mostly consistent use of denial, bolstering, and transcendence highlighted his refutation of accusations about his faith, citizenship, and patriotism. By denying the attacks, bolstering his positive qualities, and convincing voters that the subjects of the attacks were less important than other concerns facing the country, Obama successfully made the election about issues other than his character.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

This chapter provides a discussion of the results, theoretical contributions, and limitations of this dissertation, as well as future directions for image repair research. To answer Research Questions 1, 2, and 3, I will begin by reviewing the attacks, defenses, and effectiveness of the strategies used in each of the case studies. I will then discuss the theoretical implications, including discussion of the role of *kairos* in image repair research. Finally, I will acknowledge the limitations of this study and offer additional avenues for the study of political *apologia*.

#### Review of Case Study Findings

##### *Chapter Four: "Not the Person that I Met Twenty Years Ago"*

In the spring of 2008, Senator Barack Obama faced persuasive attacks based on his association with his former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Obama responded to these attacks through three substantial speeches of self defense. Analysis of these texts found that Obama used nine different image repair strategies. Obama frequently and effectively used strategies to reduce the offensiveness of his associations with Reverend Wright. He often effectively bolstered his image. Obama also effectively minimized his relationship with Wright as well as his pastor's influence in his presidential campaign. Differentiation was also an effective strategy for Obama, used to make distinctions

between Wright's beliefs and Obama's beliefs, but also employed to argue Wright was different than the man Obama had met twenty years earlier.

Corrective action was a strategy that Obama used sparingly, yet effectively with respect to *kairos*. In each instance, Obama waited until the opportune moment to apply the strategy. First, Obama seized on the *kairos* of the situation by waiting to jettison his pastor until it was clear to his audience that Wright had changed, and Obama had no choice. Had Obama denounced Wright earlier, his actions would have appeared politically, rather than philosophically, motivated. Second, Obama and his family officially left their church only when it was clear that the scrutiny on Obama had been detrimental to the rest of the church and its members.

Aside from Obama's consistently effective use of bolstering, minimization, differentiation, and corrective action, Obama's other image repair efforts fell short during the Wright controversy. Obama's use of defeasibility, attack accuser, transcendence, simple denial, and provocation resulted in inconsistent effectiveness.

External evidence showed that Obama's image suffered considerable damage. However, despite his logical and *kairotic* failings with simple denial, provocation, defeasibility, attack accuser, and transcendence; Obama's success with bolstering, minimization, differentiation, and corrective action allowed him to rebuild his image sufficiently enough to overcome Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination. Although there were brief attempts to rekindle the Wright controversy during the general election, Obama's *apologia* during the spring of 2008 proved effective enough to guard against further attacks in November.



*Chapter Five: “Forty Years ago, when I was 8 Years Old”*

This chapter examined Obama’s *apologia* in response to attacks on the candidate for his associations with accused domestic terrorist William Ayers. Analysis of Obama’s image repair discourse in the form of debate remarks, comments by campaign staff, web site postings, and radio and television advertising showed that Obama used the strategies of simple denial, bolstering, differentiation, transcendence, and attack accuser. Internal and external evidence make the case that, with the exception of attack accuser, each of these strategies was implemented with consistent effectiveness. Obama’s uses of attack accuser failed because they were hypocritical, illogical, and off topic.

Overall, internal evidence was combined with external evidence of commentary and polling to reach the conclusion that Obama effectively used image repair rhetoric following attacks for his associations with William Ayers. Despite the flawed applications of attack accuser, Obama’s other *apologia* effectively denied, evaded responsibility, and reduced offensiveness.

*Chapter Six: “Fight the Smears”*

Recall that the “Fight the Smears” chapter examined three separate sets of attacks and defenses relating to Obama’s religion, citizenship, and patriotism. The discourse was available on a site linked to Obama’s presidential campaign website. One of the analyzed sets of texts focused on response to accusations that Obama was either formerly or currently Muslim and claiming his Christian faith for political appeal. Obama’s website, “The Truth About Barack’s Faith” responded to the attacks through the application of the strategies of simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, differentiation, transcendence, and minimization. Using internal and external evaluations of the rhetoric, including

evaluations of the *apologia's kairos*, it was determined that simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser, and transcendence were effective image repair strategies for Obama. Differentiation and minimization were found to be only somewhat effective in repairing Obama's image because by so vehemently dissociating Obama from Islam, the campaign risked offending adherents to that faith.

Obama also faced allegations that he had produced fraudulent documentation of his citizenship, voiding his native born eligibility for the presidency. Obama's website, "The Truth About Barack's Birth Certificate" served as *apologia* for these persuasive attacks. On the website, Obama most effectively employed simple denial and bolstering. Transcendence was also used somewhat effectively. Attack accuser was also effective overall in response to the citizenship attacks, but not as effective as the other applied strategies. Overall, the strategies still succeeded in refuting any challenges to Obama's citizenship.

Obama also used the "Fight the Smears" website to defend his patriotism against accusations that the presidential candidate would not pledge his allegiance to the American flag and that he would not honor the flag by covering his heart. "The Truth About Barack's Love of Flag and Country" was a website that provided Obama's patriotic *apologia*. It was found that Obama ineffectively exercised the strategies of accident, differentiation and attack accuser were less effective. Evidence suggested that the implementation of simple denial, bolstering, and transcendence effectively helped to convince a majority of voters that Obama's patriotism was not a concern.

## Theoretical Implications

Seven major topics of theoretical implications emerge out of this study: (1) implications for the study of *kategoria* and *apologia* on the topic of race (answering Research Question 4); (2) findings pertaining to religious image repair (answering Research Question 5); (3) implications for image repair in defense of one's patriotism; (4) contributions to understanding preemptive *apologia* on the Internet (answering Research Question 6); (5) implications for the evaluation of image repair; (6) analysis of the role of *kairos* in evaluating the effectiveness of *apologia* (answering Research Question 7); and (7) implications for political attacks and defenses based on candidates' associations. The subsequent sections will analyze the findings of this study relevant to these implications and the existing *apologia* research literature.

### *Race-Related Image Repair*

Barack Obama was not the first rhetor to use image repair discourse to respond to accusations of racism. Recall from the review of literature, that Brinson and Benoit (1999) studied the image repair discourse of Texaco after senior executives were recorded referring "to African American employees as 'black jelly beans' who were 'glued to the bottom of the jar'" (Brinson & Benoit, 1999, p. 484). The comments by executives also showed intolerance for the holidays of Hanukkah and Kwanza. Brinson and Benoit (1999) found that Texaco effectively used the strategies of bolstering, corrective action, mortification, and a variation of shifting the blame to limit the damage of the executives' comments.

There are a number of similarities and differences between the Texaco case and the attacks on Obama for his associations with his pastor who had made allegedly racist remarks. First the principal rhetors in both the Texaco situation and the Obama-Wright controversy were responding to attacks for comments that they had not personally said or even expressed explicit agreement with. Texaco chair Peter Bijur found his company under attack for comments made by other executives, and Obama was attacked for comments made by his pastor. Despite the separation of each man from the accusations brought against him, each individual was held responsible for racist sentiments expressed by his associate(s). Even though Bijur did not face allegations that he had personally made racist comments, the entire company was tainted by the comments of the recorded executives. It was assumed that Bijur and other employees of Texaco had heard such racism before at the company; their failure to act to rectify the attitudes implicated even the not necessarily racist employees. Likewise, Obama was not accused of having made racist comments. Obama's attackers did, however, make the accusation that Obama's longtime membership in the church suggested that the senator was aware of racist sentiments. His failure to earlier denounce Wright was evidence, according to Obama's accusers, that he shared Wright's beliefs.

Another similarity between Obama's race-related image repair and that of Texaco was that each effort was enacted through a series of messages. Texaco delivered its *apologia* via a news releases, a letter to employees, a video message to employees, an appearance on ABC's nightline, and two official statements. Obama's most substantial Wright-related image repair came in his Speech on Race, a press conference, and a news conference.

The two cases also had in common the strategies of bolstering and corrective action. However, in addition to these, Obama used six strategies that Texaco chose not to use: simple denial, provocation, defeasibility, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, and attack accuser. Texaco employed mortification and shifting the blame, strategies not used by Obama. The rhetors not only used different strategies but had varying degrees of success with the strategies that they did have in common.

Brinson and Benoit (1999) observed in their analysis of the Texaco study that shifting the blame is not generally an effective strategy. However, recall that the authors argued that shifting the blame was effective for Texaco because of a variation they referred to as separation, noting that Texaco had separated itself from the bad employees whom the blame had been shifted to. Obama did not use shifting the blame. Instead, he ineffectively used provocation. Obama used the strategy in the Speech on Race (his first major defense on the Wright topic) to argue that endemic racism had provoked Wright's controversial comments.

Obama and Texaco did both use bolstering and corrective action effectively. Bolstering was used by each to express disappointment in and disapproval of the racist remarks made by their associates. Bolstering was also used by both Obama and Texaco to accentuate their positive qualities. Texaco bolstered its appreciation for diversity; Obama bolstered his interest in promoting mutual understanding across the races.

Corrective action was effective for both candidates as well. Texaco improved its diversity training programs and made concessions to right its racial transgressions. Obama's corrective action was enacted (1) when he eventually denounced not only Wright's comments but Wright himself and (2) when he and his family left the church.

Although both uses of corrective action were found to be effective, Obama's use of the strategy was noticeably absent of mortification. Recall that Coombs and Schmidt (2000) found evidence that audiences did not seem to perceive differences between corrective action used with and without mortification. Coombs and Schmidt suggested that an implication of that finding might be for organizations to omit mortification from their discourse, thusly reducing their liability in law suits.

It is not likely that even Obama, the former law professor, omitted mortification to avoid legal vulnerability. It is more likely that Obama did not admit guilt and ask forgiveness because he did not perceive himself as guilty. After all, it was Wright that had made the controversial comments, not Obama. Still, it was four racist employees who forced Bijur's rhetoric, not Bijur. This difference in the prudence of mortification is most likely signaled by differences between defenses of the individual and the collective. Even as Texaco used shifting the blame/separation to distance itself from the guilty few, the nature of the comments made by those individuals suggested a systemic problem of racism at Texaco. Therefore, it was prudent for Texaco to admit guilt and express regret on behalf of the entire company.

Conversely, Obama was one person responding to attacks for his relationship with a controversial figure in Wright. Granted, Obama was the head of a massive campaign operation, and eventually the representative at the top of the Democratic Party ticket. However, Democrats as a whole were not being blamed for associations with Wright (in fact fellow Democrat Hillary Clinton questioned the relationship). Obama was not even being targeted as part of a wholly racist congregation at Trinity. Rather, Obama was being targeted as an individual and he defended himself as an individual. This

individuality actually freed Obama from his association with Wright. Obama, as an individual candidate, was able to deny that he necessarily shared Wright's beliefs. Obama was also able to deny that Wright was an influential member of his campaign, and Obama was able to effectively differentiate between the Reverend Wright he had met in the past and the Reverend Wright that Obama was being associated with during the 2008 presidential campaign.

In summary, bolstering and corrective action appear to be well-suited strategies for race-related *apologia* (although one should still consider individual rhetorical situations). However, the two greatest implications for race-based *apologia* emerge from two major differences between the Texaco case and the Obama-Wright relationship.

First, Texaco effectively used shifting the blame by using separation. However, Obama ineffectively used provocation to argue that societal racism had forced Wright's views. This is not to say that Obama should have tried to shift blame. It likely would have been just as ineffective for Obama to blame societal racism as it was for Obama to claim that societal racism had provoked Wright. Consequently, we have learned from this study that it is inadvisable to claim societal racism as an excuse for racist remarks. Obama's use of differentiation and Texaco's use of separation and shifting the blame suggest that these are suitable strategies for responding to accusations of racist associations.

Second, Texaco used mortification to repair its racist image, but Obama did not use the strategy. Mortification was an appropriate and effective strategy for Texaco as an organization. Bijur apologized for the racist comments of the executives because he was responsible for those people as part of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Despite

shifting the blame to the guilty few, Texaco rightly took responsibility for the greater culture of racism in the company. Obama demonstrated that he was not accountable for the comments of his pastor and therefore did not need to apologize for his pastor. In fact, to do so would have undermined Obama's other strategies of differentiation and minimization in which the candidate effectively separated himself from Wright and belittled the pastor's role in his life and campaign.

Thus, the difference between these two cases demonstrates an important difference between charges of racism and charges of racist associations. Charges of racist associations may lead to allegations that the accused is also a racist (as in the case of Obama). However, the accused should be careful not to apologize for that of which she or he is not guilty. In Obama's situation, apologizing for racism might have led his audience to assume that he was a racist. Obama was better served by his strategies of bolstering, corrective action, differentiation, and minimization. Therefore, we have learned from this study that mortification is not always an ideal strategy for responding to race-oriented *kategoria*.

Finally, this finding has implications for attacks based on associations in general and not just attacks based on racist associations. For example, there was also no reason for Obama to use mortification in the Ayers case because Obama did not have any control over Ayers' actions.

### *Religious Image Repair*

Obama's religious image repair was documented in two different chapters of this study. First, although the analysis mostly focused on race-based attacks, some of Obama's Reverend Wright image repair discourse from Chapter Four is also relevant to



religious *apologia*, especially because one of the frequent refrains in response to Obama's use of defeasibility was to argue that one gets to pick his or her church, but not his or her grandmother. Thus, attacks and defenses regarding Obama's choice of church and, more specifically, his pastor have implications for the study of religious image repair. The other analyzed speech sets with implications for religious image repair come from "The Truth about Barack's Faith" webpage analyzed in Chapter Six. In this section, I will discuss Obama's religious image repair efforts in the context of previous research in religious *apologia*.

Compared to the scant research literature on race-related *apologia*, a wider array of scholarship concerns religious image repair discourse, including Jensen's (1988) analysis of Geraldine Ferraro's *apologia*; Henry's (1988) study of President Kennedy's *apologia*; Blaney's and Benoit's (1997) analysis of image repair in the Gospel of John; Miller's (2002) analysis of the image repair discourse of the Apostle Paul, Justin (Martyr), Martin Luther, Jimmy Swaggart, "the traditionalists," and the Southern Baptist Convention; and Blaney's (2009) study of the image repair efforts of Pope John Paul II (for details, see Chapter 2). Review of this body of literature reveals that collectively, religious rhetors have employed every one of Benoit's (1995) image repair strategies except provocation, accident, and good intentions. However, three strategies (transcendence, differentiation, and attack accuser) were used frequently with varying degrees of effectiveness. I will first discuss the infrequency of the major strategy of evading responsibility. I will then discuss Obama's use of transcendence, differentiation, and attack accuser in comparison to the application of these strategies by previous religious rhetors.

Of the four forms of evading responsibility, only defeasibility has been identified as a strategy used by religious rhetors (including Obama). In the case of the defeasibility, only Jimmy Swaggart, Pope John Paul II, and Obama chose to use this strategy. Even then, only the discourse of Pope John Paul II made consistently effective use (and minor use at that) of the strategy. Not all of Obama's uses of defeasibility were effective. It worked well for Obama to claim he could not possibly know everything said in all of Wright's sermons -- but once the controversy erupted he could no longer use this excuse. Furthermore, it was not persuasive to claim he could no more denounce Wright than he could his own grandmother.

It is worth considering why evasion of responsibility is such a rare strategy among religious rhetors. Some obstacles may be plausibility or aspects of the rhetorical situation. For example, Jimmy Swaggart unsuccessfully argued that he could not help but visit a prostitute because he suffered from breakdowns and addictions. If there are *any* valid reasons for visiting a prostitute, these excuses were certainly not accepted by Swaggart's audience. Obama's use of defeasibility failed because, as it was pointed out by his critics, unlike one's grandmother, one *is* able to choose (and denounce) his or her pastor.

A larger looming obstacle to the employ of strategies that evade responsibility might be Christian values (all studies of religious image repair have involved Christian discourse). Christians believe that people have the ability to judge right from wrong (or good from evil) and consequently must take responsibility for their wrongful acts (Hebden Taylor, 1981; Miller, 2002). The excuse of provocation, in particular, seems contradictory to Christ's plea to "turn the other cheek," as it would be unchristian to say

that someone acted unjustly because they had been treated unjustly. Thus, religious (especially Christian) rhetors may be cautious of attempting to evade responsibility, knowing that their principal rhetorical audience values taking responsibility for one's actions. When one is innocent, denial seems a better-suited strategy. However, when guilty, as Miller (2002) noted, "biblical text and teaching and the ethos of Protestant tradition all direct one to repent and seek forgiveness when cognizant of wrongdoing" (p. 136), suggesting that mortification is a strategy better suited to guilty Christian rhetors. Therefore, unless rhetors are able to unequivocally deny the accusations against them, the strategies of provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions seem to be ill-suited to religious (especially Christian) discourse.

Obama's ill-chosen use of defeasibility and provocation in his religious image repair discourse seem to affirm Miller's conclusion that these strategies are not ideal for religious *apologia*. In addition to denial, Obama relied frequently, as other religious rhetors had, on differentiation, attack accuser, and transcendence. I will now discuss Obama's use of these three strategies in comparison to application by other religious apologists.

Differentiation was employed by Obama to supplement his use of denial. Differentiation was effectively used by President Kennedy and Pope John Paul II. However, the strategy was unsuccessful for the three contemporary Christian apologists analyzed by Miller (2002). Recall from the review of literature that Miller (2002) believed that these rhetors and not their historic counterparts had been able to rely on differentiation because the contemporary audiences were more likely to be able to accept an alternate view of reality. Obama's contemporary audience was obviously similarly

capable of such alternate views. The senator was able to effectively argue that his personal beliefs were different than those of Wright and that, more importantly, the contemporary Wright was different than the man Obama had met twenty years earlier.

On the other hand, as shown by both Miller's contemporary apologists' and Obama's other uses of differentiation, the *ability* of one's audience to accept an alternative view does not always translate into a willingness to do so. Obama was able to somewhat effectively use differentiation to separate his faith from the faith of his stepfather and grandfather, the rejection of Islam that resulted from differentiation failed to offer a resonant alternative view for Muslims. Jimmy Swaggart had similar problems in creating alternative views for his audience (Miller, 2002). The SBC was not able to convince any of their audience of their alternative view (other than those who had always held the view that women should submit to men) (Miller, 2002).

Attack accuser was another strategy that was commonly used by both Obama and a majority of previously examined religious rhetors. In fact, Martin Luther and John Paul II were the only two of the group not to attack their accusers. As with other religious *apologists*, Obama was able to effectively attack his accusers when he held the higher moral ground. Just as Paul was able to lecture the Galatians for straying from Christ's teachings, Obama was able to attack his accusers for resorting to lies and assaults on all people of faith.

The remaining strategy used by Obama was transcendence. Transcendence was used by Geraldine Ferraro, John F. Kennedy, the Apostle John, the Apostle Paul, Justin (Martyr), Martin Luther, "the traditionalists," the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC),

and Pope John Paul II. Of these rhetors, only Ferraro, “the traditionalists,” and the SBC were not ultimately successful in their image repair efforts.

On the Fight the Smears website, Obama was able to effectively use transcendence to argue that there were more important issues than baseless attacks on his faith. Obama was also initially able to effectively use transcendence to suggest that there were more important concerns than his relationship with his pastor. However, the effectiveness of this latter application of transcendence deteriorated as Obama, on three separate occasions, addressed the relationship, thus giving it credibility as an issue.

Despite Obama’s successful use of transcendence in religious image repair, there were differences between his use of the strategy and the effective use of other religious rhetors. Other religious rhetors; notably John, Paul, Justin, and Luther; used transcendence as an appeal to a higher authority (God). However, for Obama, transcendence was not used to appeal to a higher power but rather to appeal that there were more important issues than his faith and his choice of pastor and church. In this regard, Obama’s application of religious transcendence had more in common with John F. Kennedy than the historical Christian apologists. Obama and Kennedy did not face epistemological attacks for their interpretation of Jewish law or Christian doctrine. They did not even face attacks for public behaviors as Swaggart and John Paul II had. Rather, Kennedy and Obama faced attacks for their religious affiliation and alleged religious affiliation, respectively.

So, Kennedy was attacked for being Catholic, and Obama was accused of being a Muslim. However, these attacks are obviously still not exactly the same. Obama (as far as we know) was a Christian, and thus denied being a Muslim. So for him, denial was a

viable strategy. Kennedy, on the other hand, was a Catholic and made no attempts to deny his Catholicism. So, there were different rhetorical exigencies and constraints on both men. As a result, Kennedy could not (and did not wish to) deny his Catholicism. Still, even though denial was a viable strategy for Obama, he could not appear to totally denounce Islam, and thus, he could not solely rely on denial. Obama had to also argue that the campaign had to be about more important issues than anyone's faith (not just his). Thus, analysis of Obama's discourse reaffirms assertions by Blaney and Benoit (1997) and Miller (2002) that transcendence was well-suited to religious image repair. However, the nature of the accusations dictates what form the transcendence will take.

In summary, Obama's faith-based image repair discourse has reinforced the value of transcendence in religious contexts. Further, Obama's religious *apologia* has demonstrated how appropriate recognition of the rhetorical situation can also make differentiation and attack accuser effective strategies for image repair discourse. On the other hand, Obama's failure with defeasibility in religious contexts has reinforced the flaws with evasion of responsibility when speaking to Christian audiences who have an expectation for guilty parties to accept responsibility for their actions.

Ultimately though, the greatest implication for religious *apologia* emerges from the unique accusations that Obama faced. As observed above, previous studies have not investigated rhetors who have been accused of ascribing to a religion different than the one they claim to follow. Obama's Christian faith was challenged, as he was accused of being a Muslim. Although other studies have examined those who were attacked for their faith, none have examined defenses against wrongful accusations of faith. Placed in this unique situation, Obama used simple denial, bolstering, attack accuser,

differentiation, transcendence, and minimization. Differentiation and minimization were found to be somewhat effective but these strategies may have been misconstrued as denunciations of Islam. Findings from this study suggest that rhetors who find themselves in similar situations, facing similar attacks might be best served to focus more on denial, bolstering, attack accuser, and transcendence.

### *Patriotic Image Repair*

Multiple politicians and even presidential candidates have had their patriotism questioned. John Kerry's participation in Vietnam war protests led to questions of his patriotism even though he had protested the war after he fought in it (Ball, 2005). Max Cleland's patriotism was questioned during his U.S. Senate reelection campaign, despite losing three limbs during the Vietnam War. However, despite the tendency of candidates to have their patriotism attacked, the previous research literature includes analysis of the patriotic image repair of only one candidate, Bill Clinton. Recall from the review of literature that Blaney and Benoit (2001) analyzed Clinton's image repair after allegations that he had improperly avoided service in the Vietnam War. One of the specific accusations was that Clinton did not have sufficient patriotism to be president (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). Barack Obama also faced attacks on his patriotism, as chronicled in Chapter Six. Obama's defense of his patriotism, compared with Clinton's provides implications for the study of patriotic *apologia*. The strategies of simple denial and bolstering serve as common points of comparison between the patriotic image repair discourse of Barack Obama and Bill Clinton.

Blaney and Benoit (2001) argued that "a candidate for president of the United States invariably must avoid being perceived as cowardly or unpatriotic" (p. 28). Obama

was not attacked for being a coward, but he and Clinton were both attacked as unpatriotic. For both Democrats, denial was a logical and effective strategy. However, neither explicitly denied being unpatriotic. Instead, each denied acts that would damage perceptions of their patriotism. For Obama, that meant denying that he would not say the Pledge or that he would not place his hand over his heart when honoring America. For Clinton, it meant denying that he had dodged the draft or that he had done anything wrong in respect to the draft.

In addition to denying the specific charges about the Pledge and the national anthem, Obama also relied on the framing of headings in his website to further deny attacks on his patriotism. These headings informed the audience that Snopes.com and ABC News had debunked the patriotism smears. Thus, these carefully worded headlines made more explicit denials of the patriotism accusations but still were not original, independent messages explicitly denying the patriotism smear.

Thus, Clinton and Obama both used simple denial to muzzle questions about their patriotism without explicitly mentioning patriotism in their principal messages. The “Tell a Friend” e-mail script did specifically mention patriotism when it declared, “These attacks on Barack’s patriotism are completely false.” However, this utterance was not part of the principal message. Obama, like Clinton, could have more explicitly and unequivocally denied claims that he was unpatriotic. However, the findings of the study, paired with findings from Blaney and Benoit (2001), suggest that rhetors can successfully defend against attacks on patriotism without specifically denying that they are unpatriotic. This implication is reinforced by the findings for bolstering.



The two candidates also both effectively bolstered their patriotism. Interestingly, both used memories of their early childhood and associations with war veteran relatives to persuade the audience that they had been lifelong patriots. Clinton referenced a cherished childhood memory of his mother explaining to him his father's "good duty in the war" (Blaney & Benoit, 2001, p. 31). Obama recalled his World War II veteran grandfather teaching him how to say the Pledge. Thus, neither presidential candidate had served in the United States military (and one was accused of actively evading military service during a time of war), but both effectively bolstered their patriotism by conjuring up memories of childhood love of country and veterans in their families.

After effectively employing simple denial and bolstering to discount challenges to his patriotism, Obama also effectively used the strategy of transcendence to argue that there were more important campaign topics than pointless debates about his patriotism. Obama was less effective in his use of accident, attack accuser, differentiation, and shifting the blame. The interaction of these specific strategies in this specific rhetorical situation is likely to blame for these strategies. Obama's use of accident had the potential to make him seem magnanimous or even mortifying by admitting that he may not have been as patriotic as he strove to be. However, the combination of accident with shifting the blame made his admissions of carelessness with regard to patriotism seem inconsistent and actually made him look less patriotic. Further, the use of differentiation was far-fetched, and attack accuser was hypocritical (see Chapter Six for details).

Thus, simple denial and bolstering were both effective strategies for Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. These two strategies would likely be replicable for others accused of being unpatriotic. More specifically, an implication from this study is that political

rhetors can deny unpatriotic values without explicitly mentioning patriotism. This can be done with a two-part strategy. First, one can deny acts associated with unpatriotic values. Second, the rhetor can use bolstering to claim to be a lifelong patriot with a family history of wartime patriotism.

### *Preemptive Apologia on the Internet*

This study, Chapter Six in particular, has demonstrated some of the Internet's features that make it a unique channel for persuasive attack and defense. E-mail campaigns, both viral and coordinated, campaign websites, independent party websites, and web video spots have all been shown as potential venues for persuasive attack *and* defense. This chapter has also demonstrated the ability of Internet *apologia* to work as a preemptive defense. Political campaigns may sometimes be hesitant to explicitly defend against every accusation for fear of repeating the attack. However, the Obama campaign did not demonstrate such hesitancy.

Madden (2008) observed that the Obama campaign initially employed subdued responses to rumors and innuendo, but after Obama became the presumed Democratic nominee defenses against the rumors went "aboveground" (§ 4). Helman (2008) also acknowledged the extent of the smears and took note of the power of the Internet: "But the rising influence of blogs – and the attention more mainstream media outlets now pay to them – makes it increasingly untenable for candidates to ignore swirling speculation, even if it's baseless" (p. A1). Helman (2008) also documented the role of e-mail in attacks and defenses involving Obama: "The Illinois senator has also seen e-mail and the Web used as weapons against him, and his campaign yesterday sent a clear signal that it will not stand by and let that happen in the general election" (p. A1). Plus, Tommy

Vietor, a spokesperson for the Obama campaign, said of the launch of the Fight the Smears pages, “The Obama campaign isn’t going to let dishonest smears spread across the Internet unanswered. It’s not enough to just know the truth. We have to be proactive and fight back” (Helman, 2008, p. A1). The results of this study corroborate these remarks. The Obama campaign recognized that campaigns could no longer rely on traditional news outlets to discredit baseless rumors. To fill the void left by the news media’s fact-checking role, the Obama campaign used the Fight the Smears pages to counter unfounded attacks.

Lawrence Lessig of the Center for Internet and Society at Stanford Law School suggested that the Fight the Smears website would have a “‘vaccination’ effect, getting voters used to the idea that everything they read about Obama might not be true” (Helman, 2008, p. A1). Lessig’s suggestion seems to be analogous to the notion of preemptive *apologia*. Recall from the review of literature that Newman (1970) found that Nixon had used preemptive *apologia* to address potential challenges to his policy of Vietnamization. Newman (1970) concluded that, although initially successful, Nixon’s use of ad hominem (equivalent to an attack on one’s accuser) and false dichotomy (exaggerated differentiation) to provide preemptive justification for his policy ultimately amounted to “shoddy rhetoric” (p. 178).

Benoit (1995a) identified Nixon’s employ of preemptive *apologia* in his speech that attempted to provide justification. Benoit (1995a) found that Nixon’s strategies of preemptive bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence were unsuccessful for Nixon. However, Benoit evaluated these strategies as ineffective because of logical errors by Nixon, rather than inherent flaws with the concept of preemptive image repair. Benoit

(1995a) concluded that “there is no reason why a well-conceived, preemptive self-defense couldn’t succeed at attenuating or blocking criticism, protecting a rhetor’s reputation” (p. 153).

Obama’s Internet *apologia* represented both reactive and preemptive discourse. Obama chose to respond to the Internet smears because he likely believed that a substantial number of voters had been exposed to the rumors. However, his choice of the Internet as a channel of discourse suggests that the campaign also acknowledged that there were still a number of voters who had not heard of the accusations. Like Nixon’s preemptive *apologia*, Obama also used attack accuser, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. In addition to the use of these strategies, Obama also employed simple denial, shifting the blame, accident, and minimization. Like Nixon, Obama’s use of differentiation was of questionable effectiveness. However, unlike Nixon, Obama effectively used transcendence and bolstering. Thus, although Obama’s successful use of the Internet as a vehicle for preemptive *apologia* does confirm Benoit’s (1995a) speculation that “a well-conceived, preemptive self-defense” could be successful at “protecting a rhetor’s reputation,” (p. 153), there is no evidence to argue that specific strategies work better or worse for preemptive image repair.

It is hard to deny that the Internet has changed the landscape of political campaign communication. The viral e-mail campaigns, blogs, and streaming video of the Internet offer alternative channels for political attacks, meaning that campaign operatives no longer need to--nor are able to--rely solely on traditional (and more constraining) channels of print, television, or radio. The loosening of constraints on attackers suggests that defenders must also reconsider their traditional approaches to responding to political

*kategoria*. Obama's Fight the Smears website represented an effective innovation in political discourse that took advantage of newer technology, possibly resulting in preemptive *apologia*.

So, this study has produced a unique examination of Internet-based image repair discourse in a political campaign. Further, this examination has shown how Internet-based *apologia* can serve as preemptive *apologia*. Finally, the Obama campaign's success with the Fight the Smears pages reinforced the value of preemptive *apologia* first observed by Newman (1970) and Benoit (1995a).

### *Evaluating Apologia*

We have also gained, from this investigation, some perspective on the value of using *The New York Times* and other traditional news sources as the only source of commentary for evaluating the effectiveness of image repair discourse. Analysis of attacks and defenses on the Internet has shown that e-mail, blogs, on-line news, and campaign websites are influential sources of campaign information for voters. Traditional mainstream media sources like *The New York Times* still play a prominent agenda-setting role (McCombs, 2005). However, the wide array of Internet-based news sources, including partisan blogs such as Redstate.com and the Huffington Post and nonpartisan on-line news sources such as *Politico*, serve to remind scholars that the Internet provides many more sources of commentary on political discourse. This study provided valuable analysis of multiple forms of external evidence (opinion polling, exit polls, news commentary, election outcomes, etc.) but, the study also suggests that on-line sources of these forms of evidence should be consulted.

### *Kairotic Effectiveness of Image Repair Discourse*

One of the central questions in this study asked how *kairos* influenced the effectiveness of Obama's image repair discourse. Recall from the review of literature that rhetoricians had previously identified *kairos* as a contributor to successful (and presumably to failed) *apologia*. Ryan (1988) found that *kairos* played a role in the success of Nixon's Checkers speech. Friedenbergl (1988) found that opportune timing between speeches was a factor in the effectiveness of Reagan's Bitburg addresses. However, in each of these instances, the researchers had not set out to consider how *kairos* had influenced the effectiveness of the rhetoric but had instead merely noted that situation had played (or had been played) to the advantage of the rhetor. In fact, scholarship had not previously identified a rhetorical method for the analysis and evaluation of the role of *kairos*. Thus, to be able to fully investigate the role of *kairos* in image repair, it was first necessary to develop a method for identifying the role of *kairos* and for evaluating the *kairotic* effectiveness of *apologia*.

Acknowledging the connection Kinneavy (1986) had made between *kairos* and Bitzer's (1968) rhetorical situation, for each speech set, I asked three questions about each image repair strategy: (1) How urgent were the exigencies, and how did the urgency shape the demands of the image repair discourse?; (2) What were the constraints and how did they shape the demands of the image repair discourse?; and (3) Who comprised the rhetorical audience and how did those members shape the demands of the image repair discourse? The answers to these questions yielded the influence of *kairos* in each speech set. The *kairotic* effectiveness of each image repair strategy was measured by evaluating how well Obama met each of the demands and was discussed as part of the overall

evaluation of the image repair strategies. One way that Obama met the demands of the image repair discourse was by responding to changing elements of the rhetorical situation in a manner that reflected appropriate timing. In several instances, the success and failure of Obama's *apologia* depended on choosing the opportune moment to deliver a particular defense. In the interest of brevity and avoiding redundancy, I offer here one example from each chapter, but all of the instances of the role of *kairos* can be reviewed by referring back to the results chapters.

In Chapter Four, Obama's use of simple denial in response to the Reverend Wright controversy failed because the messages were not *kairotically* effective. Obama denied that he had heard Wright's controversial sermons, but by the time that Obama made this argument, most people in Obama's audience had heard the sermons, so this was not a timely defense. In this situation, the media's reporting on the sermons acted as a constraint on Obama's ability to use denial to modify the exigence. Plus, Obama's audience was made up of people who were aware of the sermons, so this also weakened the *kairotic* effectiveness of Obama's denials.

Another example occurred in Chapter Five, where Obama's use of attack accuser was shown to be *kairotically* effective when Obama attacked Clinton and McCain in the campaign debates. Faced with accusations on live television, Obama delivered timely defenses to put the focus back on his two opponents as the audience of voters watched from home. In each instance, the live television audience added urgency to the exigence and constrained Obama's ability to weigh his response, forcing him to deliver immediate responses to the debate attacks from Clinton and McCain.

Third, in Chapter Six, Obama's use of differentiation in responding to the patriotism attacks was found to be *kairotically* ineffective because the constraint of the campaign photo weakened his otherwise logical defense. It may have been logical to argue that Obama places his hand over his heart during the Pledge but not the national anthem. However, in a situation in which the audience could see that every other candidate had covered his or her heart, the strategy was not delivered at an opportune time.

Thus, this dissertation has taught us two important points about *kairos*. First, the study developed and tested a method for evaluating the *kairotic* effectiveness of *apologia*. Second, applying the method, I have showed how the *kairos* of Obama's image repair discourse influenced the effectiveness in multiple examples. Previous research had evaluated the effectiveness of *apologia* on the basis of media commentary, public opinion polling, and internal consistency and plausibility. This study has shown that *kairos* can be used as an additional criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of image repair discourse.

#### *The Kategoria and Apologia of Associations*

Rhetors deliver image repair discourse to defend themselves against accusations that they have committed undesirable acts. In the cases of Jeremiah Wright and William Ayers, the undesirable act that Obama was most frequently attacked for was his association with these two individuals. Obama was not accused of giving a sermon in which he damned America, nor was he accused of conspiring to bomb the Capitol or the Pentagon during the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, Obama was attacked for being associated with men who had committed these acts. And although Obama was also accused of



sharing the beliefs of these men, this allegation grew from the initial attack on his associations.

Earlier in this study, I cited Jamieson's (1992) observation that political campaigns often seek to use apposition to associate their candidates with the positive and their opponents with the negative. This study has provided two additional examples of how apposition can be used to attack a candidate. Plus, the analysis of Obama's patriotic image repair showed how bolstering can be used to acclaim one's associations with war veteran family members as a defense against the label of unpatriotic.

More importantly, this study has shown how candidates can effectively use image repair strategies; notably denial, bolstering, and differentiation; to dissociate themselves from negatively perceived relationships. Denial served to reject the notion that Obama shared the beliefs of Wright and Ayers. Bolstering served to acclaim Obama's glowing ideals in contrast to the beliefs of the reverend and the accused terrorist. Differentiation sought to distinguish, in the case of Wright, between the man Obama once knew and the man Wright had become. In the case of Ayers, Obama differentiated between a casual acquaintance and an influential relationship. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the strategies of denial, bolstering, and differentiation are generally well-suited for responding to attacks on one's associations.

More generally, I have shown in this study, that regardless of the specific image repair strategies applied, rhetors attacked for their associations should focus their efforts on defending the association rather than the person that he or she has been attacked for being associated with. Obama was successful when he explained why his associations

with Wright and Ayers were not of concern or consequence. Obama was less successful when he used strategies to defend the character of Wright and Ayers.

### *Conclusion*

To review, this study contributed implications on seven different topics. First, it expanded the discipline's understanding of race-related image repair, using the Texaco case as a point of comparison to show how Obama's race-related image repair was necessarily different from the corporate *apologia* on the topic. Specifically, Obama, unlike Texaco in the corporate example, did not use mortification. More generally, Obama did not use mortification in any of his discourse. Second, the study of religious image repair was further expanded, with comparisons to previous studies of religious *apologists*. Most notably, implications were offered for rhetors facing religious attacks similar to those leveled at Obama. Third, this dissertation provided broader analysis of *kategoria* and *apologia* on the topic of candidates' patriotism and showed us that rhetors can deny unpatriotic values without explicitly mentioning patriotism.

A fourth implication of this study showed that the Internet can be an effective channel for preemptive *apologia*. Fifth, evaluation of the effectiveness of Obama's rhetoric provided additional evidence for the value of using multiple forms of external evidence. However, the analysis of Internet-based campaign discourse also demonstrated that researchers should examine non-traditional sources of media commentary. Sixth, although rhetoricians had previously identified *kairos* as a factor in some instances of *apologia*, this study introduced a method for analyzing the role of *kairos* in evaluating the effectiveness of image repair. Implementation of this method showed that *kairos* frequently played an influential role in the effectiveness of *apologia*. Finally, although

there is an existing body of literature on the attack politics of association, this study's findings provided an implication for political rhetors' defenses against these specific types of attacks. Namely, the accused should focus on defending the association, rather than the associated.

### Limitations

Each case study in this dissertation was examined using a consistent and established method of analysis through Benoit's (1995a) image restoration (repair) theory. Further, every attempt was made to integrate various ancient and contemporary interpretations of *kairos* into a method for evaluation of its role in the effectiveness of *apologia*. However, this dissertation bears some limitations. First, although I chose to study the sets of persuasive attacks and defenses that were the most influential in the presidential campaign of Barack Obama, he faced and addressed more attacks than were analyzed in the pages of this dissertation. In a similar vein, this study provided extensive analysis of image repair discourse on a unique campaign web site dedicated solely to *apologia*. A selection of the *kategoria* prompting these defenses was analyzed, but given the volume of texts on the Internet and the covert nature of many of the attacks' origins, some persuasive attacks went unanalyzed. Furthermore, although this study covered some of the most important examples of image repair by the Obama campaign, there were many other defenses of Obama that were not analyzed. Members of the media, endorsers of Obama, and non-partisan groups all offered defenses of the candidate that were not analyzed due to temporal and spatial constraints.

As discussed in the implications, this dissertation reinforced the value of using a variety of external sources of evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of the *apologia*. The

primary source of commentary was *The New York Times*, which has been shown to have an important agenda-setting function in the nation and in the world. However, as media audiences become further fragmented, and as influential web-based news sources such as *Politico* and Salon.com (both cited in this study) continue to emerge and even overshadow traditional channels of journalism, it may be necessary to rethink or at least expand the consideration of which commentary to use in evaluations of the effectiveness of discourse.

Another drawback of this study is analogous to a limitation discussed by Blaney and Benoit (2001) in their study of Clinton's image repair discourse. The authors raised the question of how effective the 42nd president's discourse, particularly his use of transcendence, would have been had he not led the country during an era of economic *prosperity*. Recall the finding that Obama used transcendence effectively to argue that the *failing* economy in the autumn of 2008 was of more importance than the attacks on his associations and character. Would voters have evaluated Obama's associations and character with more critical scrutiny had the U.S. economy been in better condition? Although I have cited public opinion polling as evidence that voters considered the economy far more important than any other issues, including character evaluations, we cannot know for certain if Jeremiah Wright, William Ayers, and the Internet smears would have been harder for Obama to respond to during an election of higher voter content.

Finally, in addition to the historically poor economic conditions during the campaign, other historic facets of the 2008 election cloud the significance of Obama's image repair discourse. First, Obama was the first African-American to serve as a major

party presidential candidate. Second, vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, one of Obama's principal attackers, was the first female candidate to appear on a Republican presidential ticket. Third, 2008 was the first time since the 1952 U.S. presidential election that neither major party had a sitting president or vice president as its candidate. These unique features all make the 2008 campaign worthy of examination. However, these oddities also demand that the implications of this study be interpreted in the context of an atypical election.

### Future Research

As mentioned in my discussion of the limitations, Obama delivered other examples of *apologia* that were not investigated in these pages. Future rhetorical criticism might examine attacks and defenses referenced in texts examined in this study, including Obama's remarks about "bitter" voters in rural regions of the country, as well as attacks on Obama for his involvement with the advocacy group, ACORN. Given that there is a need for expansion of the study of celebrity *apologia*, future studies might also analyze Obama's image repair work after attacks on his fame that associated him with Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. Additionally, attacks and defenses regarding Michele Obama's alleged racist remarks and lack of patriotism might also provide interesting findings. Although I analyzed texts that provided the themes of the central attacks on Obama's character, further studies should also analyze the masses of persuasive attacks (and defenses) available in blogs, independent/third party websites, and e-mail campaigns yet to be revealed in the traditional media.

Just as this study expanded our understandings of image repair in the contexts of religion, race, and the Internet, I have also uncovered the need for additional analysis of

image repair discourse in these areas. The literature review revealed that all of the studies of religious image repair have examined Christian rhetors. Even in this study, although Obama faced accusations that he was a Muslim, he was speaking as a Christian, attempting to prove his Christian faith. Although in some cases (e.g., Reagan, Jesus) the rhetors faced accusations from non-Christian attackers, there is a need for analysis of non-Christian religious image repair discourse. Future research should address this area.

As stated, this study was only able to analyze a sample of the Internet attacks and defenses during Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. Future research should examine other examples of Obama's discourse but should also investigate non-presidential *kategoria* and *apologia* on the Internet. Research should also add to organizational *apologia* by analyzing Internet-based persuasive attacks and defenses exchanged between corporations and other entities.

Finally, having demonstrated the importance of considering *kairos* in *apologia* studies, future research should apply this study's provided method to analyze the kairotic effectiveness of *kategoria*.

#### Final Thought

In conclusion, I found that Barack Obama faced a unique set of persuasive attacks and, overall, effectively employed the image repair strategies at his disposal. Multiple forms of evidence reinforce this finding. Further, not only did Obama wisely choose his strategies, he achieved *kairos* with his *apologia*, delivering his messages at the opportune time with respect to the exigencies, constraints, and audience in the various rhetorical situations.

Despite Obama's success in effectively repairing his damaged image, neither he nor any other person should have to face some of the attacks, true or false, leveled against his character. In response to accusations that he was a Muslim, Obama's most appropriate response might have been more to the tune of one proposed by Colin Powell on October 19, 2008 in his endorsement of Obama on NBC's Meet the Press:

Well, the correct answer is, he is not a Muslim, he's a Christian. He's always been a Christian. But the really right answer is, what if he is? Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer's no, that's not America.

This defense is, sadly, not a politically viable response in this country. Obama was able to successfully use denial and transcendence to explicitly make the arguments that he was not Muslim and that there were more important topics. However, Obama failed to adequately beat back the rampant prejudice that would disqualify someone from the office of the Presidency based solely on the criterion of his or her religion. Attacks targeting race, culture, and enactment and interpretation of patriotism are equally abhorrent. With apologies to Dr. King, hopefully, we will one day live in a nation in which our leaders will not be judged by *these* contents of their character. Until that day, we, as scholars, must continue to expose the flawed attacks *and* defenses concerning the leaders of our republic.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A LexisNexis Academic search was conducted for news coverage of each speech in the same news sources, using comparable timeframes and search terms. For the March 18, 2008 Speech on Race, U.S. Newspapers and Wires were searched from March 17, 2008 thru March 21, 2008 for the terms Obama AND race AND Philadelphia AND Constitution. The search terms were derived from the name of the speaker, the main topic of the speech, the city in which the speech was delivered and a portion of the name of the speaking venue (Constitution Center in Philadelphia). This search yielded 129 results. For the June 30, 2008 speech on patriotism, a search of U.S. Newspapers and Wires was conducted for the dates of June 29, 2008 thru July 3, 2008, using the terms Obama AND patriotism AND Independence AND Truman (the speech was delivered by Obama at the Truman Memorial Building in Independence, Missouri). This search yielded only 29 results, representing 21.97% of the number of search results returned by the Speech on Race query.

## VITA

Corey B. Davis was born in Peoria, Illinois in 1977 and grew up in rural Laura and Kickapoo, Illinois. He earned an associates degree in arts and sciences from Illinois Central College in 1997 and a bachelor's in communication with a major in public relations and a minor in English writing from Illinois State University in 1999. In 2002, Davis completed his master's in communication at Illinois State University. Davis completed his doctoral studies in communication at the University of Missouri in 2009, focusing on political communication and media communication. He is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, where he teaches courses in public relations and persuasion.

Outside of academia, Davis has served as an appropriations analyst for the Illinois Senate Democratic Staff and has worked as a paid operative on state and federal political campaigns. Davis was also an associate director of programs for education and operations with Envision EMI, LLC for two and a half years, planning and implementing conferences for the Congressional Youth Leadership Council and the National Youth Leadership Forum in Washington, D.C. and San Jose, California.

Davis married his wife Kelly, a tax policy analyst, in 2005. In 2008, the Davis' were blessed with a daughter, Lucy. Corey, Kelly, and Lucy Davis live in Whitewater, Wisconsin and are expecting a new addition to the family, a baby girl, in March, 2010.