

Pay for Play: Analysis of the Image Restoration Strategies of High Profile College Athletes

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the college athletic landscape through a Crisis Communications perspective. Using William Benoit's "Theory of Image Restoration" as a framework, this study employed a case-study approach to analyze the image restoration strategies of three high profile college football players following scandals. The study found a consistent use of traditional strategies such as mortification, corrective action, and denial from the athletes and associated parties. This research demonstrates the level of prominence that college athletes have been elevated to and concludes they be recognized from a public relations standpoint accordingly. Given the national attention and loyalty that college athletics receive, this study would provide an important foundation for future research on a rapidly evolving section of society as well.

I. Introduction

College athletics have been engrained in American culture for nearly as long as the institutions of higher learning themselves. These programs are more than just participatory sports for students, they are a unique aspect of American society. Zealous fan devotion has elevated college athletics to a level of prominence that is largely unparalleled in the world of American sports.

With a devoted fan base and a national spotlight, college athletics have become extremely profitable as well. Nearly every party involved with college sports, whether it is universities, athletic conferences, coaches, television networks, retailers, even the local communities, make upwards of millions, even billions, through the performance of student-athletes.¹ These profits continue to increase as the scope of these programs spreads, with many now referring to the world of college sports as "big business."²

Scandals have been a consistent presence in sports over the past century, and college athletics are

1 Taylor Branch, "The Shame of College Sports - Magazine - The Atlantic." The Atlantic — News and analysis on politics, business, culture, technology, national, international, and life â TheAtlantic.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/12/the-shame-of-college-sports/8643/>>.

2 Taylor Branch, "The Shame of College Sports - Magazine - The Atlantic." The Atlantic, College Football Bowl Games: Millions on the Line | AccountingWEB.com." AccountingWEB.com | Your Profession. Your Community.. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.accountingweb.com/item>

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far from being an exception. Scandals involving student athletes have become increasingly commonplace, as the world of college sports has received increasingly more and more spotlight. The causes of these scandals are numerous, although the majority inevitably stem from the NCAA's strict prohibition of athletes receiving any sort of compensation for their athletic prowess. Regardless, these scandals garner extensive attention and are heavily scrutinized by a variety of parties.

Due to the popularity and profits associated with college athletics, there is a staggering amount of responsibility tied into the actions of these young individuals. The very reputation of universities, companies, and entire communities often go hand in hand with the actions of their athletes. Thus, it is imperative that high-profile scandals involving college athletes are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

The following study utilizes a case study approach to explore the scandals of three high-profile college football players: Terrelle Pryor of Ohio State University, A.J. Green of the University of Georgia, and Cam Newton of Auburn University. The study then analyzes the image restoration efforts on behalf of each player and compares them with the established literature on the subject.³ In doing so, this study will answer the following research questions and ideally add further depth to the field of sports public relations.

- Do the crisis management efforts of high-profile college athletes coincide with the strategies established by scholars on the subject?
- From a crisis management perspective, should high-profile college athletes be viewed in the same light as professional ones?
- What crisis management strategies are effective in confronting the scandal of a high-profile college athlete?
- Do the involved athletes undertake crisis management efforts, or do the Universities assume control of the situation?
- What caveats are unique to the college athlete when employing a crisis management strategy?

II. Literature Review

Defining Crisis and Crisis Management

Crises can come in any number of forms. Whether it is organizational, individual, or another manifestation, crises have attracted significant academic attention. As a result, there are a variety of definitions associated with the term "crisis" stemming from established literature.

According to Dan P. Millar and Robert L. Heath, a crisis is "typically defined as an untimely but predictable event that has actual or potential consequences for stakeholders' interests as well as the reputation of the organization suffering the crisis."⁴ Timothy Coombs echoes a similar definition of a crisis as "an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly."⁵ Steven Fink takes his definition one step further, emphasizing the presence of instability and impending change: "Crisis is an extraordinary event that results in an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending."⁶ Other scholars, such as Irvine & Millar and Fearn-Banks, shift the focal point of their definition of the potential outcomes of a scandal, such as intense media scrutiny or a loss of reputation.⁷

3 Analyzed works include: *Responding to Crisis: A Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication* by Dan P. Millar and Robert L. Heath, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* by W. Timothy Coombs

4 Dan P. Millar and Robert L. Heath. *Responding to Crisis a Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*. pg. 2

5 Timothy W. Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999. Print. Pg. 2

6 Steven Fink, *Crisis management: Planning for the inevitable*. New York, NY: AMACOM, re-quoted by Dan P. Millar and Robert L. Heath. *Responding to Crisis a Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*. pg. 2

7 Dan P. Millar and Robert L. Heath. *Responding to Crisis a Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*.

While there are varying definitions of the word “scandal,” scholars clearly agree that a scandal has the potential to cause serious damage to the parties involved. This damage can manifest itself in any number of ways, as scholars, such as Fearn-Banks and Coombs, point out. He states that there are four critical steps to crisis management: prevention, preparation, performance, and learning. Millar and Heath, on the other hand, use three straightforward stages: before, during, and after.⁹ The strategies utilized during these stages play a critical role in effectively responding to a crisis and minimizing its damage.

Crisis Management within Athletics

While significant literature has been established on crisis management, scholars have more recently turned their attention to the field as it pertains to the world of athletics, noting that it is “a unique realm of public relations.”⁹ High-profile athletes and athletic organizations are at the center of public attention and have numerous stakeholders invested in their public images. As a result, crisis management efforts within athletics are of the utmost importance.¹⁰

Scholars have established a number of separate definitions for the term “crisis” as it pertains specifically to athletics. One scholar writes, “Any threat to a sport entity’s image, reputation, and perception constitutes a crisis, because an entity’s reputation is one of its major assets.”¹¹ Brazeal echoes a similar relationship, writing, “Ultimately, the ‘market value’ of an athlete’s image hinges on his or her public reputation.”¹² Thus, scholars have clearly established the glaring importance of public reputation, and, in turn, crisis management, within athletics.

Partially due to a rapidly evolving communications landscape, crises within athletics are of a particularly high-profile nature. Media outlets such as television networks and newspapers are far more inclined to pay them specific, added attention. As a result, scholars have noted that public relations practitioners are too often tasked with reactive crisis management efforts rather than proactive ones.¹³ In her analysis of NFL player Terrell Owen’s image reparation strategy, Brazeal acknowledges that athletes can no longer mend relationships internally when dealing with a scandal; rather, they must make a public apology and address a variety of parties.¹⁴ It is important to recognize that there is an established body of work on the analysis of public apologies by athletes, as this study will aim to conduct similar work on high-profile college athletes.

With the increasing prominence and profitability of athletics on a global scale, public relations practitioners have clearly recognized the importance of managing crises and scandals within sports. That being said, the scholars of this subject have focused solely on professional athletes. This study will aim to demonstrate that college athletics are on a similar pedestal to professional sports from both a celebrated and financial standpoint, and thus the crisis management efforts of high-profile college athletes should be given the same consideration as those of professionals. In doing so, this study aims to fill a void within the established literature of crisis management and sports public relations as a whole.

pg. 5, Irvine, R.B. & Millar, D.P (1998). *Crisis communication and management: How to gain and maintain control*. San Francisco, CA: International Association of Businesses Communicators.

8 Dan P. Millar and Robert L. Heath. *Responding to Crisis a Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*. pg. 5-9

9 Toni Bruce and Tahlila Tini, *Unique crisis response strategies in sports public relations: Rugby league and the Case for Diversion*. *Public Relations Review* [serial online]. June 2008;34(2):108-115. Available from: *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, Ipswich, MA. Accessed March 6, 2013.

10 LeAnn Brazeal, “The Image Repair Strategies of Terrell Owens.” *Public Relations Review* 34.2 (2008): 145-150. *Sciencedirect.com*. Web. 6 Mar. 2013.

11 Mark P. Pedersen, Kimberly S. Miloch, and Pamela C. Laucella. *Strategic Sport Communication*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2007. Print.

12 LeAnn Brazeal, “The Image Repair Strategies of Terrell Owens.” pg. 145

13 Toni Bruce and Tahlila Tini, *Unique crisis response strategies in sports public relations: Rugby league and the case for diversion*, LeAnn Brazeal, “The Image Repair Strategies of Terrell Owens.”

14 LeAnn Brazeal, “The Image Repair Strategies of Terrell Owens.” pg. 146

Image Restoration Strategies¹⁵

As scholars such as Miloch and Brazeal have clearly established with their work, athletes are particularly bound to their public image, making the implementation of effective crisis management strategies that much more imperative. For the purpose of this study, Benoit's theory of image restoration will be employed to analyze the public statements made by Terrelle Pryor, A.J. Green, Cam Newton, and their respective universities.

Benoit's theory was chosen largely in part because scholars have established the value of the theory as it relates to professional athletes. For example, Blair Bernstein found that Tiger Woods effectively utilized Benoit's strategy of mortification to shift media scrutiny away from his sex scandal in 2009.¹⁶ In similar fashion, scholars Bruce and Tini found that Australian rugby players relied heavily on Benoit's strategies during a highly publicized salary cap scandal.¹⁷ Thus, his theory is well suited to rhetorically analyze statements made by high-profile individuals, as this study aims to do.

Before proceeding into the outline of Benoit's theory, it is important to recognize the distinction between the terms "crisis management" and "image restoration." The two are often used interchangeably, but it is worth noting that image restoration falls under the umbrella of crisis management. That being said, the two terms will be used interchangeably within this paper, as image restoration efforts by the athletes and associated parties are its primary analytic focus.

Benoit breaks his image restoration strategies into five broad categories: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and feature sub-strategies as well.

Denial

Benoit cites several authors in noting that the individual in question can either deny that the event in question ever occurred or deny the fact that they are guilty for it. The individual in question may also utilize evidence, alibis, or pertinent information to add further weight to their denial. Benoit also cites the passing of blame as an important, and often more effective, variant of denial.

Evading Responsibility

When denial of a certain act is not viable, which is often the case, evading responsibility for it becomes the next viable option. The first of four strategy variations is asserting that the accused party was provoked into their actions by another wrongful act. In this way, the accused individual justifies their own actions by passing blame onto another party and reducing their own responsibility.

Benoit defines the second variation, defeasibility, as "pleading lack of information about or control over important factors in the situation." Thus, the accused attempts to reduce their responsibility by affirming that they did not have sufficient information or control to handle the situation effectively.

The third variation of evading responsibility relies on accidents and aims to pass the blame to their arbitrary nature. The fourth and final variation of this strategy does not particularly evade responsibility, but rather attributes it to good intentions.

Reducing Offensiveness

The third image restoration strategy employed by Benoit is reducing offensiveness. An accused individual may attempt to reduce "the degree of ill feeling experienced by the audience" through six methods: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking one's accuser, and compensation.

Bolstering is one of the more common strategies used by individuals when responding to a crisis, as studies of superstar athletes such as Terrell Owens and Tiger Woods clearly show.¹⁸ The bolstering method

¹⁵ This citation encompasses the following section: William L. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. Print

¹⁶ Blair Bernstein, "Crisis Management and Sports in the Age of Social Media: A Case Study Analysis of the Tiger Woods Scandal,"

¹⁷ Toni Bruce and Tahlila Tini, *Unique crisis response strategies in sports public relations: Rugby league and the case for diversion*.

¹⁸ Blair Bernstein, "Crisis Management and Sports in the Age of Social Media: A Case Study Analysis of the

attempts to increase positive sentiments towards the accused individual by highlighting past actions or positive attributes.

Minimization, on the other hand, attempts to convince the audience that the event in question is not as damaging or scandalous as it has been made out to be. Differentiation aims to achieve a similar effect with the audience by comparing it to similar, yet more notorious acts. Similarly, the fourth variation of this strategy, transcendence, attempts to reduce offensiveness by putting the event in question into a different context. While the individual may seem at fault in the initial frame of reference, this method aims to alleviate feelings of ill will by shifting the perception of the audience.

The fifth variation of reducing offensiveness aims to attack the accusers. The accused individual will allege that the accusers deserved what happened or that they were in some way responsible.

The sixth and final variation of this strategy is compensation. Compensation is very straightforward in that the accused individual offers some type of reimbursement to reduce sentiments of ill will.

Corrective Action

Corrective action, Benoit's fourth image restoration strategy, involves the accused individual promising to fix the problem. This corrective action can take one of two forms: the individual can work to return things to the way they were before the incident in question, or the individual can make assurances of adjustments that will prevent any similar incidents from occurring in the future.

Mortification

Benoit's fifth and final component of his image restoration theory is mortification. Mortification is the most direct of the aforementioned strategies, as the accused individual admits responsibility for the actions in question and seeks forgiveness for them. Benoit adds as a side note that mortification also couples effectively with corrective action.

Benoit cites these five strategies and their associated variants as options for individuals or parties seeking to mend their public reputation. Using this theory as a basis, this study will aim to see which image restoration strategies high-profile college athletes are employing and the implications associated with these actions.

***The Prominence and Profitability of College Athletics*¹⁹**

In order to grasp the worth of this study and the void in established literature it aims to fill, it is necessary to outline the backdrop behind the scandals of high-profile college athletes. By understanding the world of college athletics and how it has evolved in recent time, the reader can better understand why scandals have become more commonplace and, to a greater extent, why the crisis management efforts of these athletes are so important.

The fame and profitability of modern college athletics are not mutually exclusive; the two are deeply interwoven in a reciprocal relationship. As profits increase from television deals, merchandising, and other lucrative sources, the scope of college athletics only broadens further. Thus, the finances behind the current college athletic landscape speak volumes regarding its national status.

The gargantuan profits behind modern college athletics can be seen along the entire spectrum. Take, for example, one of the focuses of this study: Cam Newton, former quarterback for Auburn University. During his improper benefits scandal (which will be outlined later in this section), Newton wore 15 corporate logos while on the field, ranging all the way from his helmet to his cleats, as part of the university's \$10.6 million deal with Under Armour. Auburn happens to be part of the illustrious Southeastern Conference, which became the first individual athletic league to crack the billion-dollar mark. Not far behind, the Big Ten athletic conference netted just over \$900 million that same year. Members of these conferences, such as Penn State, Michigan, and Georgia, earn between \$40 and \$80 million in profits each year from athletics, after they pay their coaches multi-million dollar contracts. These figures stem from a number of sources, including ticket Tiger Woods Scandal," Brazeal, LeAnn. "The Image Repair Strategies of Terrell Owens."

¹⁹ The following section utilizes information from: Taylor Branch, "The Shame of College Sports - Magazine - The Atlantic." *The Atlantic* — News and analysis on politics, business, culture, technology, national, international, and life @ TheAtlantic.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/12/the-shame-of-college-sports/8643/>>.

sales, concession sales, licensing fees, and, most of all, network television contracts. These profits are then distributed to a multitude of associated parties, including the NCAA organization, the University, the respective athletic organization, and television networks. Secondary parties, such as retail and tourism destinations, also benefit financially from the presence of successful college athletic programs.

In December of 2005, the Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection Sub-Committee referred to college football as “big business.” While it is important to recognize where all of this money goes, it is just as important, if not more, to take note of where it does not go. While every party even vaguely associated with college athletic programs consistently earns high-grossing profits, the athletes themselves make nothing at all. This comes as a result of the NCAA’s stance and regulations regarding the sanctity of the “student-athlete” and “amateurism.” The payment, or lack thereof, of college athletes has become a philosophical, financial, and legal debate. Opinions aside, this polarizing situation helps shed light on why scandals have become increasingly present within the world of college athletics. As Branch puts it, “when you combine so much money with such high, almost tribal, stakes, corruption is likely to follow.”

III. Case Study Analysis of High-Profile College Athletes

Overview of Terrelle Pryor and “Tattoo Gate”

Terrelle Pryor’s impressive athletic resume at Jeannette High School in Pennsylvania gave him a number of options on where to continue playing in college, a decision which Sports Illustrated deemed “the most anticipated signing day announcement in history.”²⁰ Pryor chose to attend Ohio State University, where he quickly became a household name. He was voted as the Big Ten’s freshman of the year, and later led Ohio State to a victory in the storied Rose Bowl in 2010, a game in which he was also voted MVP.²¹ Despite all of his success, Pryor left Ohio State on sour terms following a high-profile scandal that is aptly now referred to as “Tattoo Gate.”

In December of 2010, reports began to surface of an NCAA investigation regarding several infractions by Ohio State football players, including receiving improper benefits.²² After continuous reports and both internal and external investigations of the accusations, the University opted to self-report the infractions to the NCAA. Pryor, along with five teammates, admitted to selling game memorabilia, such as their conference championship rings, in exchange for cash, as well as to receiving improper benefits from a local tattoo parlor in the form of numerous free and discounted tattoos.²³ Given the increasing occurrence of improper benefit scandals at the time, Pryor’s national fame, and Ohio State’s storied football history, “tattoo gate” received serious media scrutiny. Having been thrust into a national spotlight, Pryor and the University scrambled to respond to the scandal effectively.

20 “Pryor announcement to be most anticipated in history”. CNN. 2008-02-05. Retrieved 4/18/13

21 “Ohio State Buckeyes vs. Oregon Ducks - Box Score - January 01, 2010 - ESPN.” ESPN: The Worldwide Leader In Sports. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013. <<http://scores.espn.go.com/ncf/boxscore?gameId=300012483>>.

22 Brandon Castel, “Timeline on NCAA investigation.” NEWS. Ohio State Football, Basketball, Hockey, Baseball, Wrestling, Softball, and More. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.the-ozone.net/football/2010/SugarBowl/NCAAtimeline.htm>

23 “Five Ohio State Buckeyes, including Terrelle Pryor, must sit out five games in ‘11 - ESPN.” ESPN: The Worldwide Leader In Sports. N.p., 26 Dec. 2010. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <<http://sports.espn.go.com/ncf/news/story?id=5950873>>.

Analysis of “Tattoo Gate” Crisis Response^{24 25 26 27}

On June 14th, 2011, Terrelle Pryor held a press conference to address his scandal at Ohio State and his future as a football player. The press conference marked Pryor’s first public statement following the extremely high-profile scandal, his departure from the program and university, and the firing of the program’s longtime head coach, Jim Tressel. Since he was no longer enrolled at Ohio State, Pryor opted to hire one of the NFL’s most well-known agents, Drew Rosenhaus, before addressing the scandal and entering the NFL supplemental draft. Both Pryor and Rosenhaus spoke during the press conference and did not allow questions to be asked. Their statements will be analyzed below using Benoit’s theory of image restoration.²⁸

Despite being the focal point of the NCAA’s investigation and the media’s coverage, Pryor spoke for a mere 97 seconds. An analysis of his statement, in conjunction with Rosenhaus,²⁹ shows a clear image restoration strategy. Pryor utilized two of Benoit’s methods as the foundation for his statement: mortification and corrective action.

Pryor began his statement by apologizing for his actions, and, in effect, acknowledging his wrongdoing. He apologized directly to the various parties attached to his career at Ohio State, including former head coach Jim Tressel:

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification	<p>“In terms of Ohio State, I’d like to say sorry to the coaching staff, say sorry to my teammates, say sorry to all of Buckeye Nation and all the Buckeye fans across the country. I never meant to hurt anyone directly or indirectly with my conduct off the field and I am truly sorry.”</p> <p>“In terms of coach Jim Tressel, a special shoutout. I’m sorry for what all went down and I apologize with all my heart. I love you just like a father. You taught me a lot and I apologize for putting you in a situation and taking you out of a job and place that you loved to be. I regret the fact that you’re not there any more and I regret the fact that I’m not there any more.”</p>

Pryor showcases Benoit’s method of mortification very cleanly with these quotes as he acknowledges his actions, apologizes for them, and emphasizes his regret regarding the actions and the damage they caused. In stating that he loved Tressel “like a father,” Pryor adds further weight to his apology and the potential for emotional resonance with his audience. This use of mortification allowed Pryor to proceed logically to his next image restoration method, corrective action.

Before addressing his future with football, Pryor added a short but important statement regarding his early departure from the university: “I have nine more credits left at The Ohio State University, and I’d like to come back and graduate some time, finish my degree, and graduate a Buckeye.” This statement marks the shift in Pryor’s strategies from mortification to corrective action. His wish to someday return to school implies a level of corrective action in that he is demonstrating a desire to better himself and to make amends. By specifically expressing a desire to “graduate a Buckeye,” Pryor aims to demonstrate loyalty to the university and eventually win back the favor of the Ohio State fan base.

²⁴The following quotes and information contained in this section were taken from citations 14-16

²⁵ “Terrelle Pryor apologizes, will enter supplemental draft - ESPN.” ESPN: The Worldwide Leader In Sports. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <<http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=6661247>>.

²⁶ “WKEF-TV ABC 22 News :: News - Raw News - Terrelle Pryor’s Raw press conference clip.” WKEF-TV ABC 22 News :: Dayton, Ohio Local and National News. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2013. http://www.newsnet5.com/dpp/sports/college_sports/osu/former-osu-quarterback-terrelle-pryor-apologizes-to-tressel-teammates-fans

²⁷ Andrew Carter, “Terrelle Pryor apologizes to Ohio State: Former Buckeyes quarterback Terrelle Pryor apologizes to Ohio State for scandal - Sun Sentinel.” Featured Articles From The Sun Sentinel. Sun Sentinel, n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2013. <http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-06-14/sports/fl-terrelle-pryor-apologizes-ohio-sta20110614_1_terrelle-pryor-jim-tressel-ohio-state>.

²⁸ Benoit, William L.. *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: a Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*. Pgs.74-82

Following his apologies and statement regarding his degree, Pryor shifted his statement toward the future. The rest of his statement, albeit very brief, centered around his entering the NFL supplemental draft and his desire to be a better person both on and off the field:

Strategies	Quotes
Corrective Action	“In terms of my future, I am entering the supplemental draft and am working hard every single day on the field and off the field to be a better quarterback. One of my goals is to be the best person I can possibly be off the field and to be the best role model I can be off the field.”

Here, Pryor’s emphasis on personal betterment highlights his use of corrective action. He stresses that he is working hard not only to be a better quarterback, but a better person as a whole. This assures his audience that he is doing his best to move past his wrongdoings and grow from them, rather than evade responsibility and continue to make poor decisions. By referencing his work ethic and goals, he implies that there is a process for change in mind; he is actively working to move past his transgressions. His specific use of the term “role model” is especially indicative of corrective action, as he implies that his future actions will be positive ones far removed from his past.

After 97 seconds, Pryor finished his statement unceremoniously and allowed his agent to take the reins. Rosenhaus spoke for several minutes and employed a similar strategy to Pryor. His statement utilized a combination of mortification and corrective action methods on behalf of his client. In addition, a large portion of his statement was spent bolstering Pryor as a football player and human being. Selections from Rosenhaus’ statement was analyzed below.

Rosenhaus began his statement by referring to Pryor as an “outstanding young man” and acknowledging his actions at Ohio State. Much like Pryor, he utilized mortification early and openly as a bridge to other methods of image restoration:

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification	“He is a young man here today who is expressing tremendous remorse. He’s very sad about what has happened to his college career and Ohio State. I can tell you that he is extremely, he’s responsible for the mistakes he’s made. He’s owned up to them. There are no excuses here guys, no excuses at all.”

Rosenhaus’ use of mortification is made very clear here. He emphasizes his client’s regret and responsibility for the events that took place. By noting that there are no excuses, he assures the audience that Pryor fully acknowledges the situation and is taking responsibility for his actions. By noting that Pryor has “owned up” to his actions, he also places him in a positive, responsible light. By being straightforward about Pryor’s actions and remorse, Rosenhaus was then able to transition to his bolstering of Pryor, stating that “the past is now the past for him, and we have to move ahead. There is no point in him looking back except for him to become the best person he can be and I believe in him.” This quote demonstrates a clear transition away from the scandal for Rosenhaus and gears the conversation towards the future, where, as both statements emphasize, Pryor will work to change his ways and become a better person.

Following his use of mortification on behalf of Pryor, Rosenhaus shifted heavily to bolstering. He spoke very highly of Pryor in a number of different respects, ranging from his football prowess to his high character. Using his reputation and experience as credibility, Rosenhaus’ bolstering aims to divert attention from Pryor’s transgressions at Ohio State and highlight positive qualities about his client. Rosenhaus also listed off a series of Pryor’s football accolades during his career at Ohio State, compared him to current successful NFL quarterback Cam Newton, and referred to him as “one of the most gifted quarterbacks that this league has seen.” The table below details Rosenhaus’ bolstering of his client:

Strategies	Quotes
Bolstering	<p>“I am a firm believer after 25 years of experience that Terrelle Pryor will be a great, not a good quarterback, a great quarterback in the National Football League. That he’s going to be a star.”</p> <p>“He has a good heart. I’ve represented a lot of players in the NFL. This young man has character.”</p>

These quotes provide a strong example of Rosenhaus’ bolstering of Pryor. These statements aim to generate positive sentiments from the audience and to combat negative ones generated by the scandal.

He further emphasized Pryor’s high character by utilizing Jim Tressel, the man who lost his job due to Pryor’s actions. Rosenhaus stated that he would not have taken Terrelle as a client had he not received a glowing endorsement from Tressel. He stated that “[Tressel] talked about him like you would talk about a son.” Tressel was the most affected individual by the scandal, so Rosenhaus used his endorsement and positive relationship with Pryor as a major testament to his client’s high character. Rosenhaus continued to heap a variety of praises on his client throughout his statement. His final statements were aimed towards the future, where Rosenhaus assured that his client would be a different, more mature individual by utilizing corrective action:

Strategies	Quotes
Corrective Action	<p>“He won’t make the same mistakes. He loves the game of football. He is going to learn from his mistakes and be a better person from it.”</p> <p>“I hope that the people at Ohio State will embrace him in the future, will forgive him, and will give him an opportunity to be a Buckeye for life. He is going to make it up to those fans.”</p>
Corrective Action/ Defeasibility	<p>“He’s a young man. We all make mistakes. Everybody in this audience has made mistakes at his age. He’ll learn from them, and he won’t make the same ones twice.”</p>

Rosenhaus’ use of corrective action is very clear-cut with these quotes. He assures the audience that the actions at the root of “Tattoo Gate” would not be repeated because his client will learn from them and grow as an individual in the process. This coincides seamlessly with Benoit’s definition of corrective action, as assurances of change would help to soften negative sentiments generated from a public scandal. The third quote also demonstrates a subtle use of the defeasibility method, as Rosenhaus essentially attributes Pryor’s actions to being young and irresponsible. In this way, Pryor is portrayed to be a foolish, impressionable young man rather than a selfish celebrity.

Pryor and Rosenhaus exited the press conference following the conclusion of the latter’s statement. Their statements, when analyzed alongside one another, reveal a distinct use of image restoration strategies. In his short statement, Pryor relied primarily on the use of mortification and corrective action. Rosenhaus followed a similar strategy on behalf of Pryor, with the addition of consistent bolstering regarding his client’s football prowess and high moral character. The use of these strategies is logical in that they allowed for Pryor to apologize for his actions openly and honestly, put the past behind him, and look towards his future in the National Football League. The fallout from “Tattoo Gate” was already behind Pryor at the time of the press conference, so these statements do an effective job of gearing the conversation towards the future rather than dwelling on his past transgressions. NFL prospects often fall in drafts due to “character concerns,” but this press conference was clearly effective in highlighting Pryor’s remorse and high character. The Oakland Raiders selected Pryor in the third round of the NFL Supplemental Draft soon after the press conference. While Pryor and Rosenhaus were able to put “Tattoo gate” behind them, Pryor’s image restoration campaign did not end with his press conference.

Less than a year from his press conference, Pryor once again opted to speak out regarding his transgressions at Ohio State. His statements showcase a starkly different strategy than his press conference. Rather than relying on apologies and promises of change, Pryor flipped the tables by going on the offensive. He utilized the methods of transcendence and attacking his accusers in hopes of providing greater perspec-

tive on “Tattoo Gate.” The following quotes demonstrate Pryor’s use of these image restoration methods:

Strategies	Quotes
Transcendence, Attacking Accusers	<p>“The reason why I did it was to pay my mother’s gas bill and some of her rent. I was telling the NCAA, ‘Please, anything that you can do. I gave my mother this so my sister wouldn’t be cold, so my mother wouldn’t be cold.’ They didn’t have any sympathy for me.”</p> <p>“I don’t think I deserved [being punished] in that way, because of the reason I was doing it. I felt like I was doing God’s work in a way, and I was getting driven into the ground.”</p>

These statements mark a distinct shift in Pryor’s stance on “Tattoo gate” from his initial press conference. They are textbook examples of Benoit’s transcendence method, as he attempts to justify his actions by asserting that he did them for the sake of his family’s well being. In this context, Pryor’s actions seem far less heinous or selfish when they are being used to pay for a heating bill rather than jewelry or a car for himself.

This use of transcendence meshes effectively with the strategies employed in his press conference, as he portrays himself to be a man of high moral character, going so far as to say that he was doing “God’s work.” To further distance himself from the negative sentiments associated with the scandal, Pryor passes some of the blame onto the NCAA. He portrays the NCAA as a callous, tyrannical organization that was punishing him for trying to be a supportive son and brother. By placing his actions in a far different context and passing blame to the NCAA, Pryor both highlighted his high moral character and distanced himself further from the scandal at Ohio State.

Overview of A.J. Green and Scandal

A.J. Green began his football career at Summerville High School in Summerville, South Carolina. He was an extremely productive wide receiver, and would go on to play at the University of Georgia, where he continued to dominate the competition and produce gaudy stats. Green’s career at Georgia was marked by numerous accolades, including being named First-team All-SEC on two separate occasions and the SEC freshman of the year in 2008.²⁹ Before leaving Georgia, however, Green’s sterling career was marked by an improper benefit scandal.

Following rumors in 2010 that he had received improper benefits at a Miami party that was already being examined, the NCAA launched an investigation and questioned Green regarding the accusations. While examining Green’s bank account, the NCAA noticed a \$1,000 deposit that seemed largely out of place. Although Green denied attending the Miami party in question, he was forthcoming about the deposit and admitted to selling his game-worn 2009 Independence Bowl jersey for extra cash to spend on Spring Break. Although the amount in question was far less than with “Tattoo gate,” the scandal received a large amount of media scrutiny due to Green’s success and the growing debate regarding compensation for high-profile college athletes. While the NCAA handed down a four-game suspension for the infraction, Green and the University aimed to handle the scandal effectively.

Analysis of A.J. Green Crisis Response^{30 31 32}

On September 8th, 2010 A.J. Green released a statement through the University of Georgia in response to the four-game suspension the NCAA handed him for selling his jersey. The brief statement can be found below:

29 “A.J. Green Profile - The University of Georgia Bulldogs .” University of Georgia Athletics. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <http://www.georgiadogs.com/sports/m-footbl/mtt/green_aj00.html>.

30 The following quotes and information contained in this section were taken from citations 21-22

31 Tim Tucker. “A.J. Green: I sold jersey for ‘extra cash’ during spring break | UGA sports blog.” Blogs about Atlanta news, sports and more | ajc.com, accessAtlanta.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Apr. 2013. <<http://blogs.ajc.com/uga-sports-blog/2010/09/28/a-j-green-i-sold-jersey-for-extra-cash-during-spring-break/>>.

32 “A.J. Green’s Playing Status Clarified - The University of Georgia Bulldogs .”University of Georgia Athletics. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2013. < <http://www.georgiadogs.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/090810aad.html> >.

I want to apologize to my coaches, teammates, and the Georgia fans for the mistake in judgment. I very much regret all that has taken place and the distraction that's been caused. I've learned a valuable lesson and hope others can learn from my mistake. I can only focus my attention now on practicing and looking ahead to getting back with my teammates as quickly as possible.

Green's use of image restoration strategies is easily identifiable in this formal statement. He clearly utilizes both mortification and corrective action. He apologizes for his actions, acknowledges his lapse in judgment, and takes responsibility for the negative repercussions he caused. With this out of the way, Green was then able to shift the focus towards the future. He assures personal corrective action by noting that he has learned his lesson and is ready to move past the scandal by re-focusing on his football career. Much like Terrelle Pryor, however, Green had more to say about his actions once the scandal was behind him.

Having served his four-game suspension by the end of September, Green spoke out again regarding his scrutinized actions. While he employed similar strategies to those used in his initial statement, Green was also able to speak more openly about his experience with the scandal. He began by expressing mortification regarding his actions:

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification	<p data-bbox="532 730 1279 793">"I broke the rule, and I paid my price. And I'm just ready to play again."</p> <p data-bbox="532 842 1317 936">"I feel like I caused a lot of people pain. Because I feel like if I was out there some of the time we would have had a chance. I beat myself up pretty much over that."</p> <p data-bbox="532 984 1295 1014">"I did something wrong. I deserve it, a penalty for what I'd done."</p>

Much like in his initial statement, Green takes full responsibility for his actions and acknowledges their repercussions. He attempts to distance himself slightly from the scandal by adding that "everybody makes mistakes in life" and "I'm not the type of guy who ever got into trouble here and stuff like that." The former quote marks a use of minimization, while the latter is a bolstering of his personal character. Both methods aim to subtly reduce negative sentiments towards his character and past actions. After taking responsibility for his actions and attempting to distance himself from them, Green then turned to his familiar use of corrective action:

Strategies	Quotes
Corrective Action	<p data-bbox="532 1299 1308 1362">"It taught me a valuable lesson. I'm growing up, and I've got to do the right thing."</p> <p data-bbox="532 1411 1321 1474">"I feel like I still got stuff to prove, that I'm behind and that I'm going to have a lot of catching up to do."</p>

Both of these statements shift the focus of Green's statement toward the future. He emphasizes a change in his personal character and recognition of right versus wrong. In this way, he assures the audience that he is taking the steps necessary to avoid being involved with a similar scandal down the line. Following this interview, the scandal eventually faded from the spotlight, while Green exploded onto the NFL scene as a wide receiver with the Cincinnati Bengals.

Overview of Cam Newton and Recruiting Scandal

Cam Newton's road to stardom was, and continues to be, a long and tumultuous one. Hailing from Westlake High School in Atlanta, Georgia, the quarterback opted to attend the University of Florida. After transferring from Florida and attending Blinn Colleg for a year, Newton chose to attend the 2010 season at Auburn University, where he produced historic results and carried himself to an unparalleled level of national popularity. His accomplishments in a single year at Auburn are simply staggering, and provide perspective on his celebrity-like status. Newton led his team to a National Championship, received the storied Heisman Trophy award, was named a consensus All-American, and was also named the Associated Press player of

the year, along with countless other awards and accolades.³³ Despite his impressive athletic feats, Newton's illustrious career at Auburn was marred by a high-profile scandal regarding his recruitment to the University.

In November of 2010, during Newton's historic campaign at Auburn, reports began to emerge of an ongoing NCAA investigation regarding his recruitment to the University.^{34 35} The reports alleged that Newton's father, Cecil, had solicited large amounts of cash from universities in exchange for his son's commitment to play with their program the following season. The investigation quickly zeroed in on Mississippi State University when a recruiter alleged that Cecil Newton had told him it would cost between \$100,00 and \$180,000 to have his son play for their program.³⁶³⁷ Although Newton was suspended for the infraction, he was quickly reinstated when the University stated that he was entirely unaware of the actions of his father and that he had no personal intentions of utilizing an agent to solicit payments for his decision. The NCAA's extensive investigation supported these statements, finding that neither Cam nor Auburn University had engaged in solicitation efforts; only Cecil was found to be guilty of the accusations. Despite the fact that Newton emerged from the scandal without repercussions and went on to punctuate his successful season, his alleged involvement with the scandal sparked intense media scrutiny. Due to his popularity and the continued scrutiny of improper benefit scandals at the time, Newton and the University were forced to acknowledge and respond to the scandal accordingly.

Analysis of Cam Newton Crisis Response^{38 39 40 41}

Newton's situation was unique in that he was not actually found guilty of any infractions by the NCAA and thus faced no tangible repercussions. Newton, his father, the University, and other associated parties remained largely tight-lipped about the scandal while the NCAA conducted their investigation. When Newton was finally found innocent of the accusations and ruled eligible to play by the NCAA, both he and the University spoke out regarding the investigation. The University opted for a straightforward strategy of denial in regard to both Auburn and Newton's involvement. The quotes below demonstrate this strategy:

33Cam Newton | Auburn, QB : 2011 NFL Draft Scout Player Profile.» 2013 NFL Draft - CBSSports.com - NFL-DraftScout.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <http://www.nfldraftscout.com/ratings/dsprofile.php?pyid=71142&draftyear=2011&genpos=qb>

34 Charles Goldberg, "Auburn's Cam Newton timeline: From recruitment to NCAA ruling | al.com." Alabama Local News, Breaking News, Sports & Weather - al.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

35 "NCAA investigating Auburn QB Cam Newton's recruitment - NCAA Football - Sporting News." Sporting News - Real Insight. Real Fans. Real Conversations.. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <<http://aol.sportingnews.com/ncaa-football/feed/2010-11/cam-newton-probe/story/ncaa-investigating-cam-newton>>.

36 "Kenny Rogers: Cecil Newton put price tag on Cam Newton for Mississippi State - ESPN." ESPN: The Worldwide Leader In Sports. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <<http://sports.espn.go.com/ncf/news/story?id=5792707>>.

37 "Report: Cam Newton, father admitted pay-for-play plan - NCAA Football - Sporting News." Sporting News - Real Insight. Real Fans. Real Conversations.. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. <<http://aol.sportingnews.com/ncaa-football/feed/2010-11/cam-newton-probe/story/chizik-auburn-ad-defend-cameron-newton-amid-allegations>>.

38 The following quotes and information contained in this section were taken from citations 31-33

39 "Auburn's Cam Newton: I've done nothing wrong - NCAA Football - Sporting News." Sporting News - Real Insight. Real Fans. Real Conversations.. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2013. <<http://aol.sportingnews.com/ncaa-football/feed/2010-11/cam-newton-probe/story/auburns-cam-newton-ive-done-nothing-wrong>>.

40 "Cam Newton confident in his actions at Auburn - ESPN." ESPN: The Worldwide Leader In Sports. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2013. <<http://sports.espn.go.com/ncf/news/story?id=5903485>>.

41 "Auburn Tigers' Cam Newton eligible to play, NCAA says - ESPN." ESPN: The Worldwide Leader In Sports. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Apr. 2013. <<http://sports.espn.go.com/ncf/news/story?id=5870788>>.

Strategies	Quotes
Denial	<p>“[Auburn] was in no way involved with offering or considering an offer of any recruiting inducement.”</p> <p>“Despite numerous media reports suggesting Newton himself has engaged in wrongdoing, the facts clearly demonstrate Newton has done nothing wrong.”</p>

With the scandal in hindsight and Auburn’s support, Newton subsequently spoke out in an interview with ESPN’s Chris Fowler on several points of scrutiny, namely his involvement with the scandal and his father’s role as well. His strategy feels somewhat scattered, utilizing a combination of bolstering, denial, and other tactics that are difficult to categorize. The following quotes showcase Newton’s denial of the allegations:

Strategies	Quotes
Denial	<p>“Everything I’ve done at this university, I did it the right way.”</p> <p>“The only that I could do and the only thing that I did was tell the truth. The truth will come out.”</p> <p>“I had no dealings with nobody at Mississippi State during the time that I came to Auburn...but I felt that, as a whole, Auburn possessed what’s best for Cam Newton, and that’s why I decided to come here on my decision.”</p>

Newton demonstrates both direct and indirect denial in these instances. He emphatically denies any improper recruiting practices with Mississippi State, and implies it further by asserting that he told only the truth on multiple occasions. When pressed further about the allegations, Newton punctuated his denial by stating clearly: “I’m not here to talk about any reports.” From that point, the focus of Newton’s conversation shifted away from the alleged scandal to his father’s role in the scandal. Newton would not acknowledge any wrongdoing by his father, but instead aimed to highlight their strong relationship through bolstering and transcendence:

Strategies	Quotes
Bolstering, Transcendence	<p>“My love for him is unconditional. This situation can split a family, can split a team, can split any person’s situations with anything, or it can bring a person together. Whatever me and my father have, it’s me and my father. I respect him as a man; I respect him more being my father.”</p> <p>“I’m not sitting up here saying that we are all perfect. Everybody’s made mistakes. I’m not sitting up here saying what he did or what he did was wrong. Who am I up here to say that what he did is true or not. But I know that if I can call Cecil Newton right now, he’ll pick up the phone.”</p> <p>“I love my father, and this situation has just made us stronger.”</p>

Newton’s crisis management efforts are unique for several reasons. Not only was he already cleared of the allegations at the time of his interview, but he was also tasked with defending the character of his father. Thus, his image restoration efforts were shifted more towards his father. All three of these quotes aim to emphasize the strong relationship that the Newtons held, which both diverts attention from the allegations and highlights Cecil Newton’s character. Newton’s assertion that the scandal brought them closer together demonstrates a use of transcendence as well. Due to his clearance of all charges by the NCAA, denial proved to be a sufficient strategy for Newton, which in turn allowed him to defend his father. In light of the charges against him, Cecil Newton chose to not attend the NFL draft, where his son was selected first overall by the Carolina Panthers.

Caveats

There are two caveats that are important to take note of in regard to the analysis of these scandals. These are unique to the college landscape and factor in critically to the fallout of these and other high-profile scandals.

The fact that all three of these scandals took place in 2010 sheds light on the increasing frequency of scandals within college athletics. As more programs continue to be investigated, accusations of improper benefits and other NCAA infractions emerge. The national media tends to gravitate towards these stories, especially specialized networks such as ESPN. In doing so, the spotlights on all of these scandals simply begin to overlap. The amount of infractions in college athletics has essentially saturated the media, which allows scandals to fade from the spotlight more easily.

High profile college athletes are also often provided with an easy escape route from their controversy. Since these young men have not entered the world of professional sports yet, their entry into their respective drafts can provide a strong distraction from any scandals they were involved in. Pryor, Green, and Newton all entered the draft shortly after addressing their scandals, which potentially helped their image restoration efforts. These caveats should be kept in mind when analyzing these and other college-level scandals.

IV. Findings

An analysis of the crisis management strategies of Terrelle Pryor, A.J. Green, and Cam Newton in the wake of high-profile scandals reveals a clear use of traditional image restoration techniques and significant knowledge about the current college athletic landscape.

The fallout of these three scandals clearly demonstrates the staggering level of prominence that college athletics has risen to. Despite the fact that these young men are generally between the ages of 18 to 22, their actions are heavily scrutinized not only by the NCAA, but by the national media and fans across the country as well. This scrutiny has grown to the point that when a scandal does emerge, as it did with these three athletes, it receives a national spotlight and demands acknowledgement. Pryor, Green, and Newton, along with several associated parties, were forced to respond to their respective scandals while facing this spotlight and pressure.

All three of these athletes clearly exemplify Benoit's theory of image restoration in varying respects. Pryor and Green followed similar patterns in that they both issued statements in order to formally respond to the allegations against them. While the tactics they employed vary, there is a clear pattern associated with their initial responses. They both relied heavily on mortification and corrective action. They were upfront about their involvement in the scandal, acknowledged their wrongdoing, and apologized to the parties affected by them. In doing so, they effectively put the scandal behind them and shifted the focus of their statements towards the future. They then emphasized corrective action, where they promised to grow as individuals and make better choices down the line. Since Newton had already been cleared of his charges at the time of his first public statement, there was no need for mortification or corrective action when flat-out denial proved sufficient. Regardless, each athlete faced aggressive demands for explanations, apologies, and/or corrective actions following their scandals.

The fallout of these three scandals reveals a significant amount of the college landscape as a whole. The NCAA's looming presence over its athletes and universities is glaringly evident through their actions. All three of these athletes only chose to speak candidly about their scandals once they distanced themselves from the NCAA. The NCAA's presence also clearly affected the responses of the universities, as they remained fairly tight-lipped and attempted to stay out of the investigation's way. The NCAA's overwhelming influence and control over the college landscape is well documented through the fallout of these scandals.

The use of traditional image restoration techniques, in conjunction with the intense scrutiny that these scandals received, strongly supports the thesis of this research paper. College athletics have clearly risen to a level of distinction that requires its athletes to employ the same techniques as professionals when faced by scandal. From a public relations perspective, college athletes should be viewed in the same light as professional ones. Scholars have overlooked high-profile college athletes like Pryor, Green, and Newton, but the image restoration efforts of these athletes fill a gaping void in the established literature on crisis management

within athletics.

V. Conclusion

The landscape of college athletics is a distinctly unique section of American society. College sports and the players that participate in them have been elevated to a largely unparalleled level of stardom. In the process, college athletics has become a major source of profit through its expansive merchandising, television deals, and other endeavors. Due to strictly enforced NCAA regulations, the athletes themselves are excluded from these profits. This, in turn, has manifested itself in a variety of ways into a major spike in illicit activities within college athletic programs. The scandals of Terrelle Pryor, A.J. Green, and Cam Newton all exemplify the fallout that inevitably follows these infractions.

Due to their national fame, Pryor, Green, and Newton were forced to respond to their scandals effectively. Their various responses demonstrate a clear use of scholarly image restoration techniques, which have traditionally been applied to professional athletes. Thus, it is overtly clear that due to the national spotlight that college athletics have been elevated to, college athletes should be viewed in the same respect as professional ones from a public relations perspective.

The importance and benefit of this research is twofold. The findings of this specific case study analysis shed important light on the college athletic landscape and the unique public relations efforts that athletes employ within it following a scandal. Perhaps more importantly, however, is the fact that this research serves as a foundation for a potential area of research that has been largely overlooked by scholars. Whether or not the college athletics system is broken is a debate in itself, but one truth remains overwhelmingly clear: Scandals within college athletics are recurring. The question has now become not *if* another one will emerge, but rather *when*. In the meantime, this research has the potential to serve as a powerful foundation for public relations practitioners, scholars, and the college athletics landscape as a whole.

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