

Human beings frequently must attempt to restore their reputations after alleged or suspected wrong-doing. This is inevitable for at least four reasons. First, we inhabit a world of limited resources: there is only so much time, money, equipment, office space, room in classes, computer time, and so forth. Individuals often compete fiercely for these tangible and intangible goods, which means the allocation of these scarce resources often provokes the ire of those who desired a different distribution. Second, circumstances beyond our control sometimes prevent us from meeting our obligations. We become delayed by unexpected traffic and arrive late to meetings; documents or computer files may become lost or corrupted; or a colleague may neglect to inform us that a meeting has been moved up a day. Our behavior is significantly influenced by the people, events, and environment around us, and frequently these factors create problems for us and those who depend on us. Third, human beings are imperfect and make mistakes, some honestly, others guided perhaps too often by our self-interests. We may forget to bring a report to a meeting or to stop and buy milk on the way home from work; a self-employed individual may send the IRS an insufficient quarterly tax payment; or a contractor may substitute cheaper and inferior parts in a building. Alcohol, drugs, or even lack of sleep may cloud our judgment and hinder performance of our duties. Finally, the fact that humans are individuals with different sets of priorities fosters conflict among those with competing goals. These four factors combine to insure that actual or perceived wrong-doing is a recurrent feature of human activity.

When such inevitable (apparent) misbehavior occurs, others are very likely to accuse, attack, berate, blame, censure, condemn, rail against, rebuke, or reproach us or object to our behavior. They

may complain about things we said or did, they can carp about things left unsaid or undone, or they might criticize the *way* in which we performed an action or phrased an utterance. Indeed, the simple fact that our language is rich in expressions of disfavor attests to the ubiquity of complaints or persuasive attack.

These attacks on our reputation are serious matters, for our image or reputation is extremely vital to us. Face, image, or reputation not only contributes to a healthy self-image, but it also can create important favorable impressions on others. Conversely, a bad reputation may interfere with our interactions with others. For example, after charges of mismanagement at United Way, groups supported by that charity began to become anxious about its ability to continue fund-raising ("Groups Worry," 1992). Similarly, after a segment of CBS's *60 Minutes* that criticized the use of Alar, apple growers in Washington were upset and initiated legal proceedings against the network ("CBS Being Sued," 1990). Hence, attacks on one's image can be very serious concerns, and most people recognize the importance of these threats to reputation.

Those who believe that their face or reputation has been injured or even threatened are unlikely to ignore these perils. When our image is threatened, we feel compelled to offer explanations, defenses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for our behavior. This book investigates verbal responses to perceived damage to reputation—image restoration strategies—because threats to image are pervasive, reputation is important, and discourse has the power to restore face. This first chapter provides a backdrop for the remainder of this book. First, it offers anecdotal support, drawn from newspaper stories, for the claim that image restoration attempts are a pervasive form of communicative action. Then it provides a brief overview of the remainder of the book.

Defensive communicative acts adopt a variety of stances. One strategy for avoiding blame is denial. For example, after the Missouri state attorney general's office charged Show Me Furniture with deceptive advertising, this business simply denied that its ads were deceptive (Bennish, 1992). Similarly, Christian Laettner, leading scorer on Duke University's NCAA champion basketball team, denied that he had violated his amateur standing ("Laettner Denies," 1992). Governor Jerry Brown rejected allegations that his home had been the scene for drug parties, labeling the attack as "a tissue of false, malicious and absurd allegations" ("Brown Dismisses," 1992, p. 1A). Woody Allen denied charges that he had

molested two of his adopted children ("Woody Allen Denies," 1992). Thus, a common response to charges of misconduct is simply to deny any and all allegations. If the audience accepts the claim that an accusation is false, damage to the accused's reputation from that attack should be diminished, if not eradicated.

At times, the strategy of denial is reinforced. Following release of a tape indicating that PLO leader Yasser Arafat made derogatory comments about Jews, it was reported that "Arafat Says Tape was Doctored" (1992, p. 4A). In this instance, not only was the charge denied, but an explanation was provided for the apparently incriminating evidence. Some who defend their image with the claim of innocence also shift the blame to the—allegedly—truly guilty party. Basketball coach Paul Westhead, fired after two dismal seasons with the Denver Nuggets, shifted the blame to his personnel: "the players we had were insufficient" ("Westhead Rejects," 1992, p. 2B). After the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, we heard that President "Bush Blames Programs of '60's, '70's" (1992, p. 1A). Following charges of financial misconduct at United Way, William Aramony, former head of United Way, argued that "he was being denied access to evidence that would disprove accusations" of financial misconduct (Barringer, 1992, p. A16). In addition to denying the charges, he alleged that the evidence he needed to prove his innocence was being withheld. Thus, denial may be supplemented with explanations of apparently damaging facts or scapegoating. Again, if the denial (in these cases with additional supporting reasons) is accepted by the audience, the accused's image should be rehabilitated.

Another strategy for dealing with criticism is to respond in kind, attacking accusers. Responding to a political cartoon, Missouri Attorney General Bill Webster attacked the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* for "race-baiting" ("Webster Blasts," 1992, p. 5A). A high-ranking naval officer fired after the Tailhook sex scandal was not content to accept his dismissal quietly: "Admiral Blasts Back for Inquiry Accusation" (1992, p. 10A). President Bush felt it necessary to reply to criticism of his pardons of six Iran-Contra defendants, calling such commentary "stupid" and "frivolous" (Clymer, 1992, p. A8). Presumably, such counterattacks undermine the credibility and impact of the accusations, thus helping to restore the accused's image. They may also function to shift the audience's attention away from the alleged wrong-doing of the original target to the new prey.

Some charges may be difficult or impossible to deny. However, this does not mean the situation is hopeless: it is possible to admit guilt and still attempt to restore one's reputation. For example, L.A. Police Chief Daryl Gates, after the 1992 riots, "insisted errors occurred in only one area and not citywide" ("Gates Admits," 1992, p. 12A). If this statement is accepted, it should limit the extent of the harm attributable to him, and, presumably, limit the damage to his face. Marge Schott, owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team, admitted using the word "nigger" to refer to players, but declared that she didn't know it was considered offensive ("Schott Tries," 1992). Thus, while not denying that she made the remark, she claimed that she had not intended it as an insult. If the injury from the offensive act is not as significant as first believed, the damage to the image of the accused should be limited as well.

Another defensive strategy for dealing with charges of wrongdoing that cannot be denied is to apologize for misconduct. Senator Robert Packwood, responding to charges of sexual harassment, admitted the charges and offered an apology, although he refused to resign ("Packwood Admits," 1992). Similarly, Lawrence Eagleburger, acting secretary of state, apologized for the passport file searches during President Bush's reelection campaign ("Secretary of State," 1992). Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa apologized for Japan's use of Korean women as sex slaves during World War II ("Japan Apologizes," 1992). Russian President Boris Yeltsin apologized for keeping Japanese prisoners of war as slave labor years after World War II was over ("Japanese Get Apology," 1993). Thus, it is possible for those who commit wrongful acts to attempt to repair their reputation with a sincere apology.

In some instances, those accused of wrongdoing will take action to correct the problem. An advertisement by the University of Missouri Hospital implied that it provided better care than the Mayo Clinic. When the Clinic objected to this ad, the University Hospital was forced to take corrective action: "Mayo Clinic Protests University Hospital Ad: Hospital Apologizes, Withdraws Ad for Changes" (Roth, 1991, p. 12A). Here, the hospital stopped running the unacceptable advertisement, which presumably will put it in a more favorable light. After the check-kiting scandal, the House of Representatives adopted reforms to improve its image ("U.S. House," 1992). If the reforms are believed to be appropriate, voters' image of the House should be improved. While MTV denied that its program had caused a five-year-old to set a fire that killed his sister, nevertheless it prohibited references to setting

fires on future episodes of the cartoon program *Beavis and Butt-head* ("MTV Bans," 1993). Here, those who have allegedly committed wrong-doings suggest that they have mended their ways.

Following revelations that the Department of State had investigated passport files of Bill Clinton, his mother, and Ross Perot, we learned that "Bush Dismisses Official Over Passport Searches" (1992, p. 4A). In the wake of the Tailhook accusations of sexual abuse, the Secretary of the Navy and two admirals resigned ("Navy Secretary," 1992, p. 1A; "Investigation," 1992, p. 12A). In these examples, the suggestion is that the wrongful act will not recur because the person (allegedly) responsible for the wrongful act is no longer in a position to commit the offense and that appropriate punishment has occurred. Appropriate corrective action can help restore the face of a person guilty of wrong-doing.

These familiar examples demonstrate that the communicative act of repairing a damaged reputation is commonplace. Because blame occurs throughout human society and because face is important for virtually everyone, this phenomenon, a felt need to cleanse one's reputation with discourse, occurs throughout our lives, public and private. The ubiquity of this communicative phenomenon is one reason this topic merits scholarly attention. Cody and McLaughlin (1990) develop several other reasons for studying image restoration or accounts: to show how ordinary social actors understand their world through causal explanations; to examine how poorly handled predicaments can create conflict; to show that predicaments often involve rewards and punishments for participants; and to help actors maintain a positive self-image.

Various approaches are available for examining verbal self-defense, some developed in the rhetorical literature and some in sociology. Unfortunately, there is no complete analysis of this important and pervasive type of discourse. An examination of the literature reveals three key statements on image restoration through discourse, in the works of Burke, Ware and Linkugel, and Scott and Lyman. These are not, of course, the only works on this topic; others preceded or extended and applied their work. Nevertheless, these are clearly foundational writings in the area of image restoration discourse.

Kenneth Burke offers a more theoretical analysis of image restoration discourse than most treatments in the rhetorical literature. He uses the term "guilt" to represent an undesirable state of affairs that can be remedied through defensive discourse (other factors may create guilt, but attacks on our reputation would surely moti-

vate rhetors to attempt to remove or reduce guilt). Burke explains that there are two fundamental processes for expunging guilt or restoring one's good reputation: victimage, scapegoating, or shifting the blame; and mortification or admitting wrong-doing and asking forgiveness (see, e.g., Burke, 1973). Rhetorical critics have applied Burke's analysis to public discourse (see, e.g., Brummett, 1981; or Foss, 1984).

The first systematic approach to rhetorical criticism of speeches of self-defense was developed by Rosenfield (1968). However, Ware and Linkugel's (1973) theory of apologia was much more widely used in rhetorical criticism. Drawing on the work of social psychologist Abelson (1959), they identify four factors or rhetorical strategies in rhetorical self-defense: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Ware and Linkugel suggest that these four strategies are combined in pairs to form four postures of defense. Again, rhetorical critics have applied Ware and Linkugel's theory of apologia to image restoration discourse (see, e.g., Katula, 1975; Kruse, 1981a; Short, 1987; or Vartabedian, 1985b).

Scott and Lyman's (1968) classic work on accounts, extending earlier work by Sykes and Matza (1957), offers a taxonomy for the provision of accounts for behavior subject to the criticism of others. Following Austin (1961), they distinguish between two general types of accounts. Excuses are accounts in which the accused admits that the act was wrong in some way, but does not accept full responsibility for that act. Justifications, on the other hand, accept responsibility for the act but reject the claim that it was a wrongful act. Later work in the tradition initiated by Lyman and Scott includes that of Schonbach (1980), Schlenker (1980), Tedeschi and Reiss (1981), and Semin and Manstead (1983).

Defensive utterances (justifications, excuses, apologies) are persuasive attempts to reshape another's beliefs, to change his or her belief that the act in question was wrongful, or to shift his or her attribution of responsibility for that act. This book explores this pervasive human discourse form. Chapter 2 begins this process by examining rhetorical scholarship on speeches of self-defense or *apologia*. Chapter 3 reviews work on image restoration and accounts. Based on these analyses, chapter 4 elaborates a general theory of image restoration. This theory is then illustrated through applications to defensive discourse in corporate and governmental affairs. Coke and Pepsi's struggle in the pages of trade publication *Nation's Restaurant News* is examined in chapter 5.

Chapter 6 examines Exxon's defensive rhetoric after the *Valdez* oil spill. Chapter 7 investigates Union Carbide's discourse concerning the Bhopal gas leak. Chapter 8 focuses on President Nixon's discourse defending his decision to invade Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Finally, chapter 9 discusses the implications of these and other analyses for the theory of image restoration.