

When the News is the News: A Textual Analysis of NBC and CBS networks' Response to Sexual
Harassment Allegations in the Wake of the #MeToo Movement

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

As the #MeToo movement swept the nation from Hollywood to Washington, within less than a week's time in November of 2017, longstanding news anchors, Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose were fired from their respective news networks because of sexual harassment allegations. As a result, each network had to grapple with repairing a destroyed image while simultaneously fulfilling the duty to report on news objectively. This qualitative analysis examined NBC and CBS's response to the allegations of sexual harassment against each anchor, allegations of withholding information and allegations of ignoring complaints through the lens of image repair theory in order to identify if any of the strategies were present in the networks' response. Applications of image repair discourse to news media organizations is a relatively novel examination and it highlights the complex duality of an organization's right to uphold its image but obligation to present the news objectively, even when it has become the news.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

As the #MeToo movement swept the nation from Hollywood to Washington, within less than a week's time in November of 2017, longstanding news anchors, Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose were fired from their respective news networks because of sexual harassment allegations. As a result, each network had to grapple with repairing a destroyed image while simultaneously running business as usual. This study examined NBC and CBS's response to the allegations of sexual harassment against each anchor, the allegations of withholding information and allegations of ignoring complaints made by employees over the past two decades, all the while attempting to fulfill the duty of objectively reporting the news. This study examined each networks' response using a crisis communication theory and offers an extension to the theory that can be utilized by news network organizations and the like.

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Chapter 1: When the News is the News: A Textual Analysis of NBC and CBS networks' Response to Sexual Harassment Allegations in the Wake of the #MeToo Movement

In late November of 2017, two high profile news networks terminated long standing anchors due to sexual harassment allegations. CBS fired Charlie Rose on November 22, 2017 and NBC fired Matt Lauer on November 27, 2017. All the while, the #MeToo Movement was sweeping the nation taking down various well-known figures ranging from those who worked in the entertainment industry in Hollywood to news anchors in New York City (Chicago Tribune, 2017). Not only did these organizations face the anticipated challenges with repairing a ruined image, they had to carefully implement image repair strategies while in the midst of a nationwide revelation.

The #MeToo movement, originally founded in 1997 by Tarana Burke, regained momentum after actress Alyssa Milano posted on Twitter in October of 2017. The tweet read, "If all the women and men who have been sexually harassed, assaulted or abused wrote 'me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem. #metoo (Stevens, 2017).

Overnight, Milano's tweet had more than 40,000 replies (Stevens, 2017). During this time, Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose were only two of dozens of men who were exposed for their despicable behavior. As displayed in the Chicago Tribune's *#MeToo Timeline of Events*, men who worked in the news industry, entertainment industry, politics and sports industry were taken down due to allegations of sexual harassment and mistreatment (Chicago Tribune, 2017).

The cultural reset caused by the #MeToo movement caused chaos for dozens of organizations that were covering up sexual predators within their organizations (Chicago Tribune, 2017). This study specifically focuses on how NBC and CBS reacted and responded to sexual harassment allegations made against its respective long-time anchors in the midst of a relevant cultural movement. Beginning with Charlie Rose's termination on November 21, 2017,

closely followed by Matt Lauer's termination on November 27, 2017, this study analyzes the on-air transcripts, including conversations between news anchors and official statements from each respective news network through the lens of image repair discourse to image repair identify strategies.

The systematic and protected casting couch culture that perpetuated for decades in the entertainment and news media industry was beginning to unravel. Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose were only two among dozens of men who were taken down in the awakening caused by this movement. Money, power, and status has allowed individuals to act haphazardly without consequence for decades. However, what happens when that barrier of protection provided by status and stifling contracts is lifted? The organizations designated to bring news objectively to the living rooms of millions of Americans have now become the news itself. The perpetuated silencing of victims of sexual harassment in these organizations has come to light in the last three to four years and the consequences are long-lasting.

Image repair discourse has been applied to a wide range of crises experienced by many types of organizations ranging from sports teams to restaurants. However, the lack of image repair theory application to news media organizations suggests a gap in the literature. News media organizations operate just like other businesses. They have employees, management, public relations operations and daily tasks that need to be completed in order to thrive. However, a very perplexing difference between news media organizations and standard businesses is that news media organizations operate in the public eye and have the journalistic duty to be objective when reporting news (Pressman, 2018). This presents a two-part problem for news media organizations. The obligation to be objective does not lend itself well to inherently persuasive image restoration efforts. The reason this issue is so complex is the duality of a news media

organization's attempt to preserve its image while upholding the duty to objectively report on the events in question.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Methods

Every organization, large or small, public or private, has an image and reputation that needs to be protected. Whether the image is known by millions or just a few, every entity has an image and reputation to uphold. First impressions, stakeholder relationships, and public relations efforts are incredibly important to an organization's overall success. However, unexpected events, natural disasters, or events that do not unfold as planned can result in a crisis for an organization. Natural disasters, internal or external conflicts, freak accidents and even scandals are all inevitable. No organization is immune to experiencing a crisis. It is more accurately described in terms of when a crisis will occur, not if a crisis will occur (Benoit, 1995).

One of the main threats to an organization's reputation occurs during a crisis. There are considerably many different definitions and alterations to what constitutes a crisis, but for the sake of this research a crisis will be referenced simply as an event that threatens an organization's reputation (Coombs, 2007). A threat to reputation can damage the organization's credibility, relationships with stakeholders and even daily operations (Barton, 2001). Some organizations may allocate different levels of care to its organization. There are some organizations that continue to function normally despite bad press or unhappy customer relations, whereas there are others whereas upkeep of a positive reputation is absolutely essential. While organizations can vary differently such as the purpose it serves, the size, its visions, etc., that does not change the necessary precaution of keeping an up to crisis plan.

It is imperative that an organization has a crisis plan prepared for a myriad of situations. According to the Universal Accreditation Board, a group of public relations organizations that accredit PR practitioners and new PR graduates, "Anticipating a crisis is part of every public relations practitioner's job. To that end, every organization should have an up-to-date crisis

communication plan in the hands of a clearly identified and prepared crisis communication team...” (2015, p. 85). Even though it is standard that each organization should have an updated crisis plan for an exhaustive list of situations, this does not eliminate the chance that a completely unexpected crisis could occur.

While there are basic steps and guidelines such as having a crisis team, a plan, identifying priority publics and identifying the crisis in terms of triggering events, there is not a one size fits all crisis plan that is applicable to all organizations (UAB, 2015, pp. 85). The inconsistency between how different organizations may handle crises is only one of the problems with the field and practice in general. For example, it has been agreed upon that the first hour, and 24 hours of a crisis are the most crucial in preserving an organization’s reputation, but exactly what those messages and actions are composed of have been discovered through trial and error and theory-based applications.

Image repair or image restoration was developed by William Benoit in 1995. It was built upon three earlier theories from Kenneth Burke’s theory of guilt, Rosenfield’s theory of mass media apology, and Ware and Linkugel’s theory of apologia (Benoit, 2015). Strategies still seen in Benoit’s theory are denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence have been drawn from the three previously mentioned theories. These three influences provided direction from communication, rhetoric and sociology (Benoit, 1995). These together can be summarized by utilizing the power of apology. These influences provided guidance to help understand how much responsibility should be taken for the offensive actions, and when to issue an apology.

From this foundation, image repair provides a framework that can be utilized by any individual or organization that is believed to be responsible for an offensive act (Benoit, 1997). The ultimate goal of utilizing image repair is to control damage and save a reputation. Image

repair theory lays out multiple strategies that can be utilized depending on what would be a best fit for the situation. The key to understanding how to use these strategies depends on understanding the nature of the attack and the qualities it must possess. Image repair discourse assumes that an attack must have two components: 1. The accused is held responsible for an action and 2. The act is considered offensive. (Benoit, 1997, pp. 178). Even if the organization is not actually responsible for the offensive act, if it is perceived as such, image repair theory suggests that the organization issues a message or apology anyway.

Responsibility can come in many forms. If an organization is associated with the offensive act by ordering, encouraging, facilitating, permitting to occur or overlooking an act that it is perceived responsible for, it should consider responding (Benoit, 1997, pp 178). In image repair discourse, perception is more important than reality. However, if an organization is not actually responsible for the offensive act and can provide proof, that can be used as a response strategy on its own. As long as there is perceived fault and responsibility of the organization, there is risk (Benoit, 1997, pp. 178). The importance of understanding the risk associated with perceived responsibility stems from the origins of image repair.

The history of image restoration discourse begins with an earlier theory known as apologia theory by Ware and Linkugel in 1973 (Benoit, 2015). Apologia theory was based on studies from social psychology. Ware and Linkugel provided possible response strategies based in apologia through four categories which are similar to the five categories used in image repair: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (Brown, 2012). Benoit begins explaining the concept of image restoration theory with two basic concepts. First, the accused should understand the nature of the attacks or complaints that threaten reputation or lead to crisis

(Benoit, 1997). After the attacks on reputation have been analyzed, the organization should decide which form of message response it should use.

Image repair discourse is also based in persuasion. The organization needs to decide what it wants its audiences to believe in regard to the offensive acts. Benoit expands on this point, “Avoid making false claims; provide adequate support for claims, develop themes throughout a campaign; avoid arguments that may backfire” (Benoit, 1997, p. 183). Using persuasion to control the narrative of the situation does not translate to omission and falsified claims. Benoit also suggests that if an organization or firm is responsible, it should admit this fault immediately (Benoit, 1997, p. 184).

However, admitting responsibility does not arrive without liabilities and legal repercussions. At this crossroad is where organizations decide between image restoration efforts or avoiding possible litigation. Even though being as transparent as possible with publics and stakeholders is the morally correct action to take, not all organizations have or will choose that path when faced with a crisis or attack on reputation. Benoit explains, “Apart from the fact that this is morally the correct thing to do, attempting to deny true accusations can backfire. An organization that falsely denies responsibility for offensive actions risks substantially damaged credibility if the truth emerges” (Benoit, 1997, p.184). Of course, if an organization is not responsible for the offensive act, then it should use that to its advantage, but that may not be the only form of image repair it will use. However, if it is responsible, image repair offers different applicable strategies, but the organization must first begin with understanding the two components of an attack.

An attack on reputation has two components: perceived responsibility and offensiveness. (Benoit, 1997). In addition, the accused must be ready to face several audiences and tailor a

different response to each. Each group involved has different interests and stakes that they hold. The response given to each group must be relevant and meaningful to that specific audience. As long as there is perceived responsibility, action should be taken as per image repair discourse suggests. Any level of responsibility or association with an offensive act should be considered and followed by developing an appropriate and timely response.

Image Repair Strategies

Benoit outlines five image repair strategies and variations of each to account for a variety of crisis types. A strategy that best fits a specific individual experiencing a crisis may be different than an entire corporation experiencing a crisis. Possible image repair strategies from Benoit offer an explanation of each strategy and its variations.

Denial

Denial can be used by simply denying that the offensive act occurred or that it was performed by the accused. The accused can also deny that the act was even harmful to anyone. However, according to Benoit's recommendation for use of this strategy, denial should only be used if the organization is actually not at fault. Falsified claims are not encouraged in image repair discourse, and if denial is under honest circumstances, the organization's image should not be tarnished (Benoit, 1997, p. 180).

Blame shifting is a form of denial that entails setting up the argument that another person or organization is actually responsible for the offensive act (Benoit, 1997, p. 180). The accuser is not denying the occurrence of the event, but rather seeking to place the blame elsewhere or as a result of another event that may or may not be related.

Evasion of Responsibility

Evasion of responsibility contains four variations to lessen the perceived responsibility of the accused.

Response to offensive act (provocation): implies that the offensive act was just a reaction or response to an unforeseeable and negative external factor (Benoit, 1997, p.180). The organization argues that it was provoked into performing the offensive behavior without having negative intentions. The offensive act still occurred, but the organization attempts to lessen the perceived responsibility and intentions behind the offensive act.

Defeasibility: entails using a lack of knowledge or control over the situation to lessen perceived responsibility for the offensive act.

Accident: The accused claims that the incident was an accident in hopes that this will diffuse some of the perceived responsibility for the act.

Good intentions: The last of the denial sub strategies is to claim that the offensive behavior was performed with good intentions and the outcome did not go as planned or did not mean to appear as offensive.

Reduce Offensiveness

The next type of image repair strategy that can be used is to reduce offensiveness of specific action that is receiving negative attention. It can appear in six different forms.

Bolstering: A company or individual may use bolstering which is aimed to strengthen the audience's positive feelings towards the organization or person in question. They mention good deeds done in the past or something they did "right" in the current situation as acting quickly or issuing an apology (Benoit, 1997).

Minimization: A second version of reducing offensiveness is to minimize the negative feelings surrounding the particular act. Minimization is achieved by framing the situation in a certain light so it appears less harmful and impactful than the audience perceives.

Differentiation: The next is differentiation which is comparing the act to something worse to make light of the current incident or make it look “better” in comparison.

Transcendence: The fourth form of reducing offensiveness is transcendence which puts the incident in a more favorable context. For example, a company that tests on animals could claim that it is better to test on animals than put humans at risk.

Attack the Accuser: Attacking the accuser works hopes to shift the attention to something the attacker did and to make the accused actions look better, and to appear as a justifiable form of self-defense.

Compensation: Compensation is the last form of reducing offensiveness. Compensation entails apologizing for the offensive act and typically offering something in the form of monetary value. For example, if a cell phone company experiences a massive recall due to faulty equipment, the company could offer a replacement phone or cash value of the items that were compromised (Benoit, 1997).

Corrective Action

Another overarching strategy is corrective action. A company or individual promises to correct the problem or behavior in order to avoid a repeat offense in the future. Corrective action is sometimes followed with a new policy put into place if the offensive act were to occur in a corporation setting. For example, Starbucks Coffee had to implement corrective action due to a misconstrued store policy that ultimately led to two African American customers being arrested at a location in Philadelphia for wanting to use the restroom but not had yet made a

purchase. The prior policy was that only paying customers could use the restroom, but each store had the final say in regard to actually enforcing that policy. As a result, Starbucks closed all locations for several hours to perform an emergency training regarding racial bias and fair treatment of others (Arkin, 2018). This incident became a hot ticket item in the news and attracted both positive and negative attention, but Starbucks handled the incident quickly and transparently.

Mortification

The last strategy of image repair is mortification. It involves confessing to the accused actions, accepting responsibility and begging stakeholders for forgiveness. While the morally correct thing to do is accept responsibility for wrongdoing, organizations oftentimes are hesitant to directly apologize in any official statements because that can open doors for liability issues. “Potential drawback to this strategy is that it might invite lawsuits from victims” (Benoit, 1997, p.181). While it may be the morally right decision, it may not allow for the organization to control damage and reputation as closely as it would prefer.

Each organization and the crises it will incur are incredibly different from the next, and range in the magnitude of the potential damage that can be caused. Image repair and the different strategies it employs have been applied to many crises from extremely well known to those that went unnoticed. Multiple strategies can be used for one situation and most often are employed in multiples. Image repair has been used in cases of famous athletes, oil companies, credit card companies, etc. (Benoit, 1997).

Image repair discourse is important because William Benoit argues that no firm or individual is safe from experiencing an attack on image at some point in time. He states that there are at least four reasons why this is true (Benoit, 1997). First, the world has limited

resources. There is limited money, equipment, resources, time and so on. Resources will not be distributed fairly. Second, circumstances beyond control prevent things from going as planned and being able to meet expectations. Third, humans are not perfect and make mistakes. Some mistakes are honest while others are not. Some mistakes are more major than others that would call for image repair action. The last reason is that individuals and companies all have different goals in mind and priorities. At times, this may call for compromise, for example, finding the balance between protecting society from criminals while preserving the rights of those accused (Benoit, 2015). These four reasons demonstrate the inevitability of an attack on image. It is not a matter of if, but when.

Image Repair Applications

Image repair strategies have been used in a wide variety of crisis situations from airplane crashes to controversial viral videos involving a popular restaurant chain that serves pizza. No matter the situation or crisis, image repair efforts can help guide the individual or organization into a direction of restoring a damaged image or reputation. However, it is still expected that the organization has a crisis plan already in place. William Benoit writes, “Although crises can take a variety of forms, some potential crises can be anticipated. An airline should anticipate the possibility of a crash; a restaurant should prepare for cases of food-poisoning” (Benoit, 1997, p. 182). Image repair strategies should not be the only form of crisis plan an organization has in place. It should serve as a supplement and guide to messages that organizations can use depending on how it chooses to handle the crisis. The following cases exemplify the range that image repair discourse has, but also displays what can happen when too many strategies are used in the same crisis.

Airline Crisis: On September 8th, 1994 USAir 737 passenger jet crashed near Pittsburg and killed 132 people. In this situation, criticism is going to come from all angles (Schofield, 1994). It will come from saddened and anger- stricken families, other companies, and major newspapers. In this particular case, the crash earned USAir a serious attack on the front page of *The Times*. In reaction to the crash and attack from *The Times*, USAir appointed a new person over safety operations, had PRC Aviation audit its operations and developed a new advertising campaign that was aimed at showcasing the airline's safety practices. These three actions were the foundation of its imager repair campaign. A bolstering strategy was used as well as denial and corrective action (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997).

In published letters, USAir acknowledged that the planes are safe and inspected by maintenance facilities as well as review their records. Reinforcing that the planes are safe was denying the accusation that they are dangerous. The next strategy USAir employed was corrective action by appointing General Robert C. Oaks, “a highly decorated command pilot and the former commander in chief of U.S Air Forces in Europe” (Schofield, 1994, p.9A). By appointing the commander, they hoped to demonstrate to the public and their own company its dedication to safety. Bringing in this new person was their form of corrective action-in hopes this tragedy would not strike again.

The discussion of this article summarizes that USAir used a bolstering strategy, but it was not used well. It was an appropriate choice but not well implicated because they chose flight attendants to address the public with statements, rather than mechanics, which the public would may have found more credible. USAir also chose to use denial and corrective action. Which both are effective strategies when used well. The main argument for these strategies not being as effective is that if they were denying accusations that they were not safe, they would not need to

take corrective action to fix the problem. It was contradictory to claim there were no safety issues while simultaneously employing strategies to increase safety.

Higher Education: On March 13, 2006, Duke University men's lacrosse team was accused of raping a woman at an off-campus party. Allegedly, the team invited dancers to the party and one of them was raped by a member of the lacrosse team at this party (Meadows & Thomas, 2006). Even though in the end the players were found not guilty, it was still perceived as true and that is what matters according to image repair theory. It does not matter if an event really happened or not. If the public thinks it took place, it needs to be treated as such. One event that took place at the residence of one sports team tarnished the university's image for a period of time. While the majority of the blame and damage was associated with the sports team itself, stakeholders, donors, alumni, sports fans, current students, faculty and staff were all affected. Even though university administration or the entire athletic department was not seen as solely responsible, they were still blamed for having an oversight on their part for allowing the party to take place initially. As sneaky as college students are, there is realistically no way university administration or police can monitor all activity on and off campus at all times. However, the range of reputation is vast and that is another reason why image repair efforts are so important. The analysis of this case study showed that the university had to deal with allegations against the initial event and criticism caused by a delayed reaction. It was identified that they used a strategy that employed separation which was an expression of disappointment. This was a bit complicated and ended up not being the only strategy that was used (Len-Rios, 2006).

Overlapping too many strategies can cause the accused to appear more guilty and less credible. Image repair strategies need to be chosen strategically and appropriately thought out before taking action. Image repair discourse offers a variety of strategies and gives detailed

explanations of how to navigate each strategy, but it is up to the accused to use the strategy responsibly or efforts are futile.

Food Industry Disaster: In 2009, a video prank gone wrong wrecked total havoc at Domino's. Two employees filmed themselves tampering with food by putting nasal mucus on orders that were supposedly prepped to be delivered to customers (Clifford, 2009). The two employees were fired from Domino's and faced felony charges. Domino's took corrective action by firing the individuals and took them to court for a civil lawsuit. A public apology was also published on YouTube by Domino's. The president of Domino's spoke in the video and it was published to the same platform in which the viral video was released initially. Domino's acted swiftly and published the message on the same platform in which its reputation was damaged. Apologizing to stakeholders and issuing a quick response was an effective use of image repair discourse.

In addition to the cases mentioned above, image repair discourse has been applied to a myriad of crises. From small to large, caused by an individual or organization, and from the food industry to airline industry, image repair has been used to explore and analyze the strategies used by individuals and organizations experiencing a crisis. However, an area where image repair research is lacking is in the news media industry. More specifically it has not been applied to a news media organization experiencing a crisis caused by sexual harassment allegations.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is more common than what may be originally assumed. According to a study published by the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 2016, anywhere from almost a quarter to more than eight in ten women experience sexual harassment and assault in the workplace (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016). The U.S Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, defines sexual assault as, "Any non-

consensual sexual act prescribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks the capacity to consent” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018).

Some of the most common workplace environments for women to experience sexual harassment are in male-dominated fields and working in a setting where men possess significant power (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). It is no secret that the news media industry and entertainment businesses are highly dominated by men in positions of power. This imbalance of power and lack of monitoring creates an environment where individuals with positions of power feel as though they are immune to rules and policies (Sepler, 2015). Frequently the situations go unnoticed or the incident is not reported to higher management, but this does mean that it simply goes away. The consequences of sexual harassment extend beyond the personal impact on the individuals involved.

Sexual harassment has negative effects on mental and physical health, reduces opportunities for on the job learning and advancement, can force them into changing careers or unemployment (Shaw, Hegewisch, Phil, & Hess, 2018). In addition to the horrible affects sexual harassment has on the people who experience it, the organization itself suffers consequences. Legal costs, costs of employee turnover, low productivity due to absences are all results of sexual harassment cases in the workplace. Even those fellow employees who witness or hear of the sexual harassment taking place are affected mentally (Shaw et al., 2018). The exact monetary value that accompanies sexual harassment is difficult to gauge because not all victims report. However, the EEOC published all financial settlements it received and in 2017. \$46.3 million was awarded or spent in some capacity as a result of sexual harassment charges (U.S EEOC, 2018).

Many studies have applied image repair to crises and disasters of many types, but a particular sector that has not been explored is applying image repair when the news media itself is experiencing a crisis. This gap in the literature leads to the main overarching research question: do news organization also use the same image repair strategies as non-news organizations? Under the pressure of a crisis, news organizations have twice the amount of pressure than a non-news organization. When a news organization is undergoing a crisis, it has to simultaneously work to fix its reputation, and it must continue to report the news and continue business as usual, as outlined in the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics (SPJ).

The SPJ Code of Ethics explains four main objectives: Seek Truth and Report It, Minimize Harm, Act Independently, and Be Accountable and Transparent (SPJ, 2014). While these principles may seem fairly easy to follow until seeking and reporting the truth as well as being entirely transparent could result in severe legal consequences for the organization. In the first principle it is stated that journalists should provide context and not oversimplify a story, gather, update and correct information throughout the story, identify sources clearly and lastly that the public is entitled to as much information as possible (SPJ, 2014). Through expanding on the first principle alone, one can understand the complexities a news organization will encounter while undergoing a crisis at home base.

In addition to the responsibility of being an ethical journalistic organization, a news organization does not realistically have the option to resolve the offensive acts in question while keeping a lower profile after time has passed, hoping that everyone will forget about the crisis. A news organization's livelihood is made in the spotlight by providing information to the public. Non news organizations are different in that they may not even reach a certain audience or be

especially well known until a crisis brings its name into the forefront of the news media attention.

However, as news media organizations consistently retain a certain amount of attention from viewers tuning in every morning or night. As a result of this constant attention, viewers and other publics may feel more connected with news anchors as they are a familiar face and viewers may see them as a reliable source of information. Non news organizations have to make efforts to create those “personal” bonds with customers and stakeholders.

With news organizations, habitual viewers may feel as though there is a social bond between them and the TV personality which are built through years of watching the same news program, even though they have never had an interaction in real life (Anderson & Anderson, 2007, pp. 207). News organizations have stakeholders and publics just as other non-news organizations, except news organizations are being watched by millions. Will that additional pressure potentially change the way that a news organization would use image repair efforts and strategies?

This research aims to discover if NBC News and CBS News used any image repair strategies while experiencing a crisis that was caused by firing a well-known anchor due to sexual harassment allegations. While the news media industry is financially the same as other organizations in that it is a for-profit, frequently publicly-traded company, when it comes to image repair and reputation management they are not the same because their business model requires them to report on the news and their on-air talent are frequently viewed as celebrities.

For example, an airline organization would assign a spokesperson to give any and all official statements about a crisis so there is no confusion for its audiences. However, news media organizations already have anchors who are recognizable and familiar individuals. In that sense,

the spokesperson for news organizations is already built in, which can be both an advantage and disadvantage for the organization.

Research Questions and Methodology

Research Questions

As explored in the review of literature, image repair discourse has been applied to a wide variety of crises experienced by both individuals and organizations as a whole. One type of organization that lacks image repair application is news media organizations. Using image repair theory to analyze crises experienced by news media organizations is certainly multifaceted because of certain factors such as the news cycle, news anchors just doing their jobs, and journalistic objectivity. However, because this application of image repair to news organization is relatively novel, the purpose of this research was to first identify the presence of any image repair strategies to begin to scratch the surface in this research area.

R1: Did NBC and CBS responses to the public and employees following sexual harassment allegations align with an image repair strategy?

R2: If NBC and CBS news enacted an image repair strategy in response to the respective sexual harassment allegations, which strategy or strategies closely aligns with each?

Methodology

This study analyzed the events and primary materials released surrounding the termination of Charlie Rose and Matt Lauer by using air on transcripts. Specifically, the transcripts were pulled from NBC's *Today Show* and NBC Evening News, and *CBS This Morning* and CBS Evening News. They were then analyzed through the categories outlined in image repair theory articulated by William Benoit.

A case study method best suited this research. While case studies are often criticized because they do not lend themselves well to generalized results and some scholars claim they lack rigor, the case study method provides an opportunity to explore the research questions extensively (Alpi & Evans, 2019). In depth explanations of examples of each strategy are crucial in order to explain the complexity of the situation in its entirety. As there are no set-in stone ways that organizations can implement image repair strategies, a qualitative analysis allows for similarities to be described between the two news organizations as well as an opportunity to identify and describe any new strategies that emerged. Similar to the method used to analyze the case of Duke University's lacrosse team, this study uses the pre-existing image repair strategies and the description of each to identify the presence of a strategy (Len-Rios, 2010).

The case study method pairs well with a textual analysis. The data used was on air transcripts that included spoken conversations between anchors mixed with emails and other printed text. A textual analysis allows for all of these mediums to be analyzed for the messages and meanings. "Visual, written, or spoken messages provide cues to ways through which communication may be understood. Often the messages are understood as influenced by and reflective of larger social structures"

This research used the database NewsBank in order to retrieve on air transcripts. Newsbank is an online database that provides transcripts of on-air segments, printed articles and electronic publications from news networks all over the world. On-air transcripts were chosen as the source of information because this is what most viewers will see, and it is straight from the organization experiencing the crisis so ideally this is where the image repair efforts will begin. Any mention of internal memos or emails sent out from upper management will be mentioned on air so ideally this should allow for a grasp of how the entire situation was handled. Once the

transcripts were retrieved within the timeframe specified below, they were organized chronologically and read once, and then read again in order to identify an overarching theme that most closely reflects an image repair strategy. If no image repair strategy is apparent, the transcript will be placed into an “other” category from which future implications or suggestions for additions to the existing theory can be drawn.

To find the respective samples, a keyword search for the two individuals (Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose) were conducted. Beginning with Charlie Rose, the study examined the CBS Morning Show, by entering the keyword, “Charlie Rose” and pulled the results from November 20, 2017 to October 31, 2019. Searching for mentions of Charlie Rose on *CBS This Morning* yielded 28 results. By doing the same search for the nightly segment of CBS, which is CBS Evening News, 19 results were found (See appendices 1 and 2, pp. 31-32). For the case of Matt Lauer, the search was narrowed to mentions of Matt Lauer’s name on *The Today Show* using, “Matt Lauer” and pulled the results from November 27, 2017 to October 31st, 2019. By searching for mentions of Matt Lauer on *The Today Show*, 60 results were presented. By searching the mentions of Matt Lauer on *NBC Nightly News*, 12 segments were presented (See appendices 3 and 4, pp. 33-34). In total, there are 72 segments to analyze concerning Matt Lauer, and 47 to analyze concerning Charlie Rose.

To aid with organization, a chart was created which includes two tables for each network that lists each transcript chronologically, which segment it belongs to (morning or night) and then strategy or strategies found. A table that outlines Image Repair Theory was also created that lists each image repair strategy, the subcategories and Benoit’s definition of each that will be used to categorize the transcripts (See appendix 2).

The news about Charlie Rose’s termination broke on November 20, 2017, and Matt Lauer’s termination was announced November 27, 2017, so those are the dates in which the search began. This particular time frame was chosen because it captures the date in which each anchor was fired and will hopefully reveal a wide range of results. The dates of the search were extended to October 31, 2019 because of the book that was just published by Ronan Farrow, *Capture and Kill*, which has caused the Matt Lauer case to resurface and brought forth more information than what was previously known (Farrow, 2019).

These two particular instances were chosen because they are of the most recent scandals in the news media and Matt Lauer’s case in particular is gaining traction once again because of Ronan Farrow’s recent book (2019) in addition to an Apple TV series, *The Morning Show*, which is suspected to be an allusion to The Today Show particularly surrounding Matt Lauer’s behavior (2019). At the end of each individual analysis, it will be determined if a common theme exists among both networks through the use of similar image repairs efforts in hopes to contribute to the applications of this theory. If it is not clear that a strategy was used, or an aspect of a strategy does not seem to fit the situation, an opportunity to expand the theory into more specific uses for news media organizations will be addressed.

Table 1. Image Repair Strategies and Categories

Category	Subcategories	Description
Denial	<i>Blame Shifting</i>	Denial- Denying that the act occurred, is offensive, or the firm performed the act.
		Blame shifting-arguing that the accuser is actually to blame
Evasion of Responsibility	<i>Response to Offensive Act</i>	Evasion of Responsibility-Arguing that the offensive act was a reasonable reaction to a provocation
	<i>Defeasibility</i>	Defeasibility- the accused alleges lack of information or control over

		the offensive act
	<i>Accident</i>	Accident- claiming that the offensive act occurred by accident and was out of the accused's control
	<i>Good Intentions</i>	Good intentions- arguing that the offensive act was unintentionally detrimental
Reduce Offensiveness	<i>Bolstering</i>	Reduce offensiveness- any of the following strategies are an attempt to overall change the perception of the offensive act into some less offensive
	<i>Minimization</i>	Bolstering-bringing up past accomplishments or good deeds of the accused
	<i>Differentiation</i>	Minimization- an attempt to downplay the extent of the damage or overall offensiveness of the act
	<i>Transcendence</i>	Transcendence-framing the act into a more favorable context
	<i>Attack the Accuser</i>	Attack the accuser- bring up wrongful doings of the accuser
	<i>Compensation</i>	Compensation- offering financial or material goods as an apology
Corrective Action		Corrective action-promising to correct behavior in order to never repeat the offensive act
Mortification		Mortification- accepting responsibility for the act and begging for forgiveness
Other		

Chapter 3: Analysis of Charlie Rose and CBS

“Charlie Being Charlie”:

Background of Charlie Rose Scandal

On November 20, 2017, *The Washington Post* published an article titled, “Eight Women Say Charlie Rose sexually harassed them- with nudity, groping and lewd calls” (Brittan & Carmon, 2017). The article caused havoc on CBS and PBS networks both of which employed Rose—The Morning Show at CBS and The Charlie Rose Show at PBS. Rose had a longstanding presence in New York journalist circles having hosted The Charlie Rose Show since 1991. He was also the morning co-host for *CBS This Morning* and was an occasional correspondent for 60 Minutes and 60 Minutes II. In fact, Rose started his career at CBS in 1984 before creating The Charlie Rose Show at PBS.

Within hours after the article was published, PBS and Bloomberg LP immediately suspended distribution of The Charlie Rose Show which had been on-air since 1991 (Brittain & Camron, 2017). Victim survivors were a mix of women who had worked for both CBS and PBS. Eight women came forward to *The Washington Post* with information that Rose made unwanted sexual advances toward them, including lewd comments and phone calls, unwanted touching, and walking around naked in their presence. (Brittain & Camron, 2017). These women were employees or had wished to be employees of Charlie Rose for his show *The Charlie Rose Show* (Brittain & Camron, 2017).

In May of 2018, 27 women reported to *The Washington Post* that over a 33-year period they were sexually harassed by Rose. The very first reports were stated to have begun in 1986 and the most recent with a report in April 2017 (King, 2018). On November 21, 2017, CBS News and PBS announced its decision to take Rose off the air. Despite the seriousness of the allegations and eventual termination of his position, Charlie Rose posted a response via Twitter,

“I deeply apologize for my inappropriate behavior. I am greatly embarrassed. I have behaved insensitively at times, and I accept responsibility for that, though I do not believe that all of these allegations are accurate” (O’Donnell, 2017). Rose then goes on to say, “I always felt that I was pursuing shared feelings, even though I now realize I was mistaken” (O’Donnell, 2017). It is apparent that Charlie Rose as an individual utilized a denial strategy regarding the allegations, but it is not made clear if Charlie Rose’s statements are prepared in correspondence with the narrative that CBS created or if those statements are prepared to represent him strictly as an individual. For the purpose of this research, it cannot be either assumed or confirmed that Charlie Rose’s statements represent CBS, but Charlie Rose’s statements should still be considered in order to broaden the perspective of the entire case.

When Rose’s suspension was first discussed on air, comments made by CNN anchors James Warren and Brian Stetler were shown that were oppositional in nature to Charlie Rose. Although these were not direct quotes from CBS’s own anchors, it is interesting that were still included in the broadcast. Brian Stetler stated, “He has a lot of questions he needs to answer. The tables need to be turned on him now” and from James Warren, “I think he’s probably toast professionally” (O’Donnell, 2017). These quotes may have been included to further display CBS’s disappointment in Rose’s actions by including how an external source, such as a fellow news media organization, perceived the situation.

The overall tone of the discussion of Rose’s termination was held in matter of fact manner. CBS anchors, including Norah O’Donnell and Gayle King explained the logistics of the situation very quickly and gave some disturbing details reported to *The Washington Post*. Beginning with the first report, CBS correspondent, Bianna Golodryga stated CBS had spoken with one of the female victims reporting that the accusations are accurate. In response, the anchors do not make excuses or speculate that the accusations could be false. However, some of

Rose's achievements were mentioned such as Rose's interview program that made him a household name and "In 2014, he was one of Time magazine's One Hundred Most Influential People in the World." (O'Donnell, 2017).

Both CBS news and PBS released separate statements and ex-anchor Charlie Rose released a separate statement thereafter. The same article went on to report that the executive director of Charlie Rose's show, Yvette Vega, was told on multiple occasions about Charlie's inappropriate and terrible behavior but did nothing about it. In a statement to *The Washington Post* she says, "I should have stood up for them. I failed. It is crushing. I should have helped them" (Brittain & Camron, 2017). It was reported that Vega's typical response to employees' concern about Charlie was just to shrug and say, "That's just Charlie being Charlie" (Brittain & Camron, 2017).

3.1 Corrective Action

The theme of corrective action appears with first the suspension, then firing of Charlie Rose. The anchors boast a swift termination of Charlie Roses' position, a quote from CBS correspondent Vladimir Duthiers read, "CBS New fires Charlie Rose less than twenty-four hours after a report accused him of multiple cases of sexual harassment. And three CBS employees now say he also harassed them" (Mason, 2017). Each time his termination was mentioned, it is accompanied with some statement that expresses that his behavior is unacceptable. A statement from CBS News President David Rhodes read, "Despite Charlie Charlie's important journalistic contribution to our news division, there is absolutely nothing more important, in this or any organization, than ensuring a safe, professional workplace--a support of an environment where people feel they can do their best work. We need to be such a place" (King, 2017). Corrective action involves restoring the situation to its prior state before the offensive act and or making adjustments to prevent similar offensive acts in the future. (Beniot, 1997). David Rhodes'

statement alluded to making changes to CBS through firing Charlie Rose as well as stating that CBS News needs to be a safe and professional workplace.

Less than a week after Charlie Roses' termination, Matt Lauer was fired from NBC News for "inappropriate sexual behavior in the workplace" (Guthrie, 2017). Matt Lauer's termination made headlines and was discussed in the same tone as the termination of its own employee. The anchors Norah O'Donnell and Gayle King sympathize with the anchors of NBC with how the situation is affecting them and the entire network. It is a news organization's duty to report on events objectively, but CBS had to be especially cautious when reporting on Matt Lauer's termination as those comments could be seen as a direct reflection of the events taking place at CBS. A quote from Gayle King sums up the comparison well, "But it does send a message and shows that you were not too big to fall, that it-- there is now clearly a no zero-tolerance policy. And I think that that's a good thing. It's painful as this is when this happens to someone that we know and that we care about" (King, 2017).

Unlike anchors at NBC, anchors at CBS were less forgiving about the magnitude of Charlie Rose's actions. They mention the impact on the victims and as well as how difficult it is to come forward with that type of information. Overall, the victims are mentioned much more frequently in this case of Charlie Rose. For example, a common quote that reappears in different verbiage is, "Women cannot achieve equality in the workplace or in society until there is a reckoning and a taking of responsibilities" (King, 2017). While the CBS News anchor mentions that the human resources department and communications department of CBS deny knowledge of any prior obligations, the seriousness and magnitude of the situation is discussed openly on air.

In May of 2018, *CBS This Morning* reported an updated number of female coworkers or employees who claim to have been harassed by Charlie Rose. The number rose from 8 to 27

according to an article published by *The Washington Post*, but CBS did not release an official number of complaints that were made. In response to this article, CBS officials released a statement, "Since we terminated Charlie Rose, we've worked to strengthen existing systems to ensure a safe environment where everyone can do their best work" (King, 2018). In the same transcript, a statement from CBS President David Rhodes said, "We have continued to investigate a number of issues. Several important steps have already been taken," including adding in-person training around misconduct, and this training is mandatory (King, 2017). When an organization or individual promises behavior or policy changes such as mandatory, those actions and announcing them fall into corrective action (Benoit, 2004). The transcript did not detail exactly how long the training will be implemented or the specific content of the training other than 'training around misconduct' and that a team or task force has been formed that serves the purpose of, "a working group of colleagues to report issues and handle problems as management" (King, 2018). While both descriptions are vague, the promise of some sort of corrective action is present.

3.2 Denial & Defeasibility

Uses of denial strategy began to appear on November 22, 2017 when CBS anchors reported a statement released that reads, "The CBS News communications office issued a statement, saying "This is new information. Beyond that we have no comment at this time" (King, 2017). While reporting the details of the Lauer scandal, the CBS anchor, Bianna Golodryga reported that, "CBS News says human resources didn't receive any complaints until after Rose' termination" (King, November 30th, 2017).

Uses of the denial strategy increased as *The Washington Post* continued to increase pressure and release more information regarding Charlie Rose's alleged behavior. By May 2018, the number of women who came forward about Charlie Rose's behavior increased from 8 to

almost 30. In the publication released in May 2018, it included allegations that three women approached management at CBS News, but no action was taken (Golodryga, 2018). The anchors on *CBS This Morning* are very open and detailed about the content published in *The Washington Post* articles. The anchors did not confirm these allegations when discussing them, they only commented that the behavior is unacceptable. CBS distanced themselves from the crisis. Anna Werner, CBS News correspondent stated, “CBS News says it cannot corroborate or confirm many of the situations described in the Post report. The company has said it never received complaints of sexual harassment by Rose before his firing last November, but Rose's conduct allegedly spanned decades” (Golodryga, 2018). Officials recognize the time span of the allegations but continue to deny having any knowledge prior to what led to Charlie Rose’s recent termination.

By May of 2018, lawsuits were officially filed against Charlie Rose by three former employees of CBS. CBS correspondent Vladimir Duthiers stated pertaining to these lawsuits, “[The women] faced repeated, ongoing and unlawful physical and verbal sexual harassment by Rose, And that CBS ‘unlawfully retaliated’ against one of them and that the company ‘failed to investigate’ the matter” (Duthiers, 2018). In response to these lawsuits and the allegations that CBS was covering Charlie Rose’s actions for a long period of time, CBS released a quote that stated, “We will vigorously defend against the allegations pertaining to CBS News” (Duthiers, 2018).

Uses of denial become much more pervasive and aggressive as the stakes become higher in reference to what CBS was accused of covering up or hiding. Given the accusations that the sexual harassment occurred for decades without being met with consequences, the threat to CBS’s reputation was high. The alleged behavior was not categorized as one isolated occurrence, it was alleged to have perpetuated for years which would lead into suspicions that management

was aware but did not take action, which puts a large portion of the responsibility onto CBS as an organization failing to realize that such events were happening.

Although there is promise of corrective action, CBS officials still denied any knowledge of prior allegations made about Charlie Rose, “CBS News corporate office reported in November that it never received complaints of sexual harassment by Charlie Rose until after his termination. The corporate office hasn't revealed how many women have stepped forward since then” (King, 2018). Despite the promise of policy changes and internal investigation due to the allegations against Charlie Rose, statements of denial of any prior knowledge are released which can cause confusion to the audience and inconsistency in the use of the image repair strategies utilized.

Defeasibility was used when CBS released statements that claimed it was not aware of Rose's behavior. Defeasibility is used when an organization or individual blames ignorance or lack of control of the situation to escape some of the responsibility or lessen the offensiveness of the act (Benoit, 2007). In this particular case, defeasibility is intertwined with the use of denial strategy because the network denies having the knowledge that Rose sexually harassed other employees. Denial and defeasibility essentially serve the same purpose for this case study. Interestingly, CBS does not necessarily deny the possibility that Rose behaved in this manner, it only denied the allegations against the network. For example, in a broadcast correspondent Vladimir Duthiers read a statement from CBS, “We will vigorously defend against the allegations pertaining to CBS News” (Duthiers, 2018). Throughout the analysis, denial and defeasibility were seen interchangeably. In summary, CBS denied both having the knowledge of Rose's behavior prior to his termination in 2017 and denied allegations that it received complaints from employees or management and that it ignored those claims.

3.3 Blame Shifting

During the Rose scandal CBS used blame shifting in an unique way. CBS's utilization of blame shifting appears to be more focused towards Charlie Rose and his alleged abuse of power. In January 2018, Ann Curry visited *CBS This Morning* to interview with Gayle King and Norah O'Donnell. The initial purpose of the interview was to discuss Ann Curry's new show, but Norah O'Donnell quickly steered the conversation to the topic of Matt Lauer's termination at NBC and subsequently Charlie Rose's termination.

Throughout the conversation Ann Curry seems to want to stay objective about the conversation, but very direct questions are asked by Gayle King and Norah O'Donnell such as, "Do you think Matt Lauer abused his power?" and "You had heard things, you knew things, what does that mean?" (King, 2018). Openly discussing the abuse of power or making reference to it alludes to the idea that it is recognized that Charlie Rose and another high profile individual like Matt Lauer abused power in the workplace.

Although Charlie Rose worked for CBS, he was still an individual with decision making power. Recognizing that Charlie Rose abused power and privacy shifts the blame for the offensive acts onto him as an individual and somewhat relieves the blame from the network. Rose's individuality was used to CBS's advantage and begins to allude to a separation or distancing strategy that is not yet included in image repair discourse.

In addition to shifting the blame to Rose as an individual, the questions posed by Gayle King and Norah O'Donnell allude to the diffusion of blame onto passive fellow employees. When Ann Curry was asked if she had heard any details of Matt Lauer's behavior, it was assumed that there may have been conversation between other employees about what allegedly occurred at NBC News regarding Matt Lauer's behavior. The assumption or statement that the inappropriate sexual workplace behavior was not a secret alludes to a diffusion of blame onto other employees. Those other employees could include those who knew or heard rumors about

alleged behavior but did not act, including management and coworkers. If this were the case, it is not consistent with either narrative or image repair strategy that CBS or NBC news tried to utilize. As noted in the earlier sections of this study, CBS officials posit that no known claims made previous to the article that led to Charlie Roses' suspension then termination.

3.4 Bolstering

Bolstering appeared in the form of reminding the audience and viewers of Charlie Rose's success and other contributions to *CBS This Morning* and his own show on PBS, *The Charlie Rose Show*. Norah O'Donnell and Gayle King mentioned their closeness and friendship with Charlie Rose and how these actions have affected them personally. Interestingly, Charlie Rose's status and success was mentioned throughout the analysis despite the reasoning behind his termination.

However, CBS's use of bolstering was peculiar because it seemed to be paired with reminding viewers of the impact Charlie Rose's behavior had on the anchors and those fellow coworkers who knew him personally. Drawing attention to the widespread consequences of Charlie Rose's behavior onto the organization itself does not readily fall into an image repair category, so that could leave room for additions to theory such recognizing that the organization itself has also fallen victim to the offensive actions. In summary, anchors such as Gayle King and Norah O'Donnell mentioned their friendship with Charlie, his contributions to the network, but also reminded the audience that they were also hurt by his behavior. Normally, according to image repair discourse, bolstering is used to put the accused into a more positive light in order to lessen the offensiveness of the actions (Benoit, 2007). It is interesting that while CBS used bolstering in some broadcasts when referring to Rose, it also demonstrated the impact of his action onto the organization itself.

CBS Evening News Analysis

3.5 Denial

On the evening segment of the news on the first day that Charlie Rose's suspension was announced, a brief recap of the events was recounted. CBS Evening News correspondent Jim Axelrod read CBS's initial reaction to the allegations which was, "Charlie Rose is suspended immediately while we look into this matter. These allegations are extremely disturbing, and we take them seriously" (Mason, 2017). PBS and Bloomberg also suspended the distribution of Charlie Rose's program. The suspension of Charlie Rose due to the behavior and acknowledgement that it was offensive begins the use of the corrective action strategy by CBS. The evening report also shows Rose's response to the allegations which read, "I deeply apologize for my inappropriate behavior. I am greatly embarrassed. I have behaved insensitively at times, and I accept responsibility for that, though I do not believe that all of these allegations are accurate" (Mason, 2017).

When the allegations first began to surface, a clear distinction was made that the alleged victims worked for Charlie Rose Inc, not CBS or PBS. CBS was quick to highlight this distinction in hopes to dodge some of the blame and responsibility, however as time went on it was made apparent that the victims were employees of all three organizations. The distinction was made especially clear in the November 20, 2017 evening broadcast, one of the women who reported to *The Washington Post* was not an employee of CBS or PBS, but rather an employee of Charlie Rose Inc. "The women who spoke to the Post worked for Charlie Rose Inc, not CBS or PBS, where his interview show airs, or Bloomberg, where it's taped and rebroadcast. The allegations in *The Washington Post* article include Rose making unwanted sexual advances in the form of lewd phone calls, groping, and walking around naked in front of the women" (Mason, 2017). By making a point that these reports came from former employees of Charlie Rose Inc,

not CBS exclusively, this alluded to CBS denying direct involvement with Charlie Rose's alleged behavior.

This did not last long, however, as another *Washington Post* exposé revealed details that some of the women who were harassed by Charlie Rose did in fact work as employees of CBS. To quote CBS correspondent Bianna Golodryga on May 4, 2018, “In a story published yesterday, the *Post* detailed three occasions during which it says CBS managers were warned of Rose's conduct. The newspaper spoke to twenty-seven women who claimed Rose sexually harassed them, including fourteen here at CBS” (Golodryga, 2018).

Despite CBS's quick and initial response to allegations using a denial strategy, a contradictory detail surfaced in the November 20, 2017 CBS broadcast, Yvette Vega, the executive producer of the *Charlie Rose Show*, was said to have received complaints of Charlie Rose's behavior but did not take action. The quote from the transcript reads, “At *The Charlie Rose Show*, a small group of employees answered directly to executive producer Yvette Vega, who said she deeply regrets not helping them” (Mason, 2017). At this point in the analysis, *The Washington Post* has not yet released the article with information that specifically CBS employees were harassed by Charlie Rose. The fact that the executive producer of Charlie Rose's show admits that she was informed of the inappropriate sexual behavior but did not take action was not a responsible move for the organization and was foreshadowing what was about to be revealed by CBS News.

Even though the first *Washington Post* article published about Charlie Rose stated that eight women had complaints of Charlie Rose's behavior, *CBS Evening News* reported that CBS only identified four women who worked for CBS who had complaints against Charlie Rose. “Just last week, *CBS This Morning* co-host Charlie Rose was fired after *The Washington Post* revealed eight allegations of sexual misconduct at his PBS-sponsored talk show. CBS News

independently identified four women at CBS who also say Rose acted inappropriately” (Mason, 2017). This statement might lead one to believe that CBS is partially accepting the allegations as true or tried to lessen the severity of the allegations by only supporting it halfway. Four women who were allegedly harassed is not better than eight, when the number should be zero. Despite the strange rebuttal to the allegations from *The Washington Post*, the common theme in this case of Charlie Rose is that anchors and CBS officials do not deny or doubt that Charlie Rose behaved inappropriately, but they do not accept the allegations that other employees or management was aware of his behavior prior to November of 2017.

In May of 2018, the number of women who Charlie Rose allegedly harassed skyrocketed from 8 to more almost 30 women. With this new information, signs of a bolstering strategy began to appear as well in more aggressive and direct statements of denial from CBS. “In response to the *Post* article today, CBS News said, “We cannot corroborate or confirm many of the situations described” (Glor, 2018). The statements of denial evolved from not having information about Charlie Rose’s behavior to denying more specific allegations as the number of women involved increased. In this same report, it is reiterated that CBS claims that there was no prior knowledge of Charlie Rose’s behavior nor was there any knowledge of any actual claims made by employees, “CBS News says there were no formal complaints filed with human resources against Rose before he was fired. In a statement today, CBS News President David Rhodes said “Management has been working to create a safe environment for the staff. The journalism we do here is important--but nothing is more important than the people who do it” (Glor, 2018). This quote solidified CBS stance that no formal complaints were made about Charlie Rose’s behavior prior to the complaints received in November of 2017. The second part of the statement referring to “creating a safe working environment” falls under corrective action.

CBS's Rose scandal was compounded by multiple allegations of sexual harassment by executives. On July 27, 2018, *CBS Evening News* reported on the *New Yorker* article that stated Les Moonves, the chairman and CEO of CBS News was accused of sexual harassment by six women (Glor, 2018). There were also allegations that the *60 Minutes* executive producer, Jeff Fager, allowed harassment to occur. It was reported that CBS responded to the allegations by quoting Jeff Fager's quote, "Fager called those claims "False, anonymous," and said, "They do not hold up to editorial "scrutiny" (Glor, 2018). Based on the statements given by Rose regarding the allegations towards him, denial of the allegations would be expected, however, CBS did not issue a statement that denies the allegations, only promises to look into them, and if anything is discovered, "appropriate action" will be taken, which appears as an allusion to corrective action. CBS is quoted in an official statement that in part reads, "All allegations of personal misconduct are to be taken seriously. Upon the conclusion of that investigation, the board will promptly review the findings and take appropriate action" (Glor, 2018). Even though the described action is not specific as to whether that would include the termination of Les Moonves position or other repercussions, the promise that a behavior will change or will be met with consequences can be considered a promise of corrective action.

Although Les Moonves can be considered more of a behind the scenes individual regarding CBS Network, it is still important to recognize some aspects of how CBS handled the allegations because CBS just terminated Charlie Rose in November of 2017. Despite Les Moonves not being an individual case for this study, it may seem erroneous to not at least acknowledge the event. An instance of bolstering was identified through the report of the allegations against Les Moonves. While Les Moonves may have been as commonplace in the American household as Charlie Rose, CBS correspondent Anna Werner makes a point to describe to his success, "As CBS chairman and CEO, Moonves is credited with helping turn the

prime-time lineup into a perennial winner, helping make CBS the country's most-watched television network. The allegations against him come in the middle of a battle over the future of CBS” (Glor, 2018).

Bolstering is an attempt to lessen the offensiveness of the act by reminding the audience or public of the positive accomplishments or successes of the accused organization or individual (Beniot, 1997). In this particular case where the offensive act is sexual harassment and or abuse against other individual, bolstering may not perform as well as CBS may hope. The offensive act is something that can be more personal to viewers and stakeholders as opposed to a crisis caused by a security breach or embezzlement accusations. While lives of employees and stakeholders are still affected in all of these crises, crises caused by sexual harassment allegations can affect stakeholders more personally, and the accused can be narrowed down to one specific individual or individuals, as opposed to resting the blame on the security or oversight of an organization as a whole. The individual factor of these cases is what makes them so complex.

Interestingly CBS used a deflection strategy because of the NBC Lauer case throughout the Rose scandal. Around a week after Charlie Rose is fired, Matt Lauer of NBC is fired for the same allegations of sexual harassment in the workplace. While *CBS This Morning* still thoroughly reports on the story as it develops of Charlie Rose, *CBS Evening News* favors more in detailing the case with Matt Lauer. While neither situation at CBS or NBC was completely predictable, one important aspect that image repair theory does not account for is the news cycle. While CBS does not stop reporting entirely about Charlie Rose, it certainly grants room to turn the attention to a different story, although not so different, just occurring at another network. CBS reports on Matt Lauer’s termination fairly objectively. It would be wise to do so because any overly negative comments or speculations could be applied or reflected in the situation that occurred at CBS with Charlie Rose.

3.6 Bolstering

Bolstering attempts to shine light on the accused individual or organization in hopes to lessen the offensiveness of the act (Beniot, 1997). Bolstering was not as frequently identified throughout the span of this analysis of Charlie Rose and CBS as it was in the case of Matt Lauer and NBC, but it began to appear more definite whenever the seriousness of the allegations against Charlie Rose increased. For instance, a quote from a former producer of *60 Minutes* was displayed, “Jeff Fager, executive producer of 60 MINUTES and former CBS News chairman who hired Rose two separate times said, "He was one of the best interviewers in the country. Period. If I knew there was this darker side, he never would have been hired” (Glor, 2018). However, the latter part of that statement is interesting as it recognized the fault in Rose's actions and Fager stated he never would have hired Charlie Rose for that reason.

A new theme that recurred throughout both the analysis of Charlie Rose and Matt Lauer is a strategy that is best described as distancing. Both networks acknowledged the contributions and achievements of their long-standing anchors, but also placed a wedge between the network itself and the individual once the anchors committed acts that the network did not want to be associated with. Both literal and metaphorical distance was created in order to lessen responsibility and reduce offensiveness of the acts, which are two reasons why image repair strategies are used (Benoit, 2007).

Summary of CBS News Analysis

The most commonly used strategies by CBS were denial, corrective action, and defeasibility, with a minor use of bolstering. CBS’s efforts of denial increased and became more explicit and direct when the stakes became higher of what the exact accusations included. In the beginning, the use of denial was more so a use of defeasibility or being ignorant of the claims of

sexual harassment, but defeasibility grew into denial when accusations of covering Charlie Rose's behavior for several years emerged.

Corrective action was commonly used from the beginning and consistently carried throughout by firing Charlie Rose and making promises of training employees on workplace behavior and promising a better workplace environment for all employees. Bolstering occurred the least, but was still present with reminders of Charlie Rose's success and comments of his success. Towards the end of the timeframe for this analysis of Charlie Rose, CBS also fired Les Moonves, the chairman and CEO of CBS for the same reasons of sexual harassment allegations. Bolstering appeared to be more aggressive when referring to Les Moonves, but may be expected as he was the CEO of the entire organization. However, Les Moonves was still met with corrective action hence the termination of his position. Uses of denial were also present when referencing the allegations of Les Moonves, however, as a result of the allegations CBS fired an anchor of 20 years and its own CEO, which speaks to the change in climate and mindset regarding workplace behavior and sexual harassment, anyone, regardless of power and position, will eventually be met with consequences.

Chapter 4: Analysis of NBC and Matt Lauer

1. *The Today Show*

This chapter analyzes NBC network's reaction through the lens of image repair theory following the termination of Matt Lauer beginning November 29, 2017 through October 31, 2019. Matt Lauer's termination was announced live on *The Today Show* November 29, 2017 by anchors Hoda Kotb and Savannah Guthrie. The on air comments made by *The Today Show* anchors, *NBC Nightly News* anchors, and official statements from NBC mentioned on air will be the main focus of the analysis. More detailed conversations and comments were appeared on *The Today Show* segment and the analysis of *NBC Nightly News* provided confirmation of each strategy identified. However, some instances of contradictory statements and ideas appeared and were noted in the analysis. The contradictory statements were not enough to dismantle NBC's overall posited narrative, but they were interesting enough to raise questions and create some inconsistencies that were obvious from the very first internal statement released by NBC Chairman, Andrew Lack. An analysis of transcripts of both the morning and evening installment of NBC news revealed the use of several image repair strategies.

Several image repair themes emerged. Among the most common identified were corrective action, denial, mortification, defeasibility, and bolstering. Corrective action, denial and bolstering were the most common and appeared very early on in the analysis. Corrective action appeared primarily through the act of firing Matt Lauer. Firing an anchor who worked for the organization for almost 20 years would certainly not go unnoticed, even if not announced on live television. NBC could have made the decision to let Matt Lauer go in a more private manner, but the information would have quickly disseminated to external audiences and eventually the public. Announcing Matt Lauer's termination live was more than likely a well

thought out step in the process of beginning image repair efforts as being as transparent as possible during a crisis is a basic tenet of good public relations practice (UAB, 2015). In addition to this termination, NBC replaced Matt Lauer's position with Hoda Kotb (Koblin & Rao, 2018). The reason for Matt Lauer's termination was allegations of sexual harassment from a female coworker. Replacing Matt Lauer with a strong female presence who was already quite well known was a good move on NBC's part.

Image repair strategies were designed to be used when an organization or individual is experiencing a crisis and when the organization or individual is perceived responsible for the offensive act (Beniot, 1997). Applying Image Repair theory to a news media organization is peculiar for a few reasons. In this case study of NBC and Matt Lauer, NBC was forced to report on its own major crisis, the termination of an anchor who had a two-decade long career and was a prominent figure in the news media industry, and a very familiar face to families across the nation. NBC was essentially faced with a two-part problem in dealing with the termination of Matt Lauer. Not only did NBC have to attempt to report the news in an unbiased manner according to journalistic principles, but also simultaneously had to repair its own image and reputation just as any organization or individual would ideally strive to do after a crisis.

To ensure that both the image repair efforts and "business as usual" actions were included, this study analyzed only the on-air transcripts of *The Today Show* Segment and *NBC Nightly News*. *The Today Show* segment holds importance because that was previously where Matt Lauer appeared, and *NBC Nightly News* segment to catch any details and other information that developed throughout the day. In the timespan of November 29, 2017, to October 31, 2019, both *The Today Show* and *NBC Nightly News* had on-air segments that mentioned Matt Lauer 51 times. *The Today Show* had significantly more mentions with a total of 40 times, and *NBC nightly*

News with only 11. The mentions range from a conversation that lasts minutes long or only a brief update. Regardless of the density of the conversation held on air, each mention is important in its own context as it leads the path through the narrative created by NBC in respect to Matt Lauer's termination. As a news organization, and particularly the news organization experiencing the crisis, NBC had the poetic freedom to control the narrative as it was released to the public. While countless other news media organizations wrote articles about Matt Lauer's termination or told the breaking story on their own station, this study only analyzed the actions and on air conversations of those who are a part of NBC as other organizations and those actions or words would not be considered part of primary image repair efforts of NBC.

On the morning of November 29, 2017, *The Today Show* hosts, Savannah Guthrie, and Hoda Kotb together announced the termination of their co-host Matt Lauer, to the nation. From this moment, at 8:01 a.m. on the 29th of November, NBC began its image restoration process. Savannah Guthrie and Hoda Kotb read the internal announcement sent to employees from Andrew Lack, the NBC News Chairman. From what is described in this segment, the employees were the first to know, but only moments before *The Today Show* went live without Matt Lauer. As shocking and unsettling as it may have been to fellow employees to learn this information only hours or moments before expected to broadcast live, informing internal audiences first in a crisis situation is a standard of good public relations practice articulated by the PRSA (UAB, 2015).

The internal note released by NBC Chairman Andrew Lack described that Matt Lauer was terminated due to "inappropriate sexual behavior in the workplace" (Lack, 2017). The note does not give details about the complaints that were addressed with NBC management. It did not give a name of the female employee, with whom she spoke or how many managers or coworkers

were informed. The only definitive fact that the statement provided was that the accuser came forward Monday night prior to November 27th, 2017. However, it is stated that while this specific complaint is the first that NBC management has received, there is reason to believe that it may not have been an isolated incident. Directly from the note it reads, “While it is the first complaint about his behavior in the over twenty years, he's [Lauer] been at NBC News, we were also presented with reason to believe this may not have been an isolated incident.” (Lack, 2017). This sentence marks the beginning of inconsistency in the story described by NBC that can be seen throughout the months following Matt Lauer’s termination. It also sets the tone that Matt Lauer was held in very high regard to his colleagues which is another recurring theme in the discussions held on air. Reminding viewers and listeners of Matt Lauer’s various accomplishments is a form of bolstering that appears in image repair. An organization or individual can use bolstering in attempts to lessen the offensiveness of the act by reminding stakeholders and publics the positive things the accused has accomplished. While corrective action is a very prevalent strategy throughout the analysis, bolstering is also very apparent. By making it appear as though firing Matt Lauer caused NBC to suffer a huge loss, it is reminiscent and almost romanticizing Matt Lauer’s time with NBC and the personal relationships he formed with coworkers which are detailed later in the analysis.

4.1 Corrective Action

One of the main strategies that appeared following the termination of Matt Lauer was corrective action. Corrective action is used by promising stakeholders and publics to correct the problem that caused the offensive behavior or to make efforts to stop the offensive behavior from occurring in the future. Firing Matt Lauer was the literal use of the strategy. NBC chairman Andrew Lack released an internal statement to employees noting that Matt Lauer’s behavior was

unacceptable and not an accurate representation of NBC and its values. Andrew Lack also stated that this unacceptable behavior will be met with repercussions, “Our highest priority is to create a workplace environment where everyone feels safe and protected, and to ensure that any actions that run counter to our core values are met with consequences, no matter who the offender” (Lack, 2017). This particular portion of the statement implies that it has been and will always be a protocol to punish anyone who does not comply with the core values of NBC regarding the workplace environment. Terminating Matt Lauer and publicly reiterating policy and core values of the organization implies a use of corrective action which entails correcting the wrong behavior and essentially promising to employees, viewers, and any other publics or parties involved that the behavior will not reoccur.

Corrective action also appeared in the form of inviting Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo movement onto *The Today Show* less than two weeks after Matt Lauer’s termination. Kate Snow, a senior national correspondent for all NBC platforms, was present and stated, “Now, people all over the country are recalibrating, including right here at NBC, talking about what is acceptable in the office and what absolutely is not” (NBC, 2017). Tarana Burke’s appearance may or may not have been planned prior to Matt Lauer’s termination as Tarana Burke was part of the individual named Time’s Person of the Year for 2017 (Zacharek et. al, 2017). The #MeToo movement first appeared in 2006 but gained exponential traction closer to the years 2016 and 2017 which would be during the time of Matt Lauer’s termination amongst other prominent figures in the news and entertainment industry. The on-air conversation between Hoda Kotb, Savannah Guthrie, Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano does not strictly revolve around the termination of Matt Lauer. He is mentioned once by Savannah Guthrie as the issue “hits

home” however, the entire conversation is centered around Tarana Burkes’ future plans for the movement and some comments about the current state of workplace sexual harassment.

Throughout the transcripts analyzed for this study, corrective action appears as a prominent theme due to the reiteration of the reasons Matt Lauer was fired, and discussion for hopes that NBC and other organizations will be more proactive and enforce more training for employees in regard to proper workplace behavior. To end the segment, the co-hosts describe the “reckoning” that is occurring in their own organizations and many others regarding the treatment of women. The “reckoning” may be a reference to the #MeToo movement that was rampant at the time (Chicago Tribune, 2020). A quote from Savannah Guthrie said:

But I do know that this reckoning that so many organizations have been going through is important. It's long overdue and it must result in workplaces where all women, all people, feel safe and respected. As painful as it is this moment in our culture, and this change had to happen (Guthrie, 2017).

As the accusations against Matt Lauer developed, new accusations were brought forth against correspondent Tom Brokaw in April of 2018. Kate Snow reports that as a result of the accusations against Matt Lauer, employees have been undergoing “in person, workplace behavioral training, as well as a culture assessment taking place with small dialogue groups across the network.” Both of which are vague descriptions of the training taking place, but there is an indication of some type of training or even policy update which could fall under corrective action in order to hopefully prevent future incidents. In addition to workplace training, NBC has launched an “internal review” or investigation, rather of Matt Lauer’s behavior, however, they have not asked any outside sources to complete the investigation. (NBC, 2018).

4.2 Denial & Defeasibility

Shortly after the initial announcement of Matt Lauer's termination, signs of a denial strategy began. Referring back to the same internal note from NBC Chairman Andrew Lack to employees he stated, "While it is the first complaint about his behavior in the over twenty years he's been at NBC News, we were also presented with reason to believe this may not have been an isolated incident" (Lack, 2017). By stating that the first complaint of Matt Lauer's behavior was reported to management in November of 2017, NBC also denies the possibility that complaints prior to this date. The latter part of the statement was contradictory, however, because it stated that no other complaints had ever been received prior to November of 2017 but speculated that this was not Matt Lauer's first incident of sexual harassment.

When analyzing the statement from Andrew Lack, he did not directly state that there are others to blame than NBC management. However, by suggesting that no one came forward prior to November 25, 2017, hints that blame may fall elsewhere. In addition to not directly accepting responsibility here, and stating that there is reason to believe that this is not Matt Lauer's first instance of sexual harassment, would leave one to believe that NBC is not taking responsibility because of victim's failure to report. Although this statement was seen very early on in the process, it opened the door for reason to believe that NBC would also adopt a blame shifting strategy. Whether that was the intention will never be known, but this demonstrates how careful an organization must be when releasing official statements. Every word and every sentence count.

On May 9, 2017, the evening installment of NBC news recaps the results found from the internal investigation. They reiterate that nothing conclusive was found that would prove that management was made aware of any prior complaints about Matt Lauer. "NBC Universal's

report concludes there is, "No evidence indicating that any NBC News or *Today Show* leadership received any complaints about Lauer's workplace behavior" (Holt, 2017). Again, reinforcing the denial strategy in the evening segment of the news. Another spokesperson for NBC was also quoted, "NBC Universal says the investigation was thorough and objective. NBC investigators concluded they do not believe there is a culture of harassment at the network" (Holt, 2017).

By shifting the blame, NBC did not argue that Matt Lauer did not commit these acts, that is not the problem in question. The problem is NBC's accused failure to handle the situation sooner. So, in short, it seems as though this statement is suggesting that NBC is not at fault because they were not directly informed of the incidents but would have taken swift action if otherwise informed.

On December 1, 2017, *The Today Show* began with discussing the #MeToo movement and the current state of workplace sexual harassment across the nation. On the same day, December 1, 2017, the morning hosts of *The Today Show* gave a brief update about the allegations against Matt Lauer. It is stated that there are anywhere between 3 and 6 women who have come forward who were at that time still anonymous. They addressed questions about NBC's management, specifically if anyone was informed of the behavior previous to November 25, 2017 which is the date that NBC claims it was first informed of the behavior. Savannah Guthrie, a cohost on *The Today Show*, said, "Several former NBC News executives said they didn't know of any complaints. And the network responded saying, unequivocally, no current management knew about any accusations" (NBC, 2017). At this point in time, NBC is still staying with the notion that no one was informed of Matt Lauer's behavior previously to the complaints that caused his termination.

The following day in a similar report, the headline shifts to another update on Matt Lauer. Craig Melvin reported, “Top executives at NBC News learned that two other news outlets were working on articles about sexual misconduct involving the former *Today* co-host several weeks before an accuser came forward. Executives at the network say they did not find any evidence of complaints against Lauer or settlements that might have been reached” (2017). This marks the beginning of NBC announcing its plans to launch an internal investigation into the allegations against Matt Lauer. NBC executives still denied any knowledge of Matt Lauer’s behavior despite reports that employees confided in external news sources.

In opposition to use of the denial strategy, former correspondent Ann Curry told NBC that she was approached by an employee in 2012 because of Matt Lauer’s behavior. Ann Curry spent 15 years being a part of *The Today Show* and was a co-anchor with Matt Lauer from 2011 to 2012 (Begley, 2018). Ann Curry stated that she informed higher management, but nothing surfaced from the situation. An NBC spokesperson responded by denying the allegation, “A spokesman for NBC News says there’s no record of that conversation. Adding, those in management of the news division and *Today* at that time are no longer with the company” (NBC, 2018). Again, another instance of denial despite a very well-known anchor such as Ann Curry beginning to take a stand on the situation. In the same report, a new statement from Matt Lauer was read that he gave to the *Washington Post*. In a new statement to *The Washington Post*, Matt Lauer says, in part, “I fully acknowledge that I acted inappropriately as a husband, father and principal at NBC. However, I want to make it perfectly clear that any allegations or reports of coercive, aggressive or abusive actions on my part at any time are absolutely false” (NBC, 2018). Matt Lauer’s statement may or may not be his own or in tandem with NBC, but he has shifted to defensive statements of denial, even denying coerciveness, which is most likely referring to

statements from Addie Zinone, who worked as a production assistant for *The Today Show* when she was in her twenties (Variety, 2018).

In May 2018, NBC released the results of its internal investigation which concluded that NBC did not receive any complaints of Matt Lauer's behavior prior to November 27, 2017. A quote from Kate Snow, a senior national correspondent for all NBC platforms, reads, "This investigation started very early on. It was led by the NBC Universal general counsel. She along with a team of people, all women with the exception of one, interviewed sixty-eight people, including current management here at NBC in leadership, as well as former and current staff at *The Today Show*" (NBC, 2018). It may not be surprising that an internal investigation supported the previous claims of NBC that no prior complaints were made, however, this just means that NBC's narrative has stayed consistent thus far with the direct statements that have been made.

On November 30, 2017 beginning at 9:00 a.m, Megyn Kelly hosted a segment that gave more detail about some of the grotesqueness of the complaints that were received. Although the hosts seem to not be doubting the validity of the claims, they state that according to The New York City Police there is no known open investigation on Matt Lauer and his actions. The conversation again ended on the note of how difficult the situation is for them as coworkers of Matt Lauer and the complexity of properly reporting a story that "hits so close to home" (NBC, 2017). Megyn Kelly, Savannah Guthrie, and Hoda Kotb exchanged comments and feelings of Matt Lauer serving as a "mentor" for them and how the work environment has a family feeling and that feeling has been disrupted. In addition, comments were made suggesting the difficulties that the women who came forward are facing, as well as trying to not stay pointed in the conversation that the fault is entirely Matt Lauer's, suggesting that some of the blame should be shifted towards management.

4.3 Blame Shifting

As a result of new and even more disturbing details resulting from the interviews held for Ronan Farrow's book, NBC News was forced to readdress the claims made against Matt Lauer. In October of 2019, the woman who came forward in November of 2017 concerning Matt Lauer's behavior revealed her identity along with allegations of rape during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Brooke Nevils, who was allegedly raped by Matt Lauer during the 2014 Olympics, wrote in part, "I provided dates, times, evidence of communications and corroborating accounts. Both NBC and Farrow found me credible." She goes on to say [Matt] Lauer's open letter was a case study in victim blaming, adding, "The shame in this story belongs to him." (Guthrie, 2019).

Ronan Farrow published *Catch and Kill*, a book published in October of 2019, that detailed sexual harassment and assault allegations of Matt Lauer and other prominent figures (Farrow, 2019). The graphic details of these allegations change the caliber of the incidents from "inappropriate workplace behavior" which could mean anything from inappropriate sexual comments to groping, to now full on sexual assault. Because the allegations against Matt Lauer now include rape, NBC news began displaying more of Matt Lauer's quotes and statements and less of their own. The previous allegations did not allude to direct sexual assault, they were only vaguely described as "inappropriate sexual behavior" which could encompass an array of actions. At this point in time, the statement still remained that NBC had received no prior complaints prior to November 27, 2017. The act of directing more attention to Matt Lauer's statements and reactions to the book and its details appears as blame shifting or even divergence which is not an image repair theory, but it seems as though NBC wants the audience to see Matt Lauer as a separate entity. In addition to creating distance from Matt Lauer, statements from

NBC often included a reminder that if this behavior were going on, no one came forward until November 27, 2017. Again, blaming inaction on the lack of knowledge reinforces the idea that NBC would have fired Matt Lauer sooner if management was made aware sooner. Essentially, with this idea, NBC is tried to posit the idea that it is not at fault because victims did not report, not because it was incapable of firing Matt Lauer or handling the situation sooner.

4.4 Bolstering

Another prevalent theme that unfolds is bolstering. Bolstering is used by reminding the audience of something positive the accused has done in order to lessen the offensiveness of the inappropriate acts. However, by NBC it is used to highlight Matt Lauer and all of his accomplishments, not necessarily those of NBC. During the first on air conversations between Savannah Guthrie and Hoda Kotb, they spoke specifically about their relationships with Matt Lauer as a highly regarded coworker and anchor. While it would be a shock to any person to arrive at work to find a longstanding coworker has been fired, the comments and conversation weigh more on the side of Matt Lauer's contribution and career rather than the difficulty and hardship the female employee who came forward was facing. Savannah Guthrie described that she and other co-hosts are feeling shocked and devastated while trying to process the information. Savannah Guthrie said to Hoda Kotb, "And, Hoda, I mean, you know, for the moment, all we can say is that we are heartbroken. I'm heartbroken for Matt. He is my dear, dear friend and my partner. And he is beloved by many, many people here" (Guthrie, 2017). In addition to expressing the shock and disbelief of losing Matt Lauer as a coworker, Savannah Guthrie also expressed her condolences to the colleague who came forward about Matt Lauer's alleged behavior. Savannah Guthrie said, "And I'm heartbroken for the brave colleague who came forward to tell her story and any other women who have their own stories to tell. And we

are grappling with a dilemma that so many people have faced these past few weeks. How do you reconcile your love for someone with the revelation that they have behaved badly?” (Guthrie, 2017). The co-hosts mentioned the female colleague, but at this moment in time do not refer to her as a “victim.” In addition, the conversation circles back to Matt Lauer and the tragedy of losing him as a coworker. Matt Lauer’s history and significance to the show is mentioned several times throughout the announcement of his termination.

Throughout the on-air transcripts, almost each instance that Matt Lauer termination is mentioned, his 20-year career and amazing accomplishments are used to paint a romanticized image of him, while the female employee or employees are portrayed as more insignificant in comparison. For example, a quote from Stephanie Gosk on December 15, 2017, reads “In his twenty years at *The Today Show*, Matt Lauer had become one of the biggest names in the media world. But it took one woman coming forward with her story, according to NBC News; and roughly twenty-four hours later, he was gone” (NBC, 2017).

When analyzing the *NBC Nightly News* segment for mentions of Matt Lauer’s name, significantly less results were found. The transcripts begin with recapping the initial announcement of termination from *The Today Show*. Stephanie Gosk is quoted, “Lauer has been the face of the network during pivotal news events; interviewing the world’s most influential people. (Holt, 2017). Reinforcing the results found from *The Today Show* analysis, each time Matt Lauer was mentioned, as was some significant detail of his career. In addition, one of the morning hosts, Savannah Guthrie was quoted giving testimony about Matt Lauer, “I am heartbroken for Matt. He is my dear, dear friend and my partner and he is beloved by many, many people here. And I’m heartbroken for the brave colleague who came forward to tell her story and any other women who have their own stories to tell” (Holt, 2017). Similar comments

were identified throughout, the majority of comments found described Matt Lauer in a favorable manner and bolstered his career and accomplishments

4.5 Minimization

Minimization is sometimes seen as a pairing with bolstering (Benoit, 1997).

Minimization is used to lessen the overall offensiveness of the act by trying to downplay the situation. While NBC may not be attempting to downplay Matt Lauer's actions, whenever the female coworkers are discussed, the length of Matt Lauer's career was mentioned. However, the inability to describe any personal characteristics or accomplishments about the female employees may be due to the fact that NBC is trying to keep their identities confidential, but the descriptors used in conversation, or lack thereof, appeared to be in attempt to minimize the female employee therefore minimizing the importance of the alleged events. The female employees were not described in any personable manner, the manner is more objective. Not being able to release the identity of the women who came forward may be working in favor of this bolstering and minimization strategy. Matt Lauer's two-decade long career versus "some female employee(s)" ultimately does not carry the same weight. The anonymity factor may be working in favor of NBC when using bolstering and minimization strategies because persuasion can be accomplished much more efficiently when there is a face and a name of the individual described.

Another instance of minimization is seen during an interview with a past employee, Addie Zinone, who worked as a production assistant for *Today* (Variety, 2018). On December 18, 2017 she was interviewed by Megyn Kelly detailing her relationship with Matt Lauer. At the time, Addie Zinone was 24-years-old and just beginning her career. Addie Zinone regarded the sexual relationship as consensual, but that she also felt taken advantage of due to the wide age of almost 20 years and the obvious difference in power. A direct quote from Zinone reads, "It's very

intense. And this is one thing I want to say I am coming forward and saying, yes, this was consensual. It was an abuse of power. I want to put a face and a story to these women's accusations. Because I'm seeing that they're being doubted. And so I thought, I've got to validate their claims. I mean, this happened and I've got to explain it in embarrassing detail because I want them to understand the commonalities in our stories.” (NBC, 2017).

While this interview does not entirely repair Matt Lauer or the events that took place at NBC, the fact that Addie Zinone stated the relationship was consensual gives a little leverage to NBC and some of its claims. In the event that the relationships were consensual, it would make sense that female employees would not feel the need to report to management. This idea that some of the workplace relationships with Matt Lauer were consensual reinforces NBC's claims that they never received a complaint prior to the one that led to Matt Lauer's termination.

However, Zinone's relationship with Matt Lauer is not a definite example of all of the claims, however, she is one of the first to reveal her identity. Viewers and other publics may assume that all the relationships with Matt Lauer were consensual to some degree because Addie Zinone states that she wants people to “understand the commonalities in our stories” (NBC, 2017). Allowing this interview to take place on air probably meant that Addie Zinone's story was reviewed prior. While to some this may be seen as an act of transparency on NBC's behalf or an attempt to give the female employees a voice, the consensual aspect to the relationship with Matt Lauer could be used by NBC to downplay some of the aspects of the accusations and shifts the blame towards female employees.

The Today Show interview with Addie Zinone, was recapped on *NBC Nightly News*. On December 14, 2017, the interview with Addie Zinone was recapped and a quote from the interview was pulled regarding the consensual aspect of the relationship with Matt Lauer. She

stated that the relationship was consensual, but ultimately, she felt taken advantage of because of the power dynamic and age difference. Despite the other details in the interview, it is interesting that that particular quote is one NBC chose to reemphasize for the nightly installment.

The first four *Today Show* transcripts from November 29, 2017 contained information regarding Matt Lauer's termination. Throughout the course of the day the termination was recapped, and the audience was informed that they would be told more details as soon as they were available. On November 30, 2017 *The Today Show* began with Savannah Guthrie and Stephanie Gosk reminding viewers of the breaking news the day before Matt Lauer's termination adding the detail that two more women have come forward with complaints about his behavior. In addition, this segment includes the first mention of Matt Lauer's statement since his termination.¹ Matt Lauer's statement was vague. He partially admitted there was some truth in the statements, but did not specify if that included inappropriate relationships, sexual harassment, rape allegations, etc. The statement was more than likely purposefully vague as to not create room for liability and litigation.

Matt Lauer stated, there is 'some truth' in the allegations but overall alludes to the notion that in part that the details are fabricated or dramatized. "Some of what is being said about me is untrue or mischaracterized, but there is enough truth in these stories to make me feel embarrassed and ashamed". (NBC, 2017). Again, without more extensive research or possibly unattainable information, there is no way to solidify that Matt Lauer's statements and behavior following his termination were strictly of his own nature or coerced by NBC News.

¹ For the purpose of this research, the behavior of the accused individuals will not be considered part of the organization's image repair strategy as there is no way to prove Matt Lauer's statements were in tandem with NBC's strategy.

The co-hosts mention the report to *The New York Times* that an employee was sexually assaulted by Matt Lauer in his office in 2001 (Gabler et al., 2017). In addition, a report to *Variety* was mentioned as three women made reports detailing more unpleasant and inappropriate encounters with Matt Lauer. As the story developed over the first 24 hours since his termination, NBC acknowledged that Matt Lauer's behavior was inappropriate. On November 30, 2017 during *The Today Show* segment reiterated the part of NBC Chairman Andrew Lack's statement that Matt Lauer's behavior was a "clear violation of the company's standards" (NBC, 2017). In this segment, it detailed that NBC confirmed that the initial complaints expressed are in reference to the 2014 Winter Olympics that Matt Lauer and others were responsible for covering. This is the first specific detail in regard to time and place of Matt Lauer's actions that was released by NBC. At this point in time, the incidents took place approximately three years prior to his termination. The *New York Times* report mentioned previously contained a complaint of Matt Lauer's behavior from 2001, but that was not confirmed by NBC, only mentioned by the co-hosts, Savannah Guthrie and Stephanie Gosk.

In response to these publications, the co-hosts mentioned the statement released by NBC News on the evening of November 29th, 2017 that reads, "We can say unequivocally that prior to Monday night, current NBC News management was never made aware of any complaints about Matt Lauer's conduct" (*Today Show*, 2017). Overall, NBC's narrative of Matt Lauer's termination begins with reporting that he was fired due to the nature of his behavior that is not in line with NBC's values, but also stating that this was the first report of any complaints about his behavior, in order to shape the narrative into the direction that NBC fired Matt Lauer upon the very first complaint. In addition, comments of sympathy and remarks regarding the female

coworkers' bravery are woven into the narrative as it unfolds, but those comments are never too far from a reminder of Matt Lauer's prestige or two-decade long career at NBC.

Analysis Summary

During *The Today Show* segments, the most common themes to appear are corrective action, denial, bolstering, minimization, and blame shifting. While Matt Lauer's name appeared significantly less on *NBC Nightly News segments*, the same image repair strategies were enforced. From the beginning to the end of the transcripts analyzed, NBC remained consistent with the claim that no prior complaints were made to upper management aside from the complaint that resulted in Matt Lauer's termination. Although, there was some dissonance found in the first initial statement from Andrew Lack. While NBC claims there were no prior complaints, it stated that there is reason to believe Matt Lauer's behavior was not an isolated incident. It is difficult to provide a definite answer to how NBC wanted that portion of the statement to be perceived by viewers and their publics, but it certainly raises suspicions. Once the internal investigation or "review" as named by NBC came to a close, the statements remained the same in that no credible evidence was found that any complaints were made to higher management prior to November 27, 2017. Regardless of the disturbing details recorded in Ronan Farrow's Book, *Catch and Kill*, NBC still heavily denied any knowledge of Matt Lauer's behavior. In a letter to colleagues, Andrew Lack wrote in part, "Any suggestion that we knew prior to that evening or tried to cover up any aspect of Lauer's conduct is absolutely false and offensive." The company says they reached agreements with two women only after Lauer was fired, and that the women were free to share their stories (Guthrie, 2017).

Each time Matt Lauer was mentioned, his two-decade long career, inspirational contributions and other compliments followed. The co-hosts of Matt Lauer were not sparing in

their testimonials of their experience working with him, which may be an honest result of the shock that was felt because of the sudden change, but again, it is difficult to decipher which statements may have been planned versus impromptu statements. Accompanying the bolstering statements, the word choice used regarding the female employees showed signs of minimization.

Essentially, it seems as though NBC wanted to frame the situation as one insignificant or lesser known female employee came forward with complaints and NBC had no choice but to fire one of their prized anchors. This was achieved in one way through the strong and uplifting wording used when regarding Matt Lauer versus the dull and impersonal language choice used in reference to the employees who came forward with allegations. Although this may be due to the anonymity factor to protect the woman, and eventually women, who came forward. However, it does not take away from the fact that Matt Lauer was spoken of in such high regard despite the allegations whenever that was the topic of the conversation. While upholding the journalistic duty to minimize damage especially in the face of victim's identities in sex crimes, it actually worked in favor of NBC (SPJ, 2014). NBC was able to expand its bolstering efforts for Matt Lauer without being questioned as to why the victims were not receiving the same amount of attention and attribution to her accomplishments. The underlying tone of the conversation appeared as "one insignificant complaint took down our own mogul" (Guthrie, 2017).

The next theme that appeared frequently was blame shifting. It seemed as though NBC wanted to completely separate themselves from Matt Lauer by individualizing his actions. This sense of separation may be a possible addition to the theory. Blame shifting also appeared in the form of bringing attention to the consensual aspects of the relationships or encounters with Matt Lauer. This idea was highlighted during the on-air interview with Addie Zinone. NBC made the point to emphasize that some women waited almost two decades to come forward with

complaints or never came forward at all. Essentially, NBC emphasized that although Matt Lauer was a large part of the company, his actions were his own, some of the encounters were consensual or began consensually, and put emphasis on victims who did not report right away.

Chapter 5: Implications and Discussion

This study demonstrated the complexities that news media organizations may encounter while attempting to repair its reputation following a crisis caused by sexual harassment allegations against prominent news anchors. This study specifically analyzed NBC and CBS news networks' response to two similar crises through the lens of Benoit's image repair discourse in the wake of a relevant social movement. While this study expanded on image repair application, it also displays the complexity of image repair efforts regarding news media organizations such as their duty to report on breaking news objectively, even when the story is caused by their own network. Fellow co-anchors were faced with the challenge of objectively telling the news story of their fired coworker to millions on live television while remaining professional despite the internal conflict and turmoil that was felt. Both organizations terminated high profile male news anchors who had been a part of their respective news organizations and familiar names to American living rooms for more than 20 years. While this study and the events it analyzed are essentially novel, the organizations appeared to handle the crises in a similar fashion.

NBC News and Matt Lauer

NBC News fired Matt Lauer on November 29, 2017. It reported that this termination was in response to complaints that were received less than 48 hours prior to allegations of Matt Lauer's behavior. Matt Lauer's termination was reportedly first announced to employees, just hours before Savannah Guthrie and Hoda Kotb announced his termination without Matt Lauer on air by their side. Informing internal audiences first of any crisis is protocol according to the UAB study guide (2015). Savannah and Hoda reported that they were informed within just a few hours of going live with *The Today Show*, which is very short notice for such shocking news, but it is

difficult to determine exactly when the executive decision was made to fire Matt Lauer. Informing internal audiences including the co-hosts before airing on live television was an appropriate step in crisis management.

One of the next steps that NBC followed was to release a statement that could be shaped and reshaped over time. Accurate, but not so specific that it could not be altered if need be. This is another step recommended in crisis literature. Vague and non-specific official statements were seen commonly throughout the analysis. Official statements released by designated NBC spokespersons were often not explicit in detail regarding what exactly was included in Matt Lauer's behavior or the severity or the claims. There is reason and purpose behind such vague statements. Too specific of statements and details can lead to liability issues and lawsuits. For example, denial was used very frequently by NBC in regard to allegations that NBC had been covering for Matt Lauer over the last 20 years. Whenever NBC provided a rebuttal, specific timelines or accusations were not referenced. Only a general statement of denial of the act, in general, was made. In the beginning, however, a statement was made that seemed contradictory to the narrative that this was Lauer's first known instance of sexual misconduct.

An NBC spokesperson said, "While this is the first time anyone has ever complained about Matt Lauer, NBC has reason to believe it is not an isolated event" (Guthrie, 2017). After completing the analysis of these documents, it can be gathered that NBC wanted to push the narrative that is the first time these concerns are being brought to light. However, it added the detail that there is reason to believe it is not an isolated incident. This is not an instance where being vague worked to NBC's advantage. It only opened doors for reason to believe that Matt Lauer acted in this manner before, but this is only the first time he has been caught. In the

beginning, this section of the statement appeared as though it would cause serious issues, but NBC then began to shift the blame to victims who had not previously reported such behavior.

Blame-shifting was also seen in combination with defeasibility. NBC shifted the blame to victims for not reporting, and also used the ignorance of the alleged behavior as a reason it had not acted sooner. Whether the second half the statement was thoroughly analyzed before it was released, it opened the door for speculation for a few ideas. First, that NBC had been covering up Lauer's behavior for the duration of his career at NBC. Second, that management was fully aware, but refused to act. Third, that it omitted the severity of the acts in question knowing the implications and repercussions would be completely irreversible.

CBS News and Charlie Rose

A major point that was not enunciated as powerfully in the case of Matt Lauer and NBC is the particular instance of an organization or some of its employees being considered victims of the same crisis that was caused by a member of its own organization. Specifically referring to Gayle King's and Norah O'Donnell's first on air conversation of Charlie Rose's termination they explained how it impacted them personally. For example, Gayle King stated that she, "Slept for 1 hour and 42 minutes" and received a phone call from Oprah asking if she was okay" (King, 2017). While this is not explicitly stated as an effort of image repair, however it raised questions as to whether the organization wanted the audience and stakeholders to consider it another victim of Charlie Rose's actions (King, 2017). If this were the case, both organizations could have claimed themselves as victims due to the autonomy possessed by Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose. Again another complexity, yet advantage, held by news media organizations.

In this particular case of news media organizations, the perceived responsibility is shared between the accused, in this case the anchor, and the management of the organization. The

duality of the situation in its entirety, is what makes this case so perplexing because the “right” response is not black or white. The organization has a lot to consider when preparing a response. As noted throughout the analysis, air conversations can appear to be just as much of an image repair contribution as official released statements. Image repair efforts are already complicated, and even more complicated for news media organizations because unless explicitly stated, the audience or stakeholders cannot confirm what is “business as usual” reporting or what is part of the actual image repair efforts, thus making both the process and analysis of an organization using image repair tactics difficult.

Similarities in Responses

A major similarity between the two cases is that the information regarding sexual harassment allegations were released or threatened to be released by external sources. *The Washington Post* released the article that led to Rose’s suspension then ultimately his termination from CBS (Koblin & Grynbaum, 2017). There are no indications that CBS was aware in advance that this article would be published. The *Post* article was published in the morning of November 20, 2017 and Rose was officially terminated on November 22, 2017. In the first article published about Rose, eight women made claims of sexual harassment from Rose and three went on record saying Rose had made, “crude sexual advances” (Koblin & Grynbaum, 2017). Over the course of time, that number grew from eight to almost more than 30 women in total who made complaints of Rose’s behavior went on record (Atkinson, 2018).

Less than a week later, the same chaos ensued at NBC News. A female employee reported instances of sexual harassment allegations against Matt Lauer. It was later revealed that these allegations referred to events that took place during the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The descriptions of the allegations initially used by NBC were essentially inaccurate. What was

referred to as, “inappropriate workplace behavior” was actually rape. In late 2019, it was revealed in Ronan Farrow’s book, *Catch and Kill*, Brooke Nevils, former NBC correspondent, was raped by Matt Lauer during the 2014 Sochi Olympics. (Ortiz & Siemaszko, 2017). However, as seen during the analysis, NBC never gave specific details regarding to what exactly the “sexual harassment allegations” or “inappropriate workplace behavior” actually meant.

On November 27, 2017, NBC officially fired Matt Lauer. While Matt Lauer’s termination distracted some of the attention from the events that occurred at CBS, the public soon reoriented its attention back to both cases. In the midst of both news network crises, a social movement recognizing victim survivors of sexual harassment had regained momentum just a few weeks prior (Stevens, 2017).

Both organizations began its image repair efforts with denial. Each denied having any information or seeing warning signs prior to each anchor’s termination. The next most prominent strategy was corrective action. Repeatedly in news reports, each organization reminded viewers that the anchor was terminated due to allegations of sexual harassment. As time progressed and the newness of the situations faded, a reminder that the anchors were fired was all that was left of the conversation.

Bolstering was seen more in the case of Matt Lauer and NBC News. It was made very apparent from the beginning how shocked his fellow news anchors, Savannah Guthrie, Hoda Kotb and Stephanie Gosk were while sharing the news of his termination. They each accounted for their personal relationship with Lauer and how it hurt and disappointed them personally that these actions had taken place. Each showed sympathy for Lauer that seemed greater than the sympathy shown for the female coworker who came forward with the allegations. In addition to disclosing much sympathy for Lauer, the anchors often mentioned Lauer’s accomplishments and

contributions to the network throughout his time at NBC. While the shock factor of suddenly losing a fellow employee is certainly understood, it appeared very ludicrous to boast Lauer's accomplishments while explaining that he had been fired due to sexual misconduct, which was later revealed to be rape.

On the other hand, bolstering was not seen as often throughout the analysis of CBS and Charlie Rose. It is speculative to posit that Rose was simply not as well liked by his peers as Lauer was, but that would certainly have an effect on the tone of dialogue used between fellow anchors on air. Gayle King and Norah O'Donnell were reporting for *CBS This Morning* the day that Rose's termination was announced. While King and O'Donnell commented on the personal effect Rose's actions had on them, the conversation was steered more in the direction of the implications this had on the victim survivors and America's culture in general towards women in the workplace. To quote Norah O'Donnell, "They've suffered in silence and it shows that people are listening, people are paying attention, and that there are consequences for your actions. And I think that, as difficult as this is, is a very important message to send (O'Donnell, 2017). This quote accurately summarizes the dissonance experienced by Rose's co-anchors.

Another commonality between both cases is the use of defeasibility. Although defeasibility overlapped with denial, it is important to note because of the peculiar circumstances of these situations. Defeasibility is used by claiming a lack of information or control over the situation. Which fits perfectly into the narrative that both networks were created, that management was not aware of the sexual misconduct happening at their networks. However, as time progressed, more victims came forward, and the seriousness of the allegations increased, a simple lack of knowledge was not a strong enough defense which led into the use of blame

shifting. For NBC that was highlighted by blaming those who did not report Lauer's alleged behavior sooner, and for CBS it was characterized more by blaming Rose for abuse of power.

When comparing both organizations' reactions as whole, CBS sided more with the victims of Charlie Rose during on air conversations between employees. While through official statements from CBS spokesperson or president David Rhodes, it still thoroughly denied any and all allegations of concealing information. CBS was consistent with its use of denial beginning with Rose's termination November of 2017 and through Jeff Fager's termination in September of 2019, which was just days after CEO and Chairman, Les Moonves, resigned from CBS (Glor, 2018).

On September 12, 2018 CBS correspondent Jerika Duncan stated, "This July, six female former CBS employees told *The New Yorker*, Fager, "Would touch employees in ways that made them uncomfortable" after drinking at office parties. Nineteen current and former employees told *The New Yorker* Fager, "Allowed harassment in the division"(Glor, 2018). While Fager and Moonves were not included in the analysis as the point of this study was to use on air personalities, it is still important to note as CBS's infrastructure completely fell apart less than one year after Rose was terminated.

Despite losing three major figures, CBS still used an aggressive denial strategy encompassing that it did not hide information, and especially in Fager's case, that he was not fired due to the "allegations that surfaced in press reports" but because he violated company policy of aggressively texting a correspondent essentially threatening her when she reached out for comment on the articles alleging that he touched other CBS employees. That reporter was Jerika Duncan. Jeff Glor, the other reporter who was live with Jerika during this segment,

expressed his support for Jerika personally and as well on behalf of the CBS evening news team (Glor, 2018).

A commonality throughout both analyses is that underlying messages from anchors and official statements released by the organizations were different. This difference may be due to the human element that is present during on air conversations between anchors that is essentially absent from a calculated and meticulously formed response from the president or CEO from each organization. It would be expected to see more emotion from the anchors presenting the information than a coworker that has been known for twenty or more years, but at times it created inconsistencies in responses, but that is just another facet of image repair efforts that news organizations have to deal with that non news organizations would not.

While personal attitudes were noted in the analysis, a major difference that was noticed between the two cases is how Matt Lauer's coworkers spoke of him compared to how Charlie Rose's coworkers spoke of him. In the timeline of this study, CBS experienced the crisis first and had after the initial announcement, anchors displayed a leveled out objective attitude towards him. However, even after the initial shock of losing Matt Lauer was over, it was still very obvious that he was held in high regard and praised by coworkers. One would think that NBC would follow suit of CBS in the idea of not overly bolstering Matt Lauer's career, but that was the case. Despite the severity of the claims, it still appeared as though losing Matt Lauer was an irreversible and regrettable loss to NBC.

News Media Organizations Using Image Repair

In the wake of two organizations experiencing crisis due to sexual harassment allegations by very high-profile figures, naturally the news became the news. The majority of the strategies used by both NBC and CBS were very similar, and even similar in which the order of the

strategies appeared. Utilization of denial was common throughout both organization's responses and was frequently paired with corrective action. Defeasibility was identified under the instance that each organization denied possessing the knowledge that its longtime anchors were sexually harassing other employees prior to the dates they were terminated. While the news organizations did not release any official statements that denied the possibility of this degrading behavior, it appeared as though it was trying to create distance between the organization and the individual.

While there is not an explicitly stated distancing strategy outlined in image repair discourse, it could provide benefits to news media organizations and those that are similar. As previously stated, news media organizations may feel compelled to handle crises differently especially in the situation where a highly recognizable individual is directly tied to the crisis. News organizations can also use this to its benefit. The accused individuals are just as much the brand as the organization itself, sometimes the individuals involved are more of the brand than the brand is itself. Organizations that are unlike news organizations that do not have highly recognizable individuals in the forefront, do not have this advantage and would not find it as easily accessible to use a strategy that involves creating distance from a certain individual.

Viewers and other audience members can feel a strong social bond between themselves and individuals they watch every day, even if they have never had an interaction in real life. News media organizations and other similar organizations are mostly aware of this condition and how it makes them different from other organizations that lack this type of relationship with its audience. The organization can ultimately use that individuality to its benefit, but that should not be the only strategy that is used. However, creating distance between the accused individual and the organization itself can strengthen other strategies used such as defeasibility, denial and corrective action that were identified in both of these case studies. Creating distance successfully

can help lessen the suspicion that the organization has been working in tandem with the accused individuals to cover up the alleged sexual harassment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Limitations

Case studies are often criticized because to some they are characterized as, “lacking rigor and generalizability, [but] fail to consider the purpose of the case study and how what is learned from a case study is put into practice” (Alpi & Evans, 2019). A case study approach was appropriate for this topic because it was a novel application of image repair theory. In addition, special circumstances needed to be taken in consideration such as the time frame taking place during a relevant social movement that is actually still very prominent in 2020. This study focused solely on the respective networks reaction to terminating on-air personalities and allegations of covering up sexual harassment allegations.

Even though this research demonstrated novel applications of image repair discourse pertaining to news organizations experiencing crises, there are notable limitations. To begin, there is information that would be helpful to consider, but may be difficult or impossible to obtain such as if these organizations already had a crisis plan in place pertaining to the loss of Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose. While the individual’s statements were presented in the analysis, they were not considered as part of the organization's actual image repair process as there is no way to prove if the individual’s statements were crafted in tandem with their respective organizations. They were important to consider, but it cannot be determined for certain if they were actually a part of NBC or CBS's intentional image restoration process.

Another limitation is that the textual analysis did not review social media posts from each organization sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Due to the pressure caused by the 24 hour news cycle, news organizations may feel the obligation to update and interact with their audiences literally 24 hours a day, and even more attentively while experiencing a crisis (Hansen

& Folenflik, 2005). Analyzing social media posts during this time frame could be another study on its own to gauge how viewers at home and perceive those image repair efforts.

If this study were to be replicated, it would be interesting to compare the narrative created by the news organizations themselves in comparison with the narrative created by the external organizations that interviewed the victim survivors. While the focus of this study was to analyze NBC's and CBS's response to the accusations, it would be wise to then extend the study into a big picture comparison of the two sides.

Another limitation of the study is not having a definitive answer to whether the on-air conversations between anchors were meant to be considered part of image repair efforts. For example, if a credit card company experiences a data breach that creates a crisis, it will specifically designate persons and press releases to address the crisis. In this case, whether or not that was the intention, those on-air conversations would reach the widest audience, especially those who were loyal viewers who tuned in each morning and night, and it would appear extremely odd to not mention an ongoing crisis and the termination of a major news anchor. So, whether or not the on-air conversations were intended to be considered aspects of the image repair process, there is enough justification to consider them as such.

From a legal perspective, the use of the denial strategy makes sense in order to avoid severe litigation. If each organization were to directly accept responsibility of all allegations it would more than likely never see the end of those consequences. However, each organization is at a fault for allowing this type of behavior to fester, but it has to be very meticulous in each response in order to not open the door for litigation and even more reputational damage.

An additional limitation to this study is that it examined only two news networks experiencing crisis for the same reason during a relevant cultural movement. Those

circumstances are very specific. If the #MeToo movement had not been so prominent, the events may have played out differently. Additionally, this study only considered the organizations' reaction to the loss of on-air personalities, not executive producers or CEOs as seen towards the end of the analysis with CBS. While from what was identified in this analysis, the reaction was seemingly the same. However, altering those variables alone could certainly provide grounds for an entirely new study.

While research in this area is still considerably novel, more research needs to be conducted using image repair theory. This study has added to its already existing merits as well as provided another avenue for news media organizations and the like to use while experiencing a crisis. Even though news organizations have a duty to uphold their reputation, they also have a duty to present news objectively. This two-part problem presents an array of variables that must be considered and analyzed when conducting image repair research in the area of news media organizations.

In the end, the truth will always surface. Despite all of the image repair options, Benoit suggests that the truth is always priority. Benoit also recognizes that in certain cases the accused organization may find itself choosing between repairing image and avoiding litigation (Benoit, 2007). Benoit's recommendation is summarized as, "Apart from the fact that this is morally the correct thing to do [disclose the truth], attempting to deny true accusations can backfire. An organization that falsely denies responsibility for offensive actions risks substantially damaged credibility if the truth emerges" (Benoit, 2007). What happens in the dark will always come to light. The time for sexual assault survivors to be heard is now. While organizations have every right to protect and uphold their organizational image, that right does not override an individual's right to an equal and safe workplace.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. *The Today Show*

Date	Title	Category
11/29/2017	Our colleague, Matt Lauer, has been terminated by this network.	corrective action
11/29/2017	Matt Lauer has been terminated from NBC News	corrective action
11/29/2017	We have received a detailed complaint from a colleague about inappropriate sexual behavior in the workplace by Matt Lauer.	Corrective action, distance
11/29/2017	A detailed complaint received from a colleague about inappropriate sexual behavior in the workplace by Matt Lauer.	Denial, bolstering, corrective action
11/29/2017	Parents and advertisers are turning up the pressure on YouTube	Corrective action
11/29/2017	Democrat John Conyers so far denies all of the allegations and is refusing to give in	Corrective action
11/30/2017	New allegations against Matt Lauer surface.	Mortification, denial
11/30/2017	A look at new allegations against Matt Lauer in the wake of his firing from NBC News.	Denial, bolstering, mortification
11/30/2017	Additional allegations of sexual misconduct surface against long- time TODAY Show co-anchor Matt Lauer just one day after being fired by NBC.	Corrective action, denial
11/30/2017	The search expands for a missing Florida teenager, after the seventeen-year-old was spotted hundreds of miles away in North Carolina.	Corrective action

11/30/2017	Healthy Living celebrates men and women who have made health a priority in their lives.	Corrective action
12/01/2017	A look at the conversations prompted in workplaces across the country in the wake of the #MeToo movement.	Evasion of Responsibility
12/1/2017	A look at new developments in the scandal surrounding embattled Congressman John Conyers, already facing pressure to resign in the wake of multiple accusations of sexual misconduct.	Denial
12/2/2017	The Download takes a look back at the week that was.	Corrective action
12/2/2017	The former Stanford University swimmer who received what many called a far too lenient sentence for sexually assaulting a woman behind a dumpster now appealing his conviction.	Denial
12/6/2017	Tarana Burke, the creator of the #MeToo movement	bolstering
12/6/2017	Allegations of harassment, of assault even rape at the hands of dozens of predators.	corrective action
12/15/2017	New developments into the investigation into allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior against Matt Lauer.	bolstering
12/15/2017	New information comes to light surrounding the allegations against Matt Lauer.	Bolstering, corrective action
12/15/2017	A look at disturbing new allegations of sexual misconduct being made against Oscar-winner Dustin Hoffman.	corrective action
12/15/2017	A look at the new hurdles that suddenly have the Republican tax bill back on shaky ground.	corrective action

12/15/2017	Jessica Chastain stars in her new movie, Molly's Game.	corrective action
12/16/2017	President Trump gets into a war of words with New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand.	Minimization
12/18/2017	A woman who says she had a sexual relationship with Matt Lauer, tells her story	Minimization
12/19/2017	Harassment scandals that are shaking Hollywood	Minimization, denial, corrective action
12/23/2017	A look back at the major stories that made headlines over the past year	corrective action
4/27/2018	A look at the allegations of sexual harassment against Tom Brokaw.	distance, blame shifting
4/28/2018	Dozens of women leap to Tom Brokaw's defense.	denial, corrective action
4/30/2018	An update in the latest allegations in the MeToo movement which happened to be against our own Tom Brokaw	corrective action
5/10/2018	forNow NBC releasing the results of its months long internal investigation following Lauer's dismissal	corrective action, denial
05/10/2018	NBC Universal's investigation into multiple allegations of sexual harassment	denial
5/12/2018	A look at the topics dominating the week's headlines.	denial
9/4/2018	A rare visit from a Supreme Court justice, Sonia Sotomayor	corrective action
9/10/2018	One of the Most Successful Runs in Television, is Canceled, Effective Immediately	corrective action
2019		
10/9/2019	The woman whose complaint led to Matt Lauer's firing from NBC News comes forward publicly	corrective action

10/9/2019	Ted Danson talks about the final season of The Good Place and the other show he made famous	blame shifting
10/9/2019	Turkey's military amasses at the Syrian border, preparing for an assault on the Kurds	corrective action
10/10/2019	Outrage across California after hundreds of thousands are intentionally plunged into darkness	denial
10/10/2019	Interview with Award-Winning Host and Storyteller, Jay Shetty	denial, blame shifting
10/15/2019	The Turkish military's offensive has now entered its seventh day	blame shifting, distance

Appendix 2: *NBC Nightly News*

Date	Title	Category
11/28/2017	NBC News fires Matt Lauer after sexual misconduct review	corrective action
11/30/2017	Matt Lauer responds publicly to misconduct allegations	corrective action, denial
11/30/2017	Senate Republicans on brink of passing sweeping rewrite of tax code	correction action
12/3/2017	Metropolitan Opera to investigate conductor James Levine for sexual misconduct	corrective action, denial
12/14/2017	Simmons, Smiley on offense after sexual misconduct allegations	corrective action, denial
12/15/2017	A woman speaks about the secret affair she claims Lauer pressured her into nearly twenty years ago.	corrective action, denial, bolstering
12/15/2017	Republicans say the goal line is in sight to pass their sweeping tax plan.	corrective action
12/2/2018	Arlington Ladies' attend every funeral at the national cemetery	denial
4/27/2018	Tom Brokaw strongly denies inappropriate sexual advances allegations against him in a letter he sent to colleagues.	denial, bolstering
5/9/2018	NBCUniversal investigation finds managers were unaware of Matt Lauer's sexual misconduct	denial

2019		
10/9/2019	New Details On Anchor Matt Lauer Are Being Reported Concerning The Allegation That Led To His Sudden Termination, NBC	corrective action, denial
10/11/2019	Ronan Farrow alleges NBC News knew of complaints against Matt Lauer long before firing	denial, corrective action

Appendix 3: *CBS This Morning*

Date	Title	Category
11/21/2017	CBS News Suspends Charlie Rose	corrective action
11/22/2017	CBS News Fires Charlie Rose	corrective action
11/22/2017	U.S. Navy Plane Crashes	corrective action
11/22/2017	Cleveland Rape Crisis Center Estimates That More Than Eight Hundred Americans are Victimized Every Day	denial & corrective action
11/24/2017	A look at a new exhibit where fashionable clothing and accessories are celebrated for their contribution to art and design.	corrective action
11/27/2017	Senator Franken Talks at Length About Accusations From Four Different Women	distance
11/29/2017	Tampa Police Holds Suspect in the Hunt For Suspected Serial Killer	corrective action
11/29/2017	Republicans Could Bring Tax Reform Plan to the Senate Floor Today	distance
11/30/2017	New Allegations from Multiple Women Against Matt Lauer	Denial
12/18/2017	Jerry Richardson to Sell Carolina Panthers	corrective action
12/19/2017	Two of the Reporters Who Started the National Conversation with Their Reporting on Allegations Against Harvey Weinstein Guest on CBS This Morning	Corrective action
1/17/2018	Ann Curry's Return to Television	blame shifting
4/27/2018	News anchor Tom Brokaw faces accusations of sexual misconduct.	Denial, corrective action, bolstering
4/28/2018	Female colleagues of Tom Brokaw circulate a letter in support of the former NBC Nightly News anchor following accusations of unwanted sexual advances.	Denial, bolstering

5/3/2018	Interview with Stormy Daniels' Attorney, Michael Avenatti	corrective action, denial
5/4/2018	The Washington Post signals there may be more revelations about what CBS News knew about claims of inappropriate conduct by former anchor Charlie Rose.	corrective action, denial
5/5/2018	President Trump's former campaign manager is still facing charges filed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.	denial, distance
07/30/2018	The board of directors at CBS is expected to meet today amid allegations of sexual harassment against chairman and CEO Leslie Moonves	corrective action
08/02/2018	ISIS claims responsibility for the murder of four western tourists including an American couple in Tajikistan	corrective action
08/03/2018	CBS chairman and CEO Leslie Moonves did not address his future with the company in a teleconference with investors	corrective action
09/13/2018	CBS has fired the top executive at 60 MINUTES after he warned a reporter covering allegations of sexual harassment	corrective action, denial
12/18/2018	CBS says no to a golden parachute for Les Moonves	corrective action, denial
10/14/2019	Ronan Farrow's New Book "Catch and Kill" details allegations of sexual assault in the media industry, CBS	distance

Appendix 4: CBS Evening News

Date	Title	Category
11/20/2017	CBS News suspends Charlie Rose after sexual harassment allegations.	corrective action/denial
11/20/2017	Manhunt underway after ambush leaves border patrol agent dead.	corrective action/denial
11/21/2017	CBS News and PBS fired Charlie Rose over accusations of sexual misconduct.	corrective action
11/21/2017	President Trump says he prefers Roy Moore to his liberal opponent.	corrective action
11/29/2017	SNBC fires Matt Lauer over sexual misconduct allegation.	corrective action
11/30/2017	Prospects for approval of tax bill improving	corrective action
4/27/2018	Former NBC Nightly News anchor Tom Brokaw pushes back against sexual misconduct allegations.	corrective action

5/3/2018	New allegations of sexual harassment against former CBS THIS MORNING anchor Charlie Rose	denial
5/3/2018	President Trump no longer denies knowing about Stormy Daniels payment	Denial, corrective action
5/4/2018	A manhunt is underway for the gunman who shot a federal agent in Chicago.	denial
7/27/2018	Six women accuse CBS CEO Leslie Moonves of misconduct	denial
8/2/2018	Outside investigators to investigate accusations of sexual misconduct by CBS CEO Leslie Moonves	denial, corrective action
9/12/2018	60 MINUTES Executive Producer Jeff Fager fired from CBS News	Corrective action
12/17/2019	Les Moonves won't get severance pay following sexual misconduct investigation	denial, corrective action
10/9/2019	Matt Lauer denies rape allegation by NBC News colleague	corrective action