

ABSTRACT

Apology:
A Content Analysis of Public School District Apologies in
Race-Related Crises

Magen C. Davis, M.A.

Mentor: Mia Moody-Ramirez, Ph.D.

The need for crisis communication for public school districts is at an all-time high as school shootings and other such crises occur at a high frequency (Gainey 2009).¹ Incidents relating to racism are rarely studied in the realm of crisis communication especially in public school districts. When an organization is at fault, in a crisis of reputation, a statement of apology can be one of a few ways to atone for the incident.

Using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, this research will work to analyze the content of public apologies and statements from 32 public school district which have faced race-related crises in the last several years. In particular, this study aims to answer three questions for each study:

¹ Gainey, B. S. (2009). Crisis Management's New Role in Educational Settings. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 82(6), 267–274. <https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.82.6.267-274>

- RQ₁: Are statements more/less likely to include direct mentions of race in certain terms?
- RQ₂: Will more/less statements include the *transcendence* strategy than not?
- RQ₃: Are district statements that do/do not address race directly more/less likely to have negative news coverage?

The apologies and statements from principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and/or administrators were coded for the presence of specific strategies found in the SCCT. As a second method of analysis, social media comments were coded for overall satisfaction with one of the apologies and with the racial elements of the apology. Findings indicate fewer statements mentioned race in certain terms, about half utilized the transcendence strategy. Conclusions also indicated that in statements that did not mention race, news coverage was consistently less negative.

Apology:
A Content Analysis of Public School District Apologies in Race-Related
Incidents and Crises

by

Magen Celine Davis, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Journalism

Mia Moody-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

Approved by the Thesis Committee

Mia Moody-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

Sara Stone, Ph.D.

Tyrha Lindsey-Warren, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

May 2019

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2019 by Magen C. Davis

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	VII
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	IX
DEDICATION	X
CHAPTER ONE	1
Inspiration and introduction	1
<i>The Cases</i>	2
<i>Race-Related Response</i>	3
<i>Structure of Study</i>	3
CHAPTER TWO	5
Literature Review (Crisis Communications)	5
CHAPTER THREE	9
Literature Review (Race-Related Crisis & Critical Race Theory)	9
<i>Race-Related Crisis</i>	9
<i>Public School Crisis/Public School Race Related Crisis</i>	11
<i>Critical Race Theory</i>	11
CHAPTER FOUR	14
Hypotheses	14
CHAPTER FIVE	16
Methodology	16
CHAPTER SIX	18
Case Studies: Spring ISD and Appleton ISD	18
<i>Spring ISD</i>	18
<i>Appleton ISD</i>	21
CHAPTER SEVEN	27
Findings of 32 Cases	27
CHAPTER EIGHT	31
Discussion	31
<i>Limitations</i>	36

<i>Future Research</i>	37
APPENDICES	38
Appendix A - Table A1 Monte Carlo Model Results	39
Appendix B - Katy ISD Facebook Post	40
WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED.....	41

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Percentage of Direct Mention of Race	29
Figure 2 SCCT Strategies Used	31

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Tone of Spring articles	20
Table 2 Tone of Appleton articles	27
Table 3 Frequency of Statements Not Mentioning Race	32
Table 4 Frequency of Statements Mentioning Race	33
Table A1 Monte Carlo Model Results	46

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I thank Dr. Mia Moody-Ramirez, Dr. Tyrha Lindsey-Warren, and Dr. Sara Stone for being the powerful women who guided me through the practice of scholarship during my undergraduate and graduate career. As members of my committee, I am thankful for your commitment of time and energy... and also prayers.

I also want to acknowledge my other mentors in the department: Carol Perry and Megan Henderson. You two have changed my life for the better. You believed in me, encouraged me, and convinced me to push forward. I would not have a job or two degrees without you.

Also, I'm so grateful for my Waco family, Rae, Jon, Carlye, Amber, and Morgan.

DEDICATION

To Sheila and Rickey Spence and Beverly and Gouvaniel Crockett, my mentors

CHAPTER ONE

Inspiration and Introduction

The Cases

On April 17, 2018, Ponderosa Elementary School principal Shanna Swearingen stood in a meeting with three other staff members. The topic of conversation was a young black student with special needs and his fair share of behavioral problems. The student was known for making great escapes from his classroom, running through the building and, if possible, outside the school. In reference to this student, Swearingen said, “We won’t chase him. We will call the police and tell them he has a gun so they come faster” (Ojeda & Walker, 2018).

Over the next several days, rumors of the incident spread through PTA Facebook pages causing outrage among parents and community members. Finally, the story landed in the hands of popular Houston News Channel 2, Click2Houston. Click2Houston published a story on the incident six days later confirming the community’s suspicions. The following day, Principal Swearingen and Assistant Principal Marcus LeFlore made statements in emails to all Ponderosa Elementary parents and staff. A case study detailing the strategies used in those statements is in chapter six.

Race-Related Response

This race-related incident at Ponderosa Elementary acts as just one example of many in the United States over the past several years. In other situations, a teacher issues an assignment where students are asked to list the benefits of being a colonial-era slave, a photo leaks from a class presentation depicting a black student on a leash led by white students, a group of teachers dress up as Mexican caricatures while another group dresses up as pieces of a border wall, and a choir director issues a dress code banning “afros and other outlandish hairstyles.” These small crises of reputation can grow to be not-so-small when they go unanswered, often spreading rapidly through social and news media. Not only the incident, but the PR response become the centerpiece of public criticism.

From a public relations perspective, practitioners have a tall order to fill when addressing race-related topics because of the sensitivity involved. When these incidents occur, the PR professionals, administration, and staff of public school districts must respond in a way that broaches a topic largely avoided.

Most current articles on race-related crisis management focus on celebrity and politician image repair strategies. Conversely, most research on public school crisis management focuses on school shootings and other major safety crises (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Len-Ríos, Finneman, Han, Bhandari, & Perry, 2015; Liu, 2008; Logan, 2016). Only a small number of school crises stem from violent incidents and while it is vital to ensure the safety of students and staff on campuses, crises of reputation are far more common. These types of crises are what public relations practitioners will handle most often.

As the American cultural milieu is constantly changing, organizations are being asked to hold themselves more accountable than ever before. In the last few months, the *Netflix* PR chief was fired for using the “n-word” in a meeting, Kevin Hart was asked to step down from hosting the Oscars after homophobic tweets surfaced, and even John Schnatter (Papa John himself) was ousted by the board of directors of Papa John’s Pizza for using racial slurs. These robust responses to hate speech were largely results of pressure from the public and patrons. They aptly represent how public relations responses to race-related crises are becoming more intense and are taken far more seriously than in the past.

Structure of Study

This study uses literature on the paradigm of the Critical Race Theory, and the proposed (and tested) strategies of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to understand how to analyze race-related crises at public school districts. Using two primary case studies and 31 smaller race-related crises, this study analyzes and evaluates the current practitioner strategies for written (and sometimes verbal) responses in order to establish how these responses can be improved within SCCT strategies and the CRT paradigm.

This analysis furthers the literature on practical use of crisis communication strategies utilized by public school communicators using qualitative data (strategy and tone coding). Sentiment, frequencies and percentages are assessed using Qualtrics, a survey software, and *R*, a statistical coding program. Based on a review of the literature and on study results, conclusions indicate public school communicators benefited from

avoiding discussing race in explicit terms. Findings also indicate SCCT strategies and the CRT paradigm may inhibit the ongoing strategies for communicating contrition.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review (Crisis Communications)

The psychology field has one way of describing the components of an effective apology and the public relations field has another. In a way, the pieces of the standard apology for both disciplines match up, but the language among literature for each differs greatly. Psychology scholars often approach apology from a perspective of reconciliation and forgiveness which can be therapeutic. Public relations scholars broach the subject in terms of image restoration—a brand of saving face as often and as rigorously as possible. Organizations partake in image repair (with apologies sometimes therein) in order to regain the standing they had with constituents before an incident.

A psychology research group combined common elements from several authors of apology literature. They say that the process includes “admissions of wrongdoing and acceptance of responsibility for the offensive act, restitution, and an expression of regret and sorrow” (Slocum, et. al. 2011, 85). Author Nick Smith wrote that an apology could have many elements including corroboration of the facts, acceptance of blame, recognizing the victim as moral interlocutor, categorical regret, reform and redress, etc. (Smith, 2008).

The theory of image repair was first introduced by William L. Benoit in the mid-1990s. Benoit and a few research partners (including famed communications professor Timothy Coombs) studied individual and organizational case studies where people utilized crisis communication strategies. The basic concept of image restoration is that

when an organization (or a person) is accused of wrongdoing, the accused organization reviews its options and deploys strategies to repair that damaged image (Benoit, 1994). The strategy options that Benoit created are defined in categories including denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, and mortification.

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was first introduced by Timothy Coombs in the late-1990s. It is akin to the Theory of Image Repair but with some small augmentations. As colleagues, Coombs and Benoit worked together to form and define strategies for image repair. Coombs later wrote *Ongoing Crisis Communication* which includes several other strategies that directly address crisis. SCCT is all about containment and recovery. A PR practitioner's work is to respond to crisis quickly (Barton, 1993), with information (Sturges, 1994), and with a plan (Coombs, 1999). SCCT strategies live on a continuum. For Coombs, every crisis holds weak to strong responsibility for the company and the response can range from defensive to accommodative. By deciding how responsible it is for the incident, a company can utilize a number of SCCT strategies to respond and atone. SCCT also takes into consideration crisis history and level of intentionality.

Base strategies (mandatory and first actions of the company) include instructing and adapting information. Instructing information is the facts stakeholders need to know about crisis and how they can avoid being impacted or harmed by it. Adapting information is the immediate corrective action taken to resolve a persisting issue. These are not technically strategies, that is why Coombs (1999) and Sturges (1994) say they are necessary and should be communicated first.

Denial strategies live on the weak crisis responsibility end of the spectrum. Coombs identifies three deny strategies: attack the accuser, denial and scapegoat. Attack the accuser is pretty straightforward. A company can make an effort to confront the party that insists there is a crisis. Denial allows the organization to state that a crisis simply does not exist. Finally, scapegoat allows the organization to claim that someone else is responsible for the crisis. Diminish strategies include excuse and justification. Organizations excuse by offering an explanation that can limit their responsibility. Organizations can also use an explanation to justify the reasons for the crisis. Rebuild strategies include compensation and apology. In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, organizations can publicize information about compensation. Compensation is always financial support for victims. Organizations can also apologize by expressing regret, (which is to accept responsibility).

Finally, the reinforce response is a late addition to the theory (Heath & Coombs 2006). They identified three reinforce strategies: bolstering, ingratiation, victimage.¹ Bolstering is illustrated when an organization promotes past good deeds. Ingratiation is used when the organization thanks stakeholders. Finally, victimage occurs when the organization states that they too are victims of the crisis.

To expand on our understanding of successful strategies, a research group analyzed 110 journal articles on apologetic discourse and image repair from 1986 to 2016. By laying out the types of strategies identified by the authors and whether the strategies were successful, they were able to develop a matrix of options showing most

¹ Some of these strategies are found (in part) in the theory of image repair (Benoit).

successful, most common, and least successful strategies of image repair. They found that the most successful strategies were corrective action paired with reducing offensiveness. The most common included all but the last of Benoit's strategies, mortification. Finally, the least successful strategies included denial, denial paired with reducing offensiveness, and denial paired with evading responsibility. More than 62% of articles (which include numerous case studies and examples) showed that denial was the most unsuccessful but most commonly utilized strategy in the sample (Arendt, LaFeche, & Limperopulos, 2017).

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review (Race-Related Crisis & Critical Race Theory)

Race-Related Crisis

Most current articles that focus on race-related case studies look at celebrity and politician image repair. Many papers add tactics to existing literature including endorsement and misinterpretation (Liu, 2008), defiance (Len-Ríos, 2015) and humor (Liu, 2007). One case study of the incident where Paula Deen (TV personality and home-making guru) utilized the “n-word” in a tweet concluded that people accused of racism should see the most success when they show the figure “working actively to support policies and programs that support minority groups” (Len-Ríos, 2015, 162) and essentially that the words of the apology must be backed up by actions (Len-Ríos, 2015, 162). Len-Ríos also concluded that any response is better than nothing (which is supported by Benoit himself). Another case study from Timothy Coombs and Lainen Schmidt compared image restoration strategies for the case of Texaco’s senior executives belittling minority employees with racial slurs. Their interesting finding was that (in this case) no one strategy proved more effective than another. Coombs and Schmidt conclude that when one ideal tactic (such as mortification) would prove legally disadvantageous for an organization, another might be just as successful (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

In 2009, Timothy Coombs and Sherry Holladay published *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*. The book is a compendium for both practitioners and researchers featuring their latest research on crisis communication methods. One framework (the only

one of its kind) which addresses racial crisis communication specifically prescribes three categories: actions, words, and symbols. Like SCCT, depending on the type of incident, practitioners could follow Baker's recommendations for response strategies. For example, "Racial incidents resulting from words (e.g., racial slurs) are most effectively handled by apologies and swift dissociation from the individuals or groups responsible" (Heath, 2013). In her study on five racially charged incidents and the responsible organizations' responses, Brooke Fisher Liu said Baker's framework was rarely used with the exception of one strategy which she calls "separation." She recommends that when an individual or group is responsible for the incident, the organization should distance itself from them (Liu, 2010). That strategy is found across Benoit's and Coomb's theories as well. Liu dismisses the Baker framework as "too general" and wrote that it limits the expanse of strategies practitioners can take when responding to racial crisis.

From the article, Liu addresses racially charged crises from the basis of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory which Coombs founded and Liu calls a "promising approach" (Coombs, 2010, p355¹). Coombs' theory is one of the most recent and comprehensive frameworks for crisis communication. The theory works from a matrix of communication practices contingent on an organization's level of responsibility for the crisis. Organizations should first consider the type of crisis (victim, accidental, or preventable) and then consider whether the organization already has a history of similar incidents and the current nature of their relationship with constituents. Strategies are then split into four categories: deny, diminish, rebuild, and reinforce (Coombs, 2007). When

¹ Chapter written by Brooke Fischer Liu

Liu coded the crisis response of four racially charged incidents (using SCCT), she found that SCCT was a useful framework when loosely (instead of prescriptively) applied. For this research, both Coombs and Liu's additions to SCCT will be used to understand the statements from public school districts.

Public School Crisis/Public School Race Related Crisis

Most, if not all, research on public school crisis management focuses on school shootings and other major safety crises. Only a small number of school crises are violent incidents, so certainly more research on public relations crises is necessary. Dr. Barbara Gainey is one of the few researchers studying the state of crisis communication in public education. In 2009, Gainey published a three-part case study on crisis preparedness of the South Carolina and Metropolitan Atlanta school districts. Through surveys, Gainey discovered that most (97.5%) of school districts had crisis management plans in place but just 22.5% of the plans included response strategies for crises of "reputation" (Gainey, 2009).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory is both a theory and a paradigm.² It sprang up in the mid-1970s through scholars and historians in the law community. It operates on six basic tenets:

1. Racism is ordinary, making it hard to address.
2. White-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes for the dominant group. This one is sometimes called "interest convergence."
3. Race is a social construct.
4. The dominant society racializes groups at different times.
5. All people hold intersectional and "anti-essential" identities.
6. Voices of color have innate authority to communicate histories and experiences.

² CRT also contains an activist dimension which is not discussed here.

Because they believe that race issues are ingrained in our everyday society, Critical Race Theorists focus partly on incrementalism in squashing some signs of re-entrenchment into historical racism.

Critical Race Theorists would say that crises related to race bring with them an entire history of racial discrimination (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). For example, take an incident similar to the others studied in this paper. In May 2018, a New Jersey high school principal and organizers themed their prom dance “Party Like It’s 1776” and the event was to be held at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. Many black students and parents were outraged by this while many white students and parents were outraged by their outrage. They could not understand why anyone wouldn’t want to celebrate American independence in this way.³ Here’s where CRT comes in. That sixth tenet can directly explain the disparity between the black and white constituents and help the practitioner (whose job it is to respond) respond effectively. People of color have both the benefit and disadvantage of being *aware* of their racial experiences and histories at all times (Delgado, 1989).⁴ This can explain why black constituents were offended and many white ones were not. And knowing that, can help PR professionals communicate more effectively with their communities.

In thinking about crisis communications, the question is how to address issues related to race in a way that ameliorates conflicts of perspective and guilt. What could

³ This story is cited as Fearnow, 2018.

⁴ This is, of course, not to say that people of color cannot or are not aware of history. *It is*, however, to say that some people have the capacity to be more (and constantly) aware of these things.

that principal say that would help all people understand the situation and express empathy or apology to the people hurt by it?

The connection between Critical Race Theory and public relations is fairly new. Donnalyn Pompper, a celebrated researcher and professor of public relations, wrote, “It is time for CRT in public relations, given the nearly three decades of myopia with regard to difference in research agendas, normalized andro-, Euro-, and ethnocentrism, and alpha and beta biases in research processes” (Pompper, 2005, 155). Mia Moody-Ramirez and Hazel James Cole also wrote a recent book bringing image repair and race relations together through studies of race-related crisis contributing to available literature (Moody-Ramirez & Cole, 2018). They write, “We identified successful applications of CRT to IRT that might be applicable to individuals who find themselves in race-related crisis situations in the future” (Moody-Ramirez & Cole, 2018, 193). They also call for “ongoing analyses of IRT, race and gender in varying settings” (Moody-Ramirez & Cole, 2018, 197).

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Questions

Based on the review of prior literature, this study utilizes the strategies of the Situational Communication Theory and the paradigm of the Critical Race Theory to answer these questions:¹

RQ₁: Are statements from public school districts more/less likely to include direct mentions of race in certain terms?

Specifically, this refers to explicit terms such as racism, racial, and names of races or ethnicities (African-American, Hispanic, Latinx, et. al). Critical Race Theory calls for confrontation of minor race issues and its main tenets suggest that colorblindness is not a helpful practice in that regard.

“Critical race theorists (or “crits,” as they are sometimes called) hold that color blindness of the latter forms will allow us to redress only extremely egregious racial harms, ones that everyone would notice and condemn. But if racism is embedded in our thought processes and social structures as deeply as many crits² believe, then the “ordinary business” of society— the routines, practices, and institutions that we rely on to do the world’s work— will keep minorities in subordinate positions. Only aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are will do much to ameliorate misery.” (Delgado and Stefaniec, 2017, 27)

That said, the opposite strategy to the transcendence strategy could be this brand of confrontation. Using explicit terms to express the wrongdoing related to the crisis would align with the philosophy expressed in CRT.

¹ The three questions apply to the case studies found in chapter six

² “crits” is another name for people who associate themselves with the Critical Race Theory.

RQ₂: Will more/less statements include the *transcendence* strategy?

An example of the transcendence strategy is, “We recognize the value and worth of each and every one of our students who come through our doors. We are committed to ensuring all students have every opportunity to reach their potential” (Beaverton School District statement). Again, the transcendence strategy was identified by Benoit (1997) and later Brooke Fischer Liu (2010). For Benoit, transcendence appeared when organizations appealed to a bigger picture rather than addressing the specific situation. Based on her research, the strategy is often used as an alternative to discussing race explicitly. Liu found that transcendence was used in 47% of documents when addressing race.

RQ₃: Are statements that do/do not address race directly more/less likely to have negative news coverage?

This final question brings together the previous two. It asks, simply, do districts see more success (through news coverage tone) when they do not address race as compared to when they do.

CHAPTER FIVE

Methodology

This study employs a two-step approach to evaluate effectiveness of strategies used by school districts in responding to race-related crises. In the first phase, response documents are used to analyze which strategies from the SCCT are present. The documents (43 in total) were located through Google searches, which yielded news stories, web postings, and social media postings and public information requests to some of the organizations. The chief goal of this part of the content analysis is to assess the frequency of SCCT strategies.

To ensure reliability, 10 percent of the documents were coded twice: once by the researcher and once by a trained coder. The statements (sometimes more than one per crisis) were coded for SCCT strategies by identifying portions of the statement which aligned with the strategies detailed in Coomb's SCCT.

In the second step, the top three hard news articles from each case were coded using one of Miles and Huberman's (1994) data analysis procedures and mimic an article written by Brooke Fischer Liu (2010) wherein 144 articles are evaluated. Those news articles were then analyzed for a qualitative correlation with the district statement from each case (n=32). The procedure analyzes articles for tone: positive, negative, or neutral. For the purposes of this research (identifying successful strategies), a "positive" article would benefit the school district in that their response is framed as satisfactory or even robust. In opposition, a negative article frames the district response as nonexistent, slow, or flawed. As such, a neutral article covers the facts of the situation with the sole function

of briefing readers on the situation. Neutral stories leave the reader with neither an improved nor worsened opinion of the district response.

All news articles were found using the news tab on Google (which prioritizes and categorizes news based on search terms). The search terms followed the formula, “‘name of school district’ + keywords from the incident.”

CHAPTER SIX

Case Studies: Spring ISD and Appleton ISD

Case Study One: Spring ISD

The situation at Spring ISD (first mentioned in the introduction) is a perfect example of the type of ‘crisis of reputation’ this study analyzes. The principal (perpetrator), the district superintendent, and the assistant principal each made statements which were sent to parents and the media.

Swearingen’s Statement:

"Ponderosa Family,

It is with a heavy heart that I write this message. As many of you may be aware, KPRC¹ ran a story late yesterday about Ponderosa Elementary and an incident that occurred last week where I made an insensitive comment that was not reflective of who I am nor how much I care about every student who attends this school.

Your children mean the world to me, and I’m heartbroken that my thoughtless remark has caused disruption to the hard work underway here at Ponderosa. Here in our community, we had a hard year with Hurricane Harvey, and the damage it caused to a large part of our neighborhood. I was so proud of the unity seen in this community during the recovery efforts.

Please know that the same commitment and drive that I had to make things right for our children after the storm, I have today as I work to make things right now with both staff and parents.

I am truly sorry for the comment I made. It does not in any way reflect the love and care I have for the students of Ponderosa."

Sincerely,
Shanna Swearingen, Principal
Ponderosa Elementary School"

¹ KPRC is a local news station.

LeFlore's Statement:

"Regarding the events of last Tuesday, April 17, 2018, one of our own, our leader, made a mistake. Something was said that should not have been said and it struck a chord based on some of the events occurring in today's society."

One week later, Spring ISD Superintendent Rodney Watson, posted a public statement on the district's Facebook and Twitter pages. This statement came fifteen days after the incident and one week after Swearingen's apology (which was sent only to Ponderosa parents).

Watson's Statement:

"As an African-American male and father, I understand the concern we are seeing around the careless and inappropriate comment that was made by our Ponderosa Elementary principal.

I was extremely concerned too when I heard about the comment and want to reassure everyone that strong disciplinary action has been taken. As a school district, it is our policy not to discuss personnel issues so it appears some people have assumed that no action was taken on this issue. That is not the case. I would never let a comment of this nature go unaddressed. It is being addressed first and foremost with Principal Swearingen and also with the district as a whole.

Although we routinely do an annual, online discrimination awareness training here in the district for all staff, this year I'm calling for in-person cultural sensitivity training.

As a diverse school district serving a student population that is 46 percent Hispanic and 40 percent African-American, my top priority is ensuring the dignity, respect and safety for all our students.

I appreciate all of the input we have received on this issue, and I am continuing to monitor it closely."

(Kennedy, 2018)

The incident occurred on April 17, the first article about it came from a local news station 13 days later (after word had spread through a parent Facebook page and all three apologies were sent via email the following day on May 1 and finally, the superintendent

statement was posted the following day to social media (the District’s Twitter and Facebook accounts) (Kennedy 2018).

Findings

Analysis of Swearingen’s Statement

With the district exhibiting no intention to fire Swearingen, statements of apology and proof of rebuilding actions are their main discourse. Overall, the tone of the apology is emotional and could be characterized by Benoit’s strategy called *mortification* and Slocum’s “sorrow.” Swearingen promises that she is committed to “make things right for our children” but includes no tangible forms of restitution.

Interestingly, Swearingen uses the *bolstering* strategy by mentioning her hard work during Hurricane Harvey, an event which devastated the Houston area during the first month of the school year (Heath & Coombs, 2006). By *bolstering* those past good deeds, Swearingen reminds the parents/public how much she cares. On another note, Swearingen does not address race in the statement. She states that her comments were not a reflection of how much she cares about “every student” at Ponderosa.

LeFlore’s Statement

This brief statement that was sent to staff members in an email serves more as an internal form of Coombs’ base requirement for crisis communications: adapting information. LeFlore’s role in the situation (as second-in-command on the campus) is to inform and support campus staff.

Watson’s Statement

This statement from the Superintendent of Schools includes most parts of the customary apology. Watson admits that something went wrong (admission) while using trace amounts of the *separation* strategy by placing blame on a named member of personnel (acceptance), he mentions that “strong disciplinary action” was taken and “in-person cultural sensitivity training” is in the future. From Slocum’s perspective on apology, Watson’s statement does not qualify for “an expression of regret and sorrow” while Swearingen’s does.

Unlike the first two statements, Watson mentions race twice: “as an African-American male and father” and “as a diverse school district serving... 46 percent Hispanic and 40 percent African-American” student.

Table 1: Tone of Spring Articles

x	Positive	Negative	Neutral
News Story Content	n=3	n=2	n=4
%	33.3%	22.2%	44.4%

Note: Percentage is out of total number of articles.

Case Study Two: Appleton ISD

The focus of this case study is a small crisis in Appleton, Wisconsin. During the week of January 12, 2018, a high school American History teacher, Chad Endres, assigned an essay writing prompt. He asked the students to put themselves in the shoes of a colonial-era slave and to write about it. The essay prompt said that the students should include, “hours, benefits, physical and mental requirements for the job, ‘relationship with your master,’ and ‘relationship with white southerners who don’t own you’” (WBAY, 2018). When the students brought the assignment home, there was an overwhelming

response from students and their parents.² The comments of a white student in the class describe much of the outrage well:

“First of all, no black student should EVER be asked to imagine that they are a slave. That alone is absolutely revolting and disgusting. Second of all, no one who is not black could even begin to imagine what slavery is like and how it still affects black kids every day. You [Endres] have absolutely no concept of how horrifying and disgusting slavery is, and you belittle the suffering enslaved black people went through every day in your lessons. You make dozens of black students feel uncomfortable and unsafe in your class, and I have just discovered that you IGNORED these students when they came to you about this. This essay request, and the way you discuss slavery is absolutely deplorable and must change immediately.” (from WSAU)

Just one week prior, a private elementary school an hour’s drive away had a similar crisis where an elementary school teacher had asked her students to think about the pros and cons of American slavery. A few days later, media stations asked the superintendent of schools, Judy Baseman, for a statement. Suffice it to say, this small half-page assignment became a crisis for the district. Below are the statements released from the district.

Baseman Statement (Superintendent):

“An Appleton high school educator recently created and used an objectionable essay prompt as one part of a US History unit on slavery. This matter has been taken very seriously and is currently being addressed by both school and district administration.

While we cannot discuss the specifics of personnel matters publicly, as soon as we were made aware of this situation, it was immediately addressed with the educator and steps were put into place so that this will not happen again. Although we believe that the educator’s choices were not intended to cause harm, we understand that this essay prompt was and is hurtful and offensive to all of our students.

Teaching about the profound immorality of slavery is a necessary part of our curriculum. We are committed to working with all of our staff members to ensure that our curriculum materials are respectful toward all students. We understand

² Of course, many other parents and community members found nothing wrong with the assignment.

that it is essential that the tone and content of our instructional practices are also sensitive to the topic being discussed.

The district is in the process of reviewing its current curriculum, instructional materials, and practices in this area. To further assist all of our staff in building their expertise and to prevent future concerns, we will also continue to provide district-wide coaching and training in culturally and linguistically responsive practices.

Clearly, our work is not done. We are dedicated to continuing to improve our cultural sensitivity and understanding at all levels across the district.

We sincerely apologize to our families and to the students who were asked to complete this assignment. The material included in the essay prompt does not reflect our values as a district and how we want to serve our students and families. The Appleton Area School District is committed to providing a safe and welcoming school environment for all students.”

Endres Statement:

“Dear Families:

I wanted to make you aware that I recently apologized to all of my current US History students for using an objectionable essay prompt as part of a unit on slavery. The essay prompt for this assignment was inappropriate and harmful and I have removed the assignment from my gradebook. While in future years I will continue to teach the topic of slavery in U.S. History, I assure you I will never use this assignment again. I understand that slavery needs to be taught in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of all students. I failed to do this. I am personally committed to working with the District to create more appropriate lessons on slavery. This will include participating in ongoing professional development opportunities that will build my cultural competence as an educator and as a person. My goal has always been to create and maintain a safe, comfortable, culturally sensitive learning environment for all of my students. I am sorry that I did not do so. If you have any questions or concerns or wish to review the entire instructional unit, I invite you to contact me directly.

Thank you,
Chad Endres
U.S. History
Appleton North High School”

Findings

SCCT Response Strategies Used. Endres (the teacher) and Baseman (district superintendent) used a total of six strategies defined by Coombs and one strategy added to SCCT by Liu.

Base Strategies. Coombs, drawing from existing organizational communication literature, suggests that no communication strategies should be deployed until after base strategies have been communicated.² For the purposes of this study, a statement aligning with the SCCT would immediately include instructing information. Both apologies did include that information. In a sentence (the first sentence), both statements succinctly describe exactly what happened. Both apologies also included statements on corrective action. For example, “While we cannot discuss the specifics of personnel matters publicly, as soon as we were made aware of this situation, it was immediately addressed with the educator and steps were put into place so that this will not happen again.” Further down, she also writes, “To further assist all of our staff in building their expertise and to prevent future concerns, we will also continue to provide district-wide coaching and training in culturally and linguistically responsive practices.” The teacher also wrote, “I have removed the assignment from my gradebook” and “...I assure you I will never use this assignment again.”

Diminish. The superintendent’s apology also included the diminish strategies, excuse and separate.

² Coombs refers to frameworks on organizational communication from the ‘90s such as Sturges, 1994 which is cited in the bibliography of this paper.

- Excuse: “Although we believe the educator’s choices were not intended to cause harm, we understand that this essay prompt was and is hurtful and offensive to all of our students.”
- Separate: “The material included in the essay prompt does not reflect our values as a district and how we want to serve our students and families.”

By Coombs’ and Liu’s definitions, excuse and separate both do the work of diminishing the organization’s responsibility but in this case the school district utilized the excuse strategy in defense of the perpetrator (Endres). In addition, their use of the separate strategy pacifies the guilt by avoiding use of Endres’ name when describing the problem (“the material included in the essay”).

Rebuild. Both statements included an apology by using the phrases “we sincerely apologize” and “I am sorry” to apologize to the students asked to complete the assignment. The district superintendent utilized the transcendence strategy (another Liu addition based on Benoit’s image-repair theory). In her 2010 study, she found that transcendence was used in 95% of response documents discussed race explicitly and that the strategy was effective. The district superintendent wrote:

“Teaching about the profound immorality of slavery is a necessary part of our curriculum. We are committed to working with all of our staff members to ensure that our curriculum materials are respectful toward all students. We understand that it is essential that the tone and content of our instructional practices are also sensitive to the topic being discussed.”

Media Coverage. News stories were coded for valence (positive, negative, or neutral) (Miles and Huberman, 1994). That data can be found in Table 2.

News stories often help researchers yield new and helpful information about the situation. Small crises (especially ones at public school districts) are rarely covered by national news. Obviously, local coverage is usually written by local people and often includes both the district and constituent responses to the crisis. Eight stories covered this small crisis. All stories developed between Friday, January 12, 2018, and Monday, January 15, 2018. One reporter said he discovered the inappropriate assignment on Thursday, January 11 (the day prior to the first article) and reached out to the superintendent for comment.

Table 2: Tone of Appleton Articles

x	Positive	Negative	Neutral
News Story Content	n=2	n=3	n=3
DS	25%	37.5%	37.5%

Note: Percentage is out of total number of articles.

For a case study on a small crisis, analyzing news content in this way is helpful but perhaps not the most powerful indicator of response success. As shown above in Figure 2, the coverage is distributed almost evenly. A few stories (especially the ones that focused on crisis fallout) reported on how disgruntled students and parents were. A couple others focused on the Baseman apology and her promises to improve the situation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Findings of 32 Cases

Based on the findings of the previous two cases, this chapter assesses IRT and SCCT strategies used by 32 school districts. The first research question asked whether the statements of apology were more or less likely to include direct mentions of race in certain terms than not. Coding methods confirmed that less than half of the statements (37.21%) mentioned race in certain terms and more than half did not (62.79%) (Figure 1).

Direct Mention of Race in Certain Terms

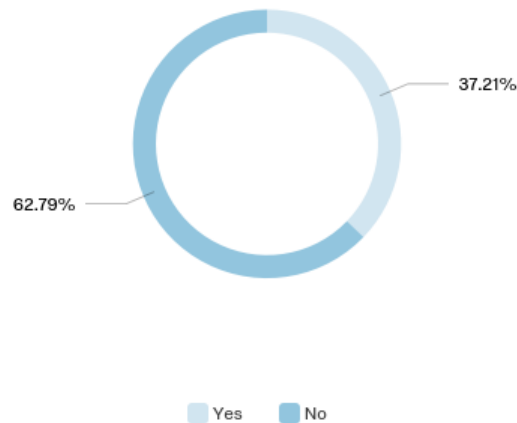


Figure 1: Percentage of Direct Mention of Race

Several statements that included race in explicit terms used them to apologize directly to the person or people impacted by the incident, paired with the transcendence strategy, or paired with the separation strategy. Examples from three statements which exemplify use of the race in certain terms.

This quote is in a letter from the Superintendent of Mason City Schools in Ohio. In this incident, a teacher used the “n-word” with a student in her class.

“This week, our school district was in the spotlight for a thoughtless and offensive remark made to an African American student. There’s no explanation or defense that would make such a comment appropriate in any setting. It was wrong. Racism is real in America, and we all have an obligation to fight it.”

This quote is from the actual administrator at fault in a situation at Onalaska ISD. He made a comment on a Facebook post about a football game wherein he said, “You can't count on a black quarterback.” As exhibited in the quotation, he uses a self-separation strategy (separating himself from the district).

“Also, I want everyone to know that my comments in no way reflect the nature of the Onalaska Independent School District or the Onalaska community. These are caring, thoughtful communities where there is no place for racism.”

Finally, in his statement on an incident involving the Delaware State Education Association, an administrator admonishes the association president for posts he made on his own political blog.

“Without mincing words, there is no place for the type of commentary found on DSEA President Mike Matthews’ old blog in our society, and especially in our education system. His remarks demean women, insult minorities and religious beliefs and joke about child molestation and gang rape.”

Use of the Transcendence Strategy

The second research question asked if more or less statements would utilize the transcendence strategy. Nineteen of the 42 apologies included transcendence (44.3%). This finding is similar to Liu’s study where she found that 47% of statements used transcendence (Liu, 2010). Transcendence and other the strategies are listed below (Figure 2).

SCCT Strategies

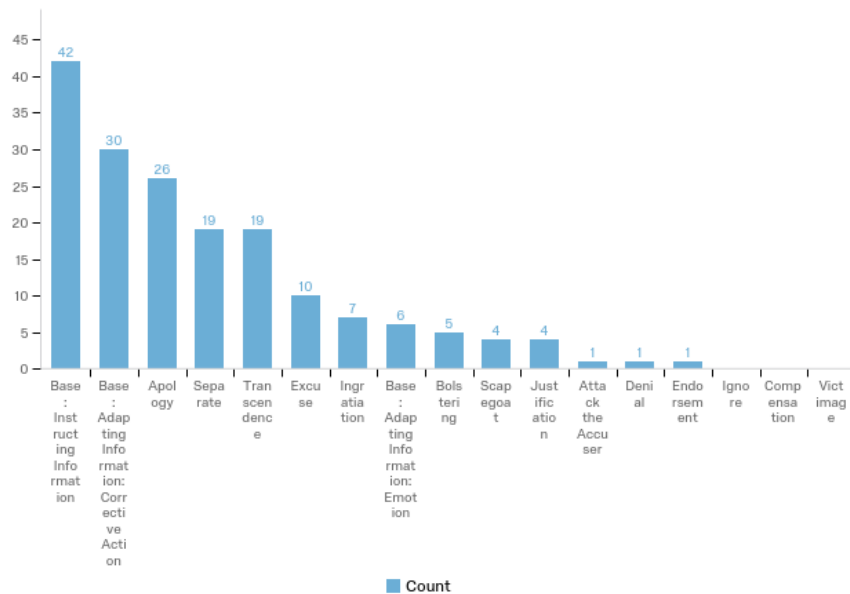


Figure 2: SCCT Strategies Used

In these examples, the transcendence strategy is used in different ways. The main purpose of transcendence as Benoit sees it, is to appeal to a larger narrative in order to divert attention (and sometimes blame) from the core narrative involved with the incident.

This incident is, again, from Mason City Schools in Ohio.

“It is not lost on me that this comes as we prepare to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day and his legacy of fighting for justice. Dr. King reminded us that, “the time is always right to do what is right.” In this case involving our teacher, the right thing to do is apologize, make amends, and take steps to be better. Once the teacher realized the gravity and impact of her statement, she apologized to the student.”

This statement comes from the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools where a rival school district burned a Swastika (used contemporarily as a Nazi symbol) into a high school football

field. Although people saw the issue as abhorrent on its own, it became a crisis when the school district left it on the field uncorrected for several months.

“We are committed to the improvement of this district and see this as an opportunity to have a larger impact.”

Finally, the following statement comes from Katy ISD in Texas. In this incident, the campus police for the district posted an image of a bus packed with several Indian people.¹

“While faced with difficult situations in our community, I want to thank all of our stakeholders for their hard work, respect, and compassion that illustrate what it means to create positive change in a hurting world.”

Tone of Articles

The third question asked whether the number of negative articles is influenced by whether race is mentioned in the district statement. The articles were coded by the main researcher and a trained colleague to ensure intercoder reliability. A Cohen’s *d* analysis resulted in substantial reliability ($d=0.71$). The most consistently negative coverage came from statements where they did use race in certain terms. As is exhibited in Table 5, in nearly half of the statements that did not mention race none of the three coded articles were negative. This is a stark difference to the cases where the statements did mention race. Over half (55%) of those statements had two negative articles (Table 6).

Table 3: Frequency of Statements Not Mentioning Race

Number of Negative Articles	Statements that Did Not Mention Race
0	9 (45%)
1	7 (35%)
2	3 (15%)
3	1 (5%)

¹ The post can be found in Appendix II

Table 4: Frequency of Statements Mentioning Race

Number of Negative Articles	Statements that Did Mention Race
0	3 (27%)
1	2 (18%)
2	6 (55%)
3	0 (0%)

Using a customized Monte Carlo model, which identifies the probability that given more cases, the trend would continue on that way.² This goes especially for the statements where race is not mentioned. The results of the model also show that there is a 95% probability that there is a high chance of these articles continuing to be lower than with the statements that do mention race explicitly. Simply put, the current trend of low negativity will most likely continue for statements where race is not mentioned.

In sum, coding methods found that fewer statements mentioned race in certain terms, about half utilized the transcendence strategy, and in statements that did not mention race, news coverage was less negative.

² Appendix I

CHAPTER EIGHT

Discussion

The role of school public relations is to advocate for the school district, teachers, and students. As school district personnel are largely employed by local government, their role is to communicate with district constituents (stakeholders and community). They tend to be obligated to promote and support the efforts of the district just as it is the role of PR professionals at a corporation to operate in the best interests of their company. When a crisis occurs at a district, racial or otherwise, PR communications moving forward often respond (with action items or rhetoric) in an effort to ameliorate the anger or confusion of the public in favor of the district. The aim of this research is to analyze the efforts of public school communications in race-related crises and how we can meaningfully discover which strategies impact the tone of influential news coverage.

Strategies Used

Coombs wrote that the very first step of crisis response is to issue instructing and adapting information as soon as the details are available (Coombs, 2007). Instructing and adapting information is anything constituents need to know in order to remain physically and psychologically safe. The basis of this strategy is speed. In the 32 cases, 88% of statements provided instructing information and 63% provided adapting information. Without drawing undue attention to the situation, Spring ISD (the first case study) may have addressed the crisis before it appeared (featuring outraged parents) on the nightly news. The practice of not responding to rumors and hearsay is common however a

situation becomes a crisis when constituents see it as a crisis (Coombs, 2007). In waiting 15 days to unroll a response, Spring ISD may have cost itself an opportunity to sell a better narrative. In theory, a response (at least on the campus level) was necessary as soon as district/campus leaders knew the facts of the situation and the public became outraged. When releasing a statement only after news coverage (regardless of intent), the district looks like it may not have addressed it at all had it not been for the coverage (this sentiment is found in several comments under the Twitter and Facebook posts of the superintendent's statement).

Addressing Racism

In her study on five race-related crisis situations, Brooke Fischer Liu found that most organizations avoid discussing race in their responses to racially charged crises. When they do discuss race, they use *denial* and *transcendence*. Liu also found that all parties in her study utilized the denial option which includes the strategies *attack the accuser*, *denial*, *scapegoat*, and one Liu added *ignore* (Liu, 2010). In a recent book which analyzes several cases of race-related speech crises, researchers found that people who used mortification and apology were more successful than people who utilized the denial strategy (Moody-Ramirez and Cole, 2018). Benoit identifies transcendence as organizations shifting focus away from the issue at hand to a larger issue thus avoiding too much blame. Phrases like, “regardless of race” and “across lines of race, gender and other forms of difference” are examples of transcendence when used during a race-related crisis. Colloquially, it could be characterized as an “all lives matter” approach. In both case studies, statements utilized transcendence rather than addressing race directly.

Race through SCCT Response Strategies

An interesting part of the responses to a race-related crisis is how exactly they address race. Few statements directly discuss race. All but one of the Spring ISD and Appleton ISD statements included the word race or mentioned any particular race.¹ What is interesting, however, is that both used phrases like “cultural competence” and “cultural sensitivity.” They write about how hurtful and offensive this assignment was for “all students” and about their intention of protecting “all students.” In the Appleton ISD statements, Endres wrote, “My goal has always been to create and maintain a safe, comfortable, culturally sensitive learning environment for all of my students.” Superintendent Baseman wrote, “Although we believe that the educator’s choices were not intended to cause harm, we understand that this essay prompt was and is hurtful and offensive to all of our students.”

Mentioning Race

Of 12 cases which yielded zero negative stories, only three cases mentioned race. There’s an argument that this finding is an indication that mentioning race can be a risk. Critical Race Theory may address this risk: “Some critics,² such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, even argue that our system of civil rights law and enforcement ensures that racial progress occurs at just the right slow pace. Too slow would make minorities impatient and risk destabilization; too fast could jeopardize important material and psychic benefits for elite groups” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 39). Although this selection addresses the American legal system, the sentiment may still apply. Approaching race, especially using race-related terms, can appear confrontational and confrontation makes for interesting (often critical) news stories.

CRT calls for “aggressive, color-conscious efforts” to address racism which is “embedded” in our ordinary lives (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 27). Based on this and other research, confronting racism overtly does not appear to work (at least not every time). How can practitioners’ response statements broach this disparity successfully? Specifically, what combination of strategies can be used to improve relations with invested parties (parents, staff, and community)? It is clear that the transcendence strategy yields some of the best responses.³ Other research has stated that the use of emotion in apologies (mortification) works as well (Moody-Ramirez and Cole, 2018). Research shows that making excuses or ignoring the crisis are the worst response (Arendt, LaFeche, & Limperopulos, n.d.; Len-Ríos, Finneman, Han, Bhandari, & Perry, 2015; Liu, 2010).

Applying these findings to the work of public school districts goes a step further. School district staff are local government employees and are governed by elected board members. This adds a responsibility to the public which exists in shorter form at businesses and corporations. The main constituents at these districts have invested their most valued asset, their children. When strategy meetings begin about how to respond to race-related responses, one of the foremost considerations will be the district’s legal responsibility to provide students with a nondiscriminatory educational environment. So as the results have shown, using explicit racial terms may not be a fail-safe strategy but they do not discount addressing race at all.

Limitations

The chief limitations in pursuing this research was access to information. Because all public school districts are pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, any citizen can request (at a low cost or sometimes free) previously unreleased information from government offices. When selecting cases and gathering statements, several public information requests were made for statements that had not been published in full. In an effort to secure the full statements (rather than relying on quotes from news media), those requests added time and money to the long process of research. In some cases, school districts responded weeks late and sometimes never responded to requests.

One interesting finding surfaced while searching for district statements. An overwhelming majority of school districts did not post or publish their statement to their website or social media. This begs the question, besides parent emails and news media, how are districts informing constituents of their statements? So often, reporters include only a small portion of the statement (if any). Sometimes direct quotes are contextualized or contrasted with commentary and other times, there are no direct quotes at all. This finding suggests that districts may not be as focused on inbound communication as they are on responding to media requests for comment. Posting statements on websites and social media opens the district up to commentary from the public. However daunting, it may benefit districts to host healthy discourse on these small crises, allowing for inbound commentary from constituents. In the case of a race-related crisis, districts may be able to contain and respond to community concerns faster and more succinctly.¹

¹ They can do this rather than leaving it to reporters to gather public opinion.

These cases are crises of reputation about small, public school districts where the news coverage tends to also be small. This study coded three articles from each incident and sometimes three articles are all that were written. Over the years, Education beat reporters are becoming less common. At many papers and stations, the Education beat is combined with the City beat. That said, there is much less focus on small crises at public school districts. For that reason, there may be another suitable technique of measuring the success of strategic communication in small crises.

Future Research

There are several points of interest on the topic of public school crisis. Future studies could investigate social media responses to race issues related to staff, policies, or school culture. Posts and comments on social media can be a great representation of the impact an issue of reputation can cause. Parents, community members, donors, etc. often take to social media rather than appealing to the news media. This may be a better source of rich data from a diverse group of stakeholders on the response to communication strategies from the district.

Another point of interest from the CRT perspective would be a demographics study of the public relations practitioners at public school districts. Although all people can hold a wide range of views, Critical Race Theorists would agree that race and background can impact a practitioner's strategic communication methods. How that practitioner manages the entire ecosystem of a race-related crisis may be directly affected by perspective on the issue, which is partly informed by their race.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table A1: Monte Carlo Model Results

	mean	se_mean	sd	2.5%	25%	50%	75%	97.5%	n_eff	Rhat
statement_p_no_race[1]	0.18	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.45	5752.72	1.01
statement_p_no_race[2]	0.19	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	8014.81	1.00
statement_p_no_race[3]	0.51	0.00	0.22	0.18	0.33	0.49	0.68	0.93	3822.32	1.01
statement_p_no_race[4]	0.28	0.00	0.15	0.05	0.17	0.26	0.36	0.64	9250.30	1.00
statement_p_no_race[5]	0.28	0.00	0.15	0.05	0.18	0.26	0.36	0.64	6613.74	1.00
statement_p_no_race[6]	0.40	0.00	0.18	0.12	0.26	0.36	0.51	0.81	7085.47	1.00
statement_p_no_race[7]	0.28	0.00	0.15	0.05	0.18	0.26	0.36	0.64	12519.85	1.00
statement_p_no_race[8]	0.28	0.00	0.15	0.06	0.18	0.26	0.36	0.64	13418.07	1.00
statement_p_no_race[9]	0.28	0.00	0.15	0.05	0.18	0.26	0.36	0.64	10965.17	1.00
statement_p_no_race[10]	0.19	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	7174.54	1.00
statement_p_no_race[11]	0.19	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	7393.88	1.00
statement_p_no_race[12]	0.40	0.00	0.18	0.12	0.26	0.36	0.51	0.82	2639.76	1.01
statement_p_no_race[13]	0.28	0.00	0.15	0.05	0.17	0.26	0.36	0.63	3609.24	1.01
statement_p_no_race[14]	0.18	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	7545.21	1.00
statement_p_no_race[15]	0.19	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	7720.59	1.00
statement_p_no_race[16]	0.28	0.00	0.15	0.06	0.18	0.26	0.37	0.63	7331.02	1.00
statement_p_no_race[17]	0.18	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	7660.85	1.00
statement_p_no_race[18]	0.39	0.00	0.18	0.12	0.26	0.36	0.50	0.80	6901.33	1.00
statement_p_no_race[19]	0.18	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	7879.02	1.00
statement_p_no_race[20]	0.18	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.09	0.17	0.26	0.46	7050.11	1.00
statement_p_race[1]	0.28	0.00	0.17	0.02	0.15	0.28	0.40	0.62	4260.54	1.00
statement_p_race[2]	0.51	0.00	0.18	0.18	0.38	0.50	0.64	0.88	2962.80	1.02
statement_p_race[3]	0.39	0.00	0.17	0.09	0.27	0.38	0.51	0.74	4394.18	1.01
statement_p_race[4]	0.51	0.00	0.18	0.18	0.38	0.50	0.64	0.87	4752.38	1.01
statement_p_race[5]	0.28	0.00	0.16	0.02	0.15	0.27	0.40	0.62	5384.12	1.00
statement_p_race[6]	0.28	0.00	0.16	0.02	0.15	0.27	0.40	0.61	5446.32	1.01
statement_p_race[7]	0.39	0.00	0.17	0.08	0.27	0.39	0.51	0.74	11903.83	1.00
statement_p_race[8]	0.51	0.00	0.18	0.18	0.38	0.50	0.64	0.87	3122.19	1.01
statement_p_race[9]	0.51	0.00	0.18	0.19	0.38	0.50	0.64	0.87	10410.33	1.00
statement_p_race[10]	0.51	0.00	0.18	0.19	0.38	0.49	0.63	0.87	9338.54	1.00
statement_p_race[11]	0.51	0.00	0.18	0.18	0.38	0.50	0.64	0.87	7638.71	1.00
mu_no_race	-1.24	0.00	0.45	-2.26	-1.51	-1.21	-0.95	-0.46	9422.27	1.00
mu_race	-0.38	0.01	0.53	-1.48	-0.70	-0.36	-0.03	0.63	9570.54	1.00
sigma	0.99	0.01	0.55	0.11	0.59	0.95	1.34	2.21	2063.10	1.02
p_no_race	0.23	0.00	0.07	0.09	0.18	0.23	0.28	0.39	9596.88	1.00
p_race	0.41	0.00	0.12	0.19	0.33	0.41	0.49	0.65	8932.12	1.00
p_no_race_lower	0.91	0.00	0.28	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	14804.49	1.00
lp_	-89.28	0.84	21.18	-115.00	-102.19	-94.26	-82.74	-34.72	642.82	1.04

APPENDIX B

B1: Katy ISD Facebook Post

 **Katy ISD Police Department** 2 hrs · 🌐

Don't forget it's National School Bus Safety Week!



Remember it's National School Bus Safety Week

   You and 19 others 1 Comment 6 Shares

 Angry  Comment  Share 

Most Relevant ▾

 Write a comment...   

 **Lilia Sawyer** This post is completely offensive. Shame on you, Katy ISD Police Department. Your job is to remain neutral and offer protection to our students, staff, and faculty, not post such racist memes. This is NOT representative of my support of the school district which is supposed to educate our children into world leaders. Shame!

Like · Reply · 1m

REFERENCES

- Ahn, R. (n.d.). Appleton superintendent of schools apologizes for slavery essay assignment -. Retrieved October 28, 2018, from <https://www.nbc26.com/news/appleton-superintendent-of-schools-apologizes-for-slavery-essay-assignment>
- Alonso III, F. (n.d.-a). Report: Principal jokes about telling police special needs student has gun. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.wlwt.com/article/report-principal-jokes-about-telling-police-special-needs-student-has-gun/20137682>
- Alonso III, F. (n.d.-b). Spring ISD principal ‘takes responsibility’ for comments about special needs student - Houston Chronicle.’ Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.chron.com/neighborhood/spring/article/Spring-ISD-principal-Ponderosa-Swearingen-2018-12878134.php>
- Arendt, C., LaFeche, M., & Limperopulos, M. A. (n.d.). A qualitative meta-analysis of apology, image repair, and crisis communication: Implications for theory and practice - ScienceDirect. Retrieved July 11, 2018, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811116304611>
- Bader, J. (2018, January 12). Appleton Schools Superintendent Apologizes for Slave Essay. Retrieved October 18, 2018, from <http://mediatrackers.org/2018/01/12/another-wi-school-district-deals-slave-question/>
- Bader, J. (n.d.). Appleton School District Dealing with “Slave” Essay Question. Retrieved October 18, 2018, from <https://wsau.com/blogs/the-bader-blog/82/appleton-school-district-dealing-with-slave-essay-question/>
- Behr, M. (n.d.). Appleton school district responds to criticism over slavery essay assignment. Retrieved October 18, 2018, from <https://www.postcrescent.com/story/news/2018/01/12/appleton-school-district-responds-criticism-over-essay-assignment-slavery/1030247001/>
- Benoit, W. L. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 177-.
- Benoit, W. L. (2006). Image repair in President Bush’s April 2004 news conference. *Public Relations Review*, 32(2), 137–143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.02.025>
- Benoit, W. L. (2014). *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research*. Albany, United States: State University of New York Press. Retrieved from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bayloru/detail.action?docID=3408943>

- Blair, N. (n.d.). Community discusses Appleton North slavery essay considered offensive. Retrieved October 18, 2018, from <https://www.wbay.com/content/news/Community-discusses-Appleton-North-essay-deemed-offensive--469417383.html>
- Brumfield, L. (n.d.). Texas principal apologizes for joking she'd call police on special-needs runaway, say he had a gun | Education | Dallas News. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2018/05/02/houston-area-principal-apologizes-saying-police-respond-quicker-said-special-needs-student-gun>
- Calleros, C. R. (1996). Conflict, Apology, and Reconciliation at Arizona State University: A Second Case Study in Hateful Speech Essay. *Cumberland Law Review*, 27, 91–138.
- Coombs, T., & Schmidt, L. (2000). An Empirical Analysis of Image Restoration: Texaco's Racism Crisis. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(2), 163–178. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1202_2
- Coombs, W. T. (1999). *Ongoing crisis communication* (Vol. 2.). Sage Publications.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Corporate Reputation Review; London*, 10(3), 163–176. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049>
- Coombs, W. T. (2013). An Overview of Challenges Facing Collective Apologies: Their Use in the Corporate World. *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries*, 86, 229–247.
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2010). *Handbook of Crisis Communication*. Hoboken: Wiley. Retrieved from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bayloru/detail.action?docID=480445>
- Crenshaw, K. (1995). *Critical race theory*. New Press.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1988). Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law. *Harvard Law Review*, 101(7), 1331–1387. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341398>
- Dates, J. L., & Moody-Ramirez, M. (2018). *Blackface to Black Twitter: Reflections on Black Humor, Race, Politics & Gender*. Peter Lang. Retrieved from <https://books.google.com/books?id=2Wv2twEACAAJ>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (1996). Apologize and Move On: Finding a Remedy for Pornography, Insult, and Hate Speech Review Essay. *University of Colorado Law Review*, 67, 93–112.

- Fernando Alfonso III. (2018, May 10). Texas teacher fired after sending profane text to mother of autistic student. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/texas/article/texas-teacher-fired-text-message-autistic-student-12904188.php>
- Gainey, B. S. (2009). Crisis Management's New Role in Educational Settings. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 82(6), 267–274. <https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.82.6.267-274>
- Gainey, B. S. (2010). Crisis Management in Public School Districts. *Organization Development Journal; Chesterland*, 28(1), 89–95.
- Grotting, D. (2018, April 16). Beaverton School District - Post. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://www.facebook.com/BeavertonSchoolDistrict/posts/2137225859627579>
- Haoran Mao, & Dajin Lin. (2014). Public Apology Between Ritual and Regret: Symbolic Excuses on False Pretenses or True Reconciliation out of Sincere Regret? *Journal of Language & Politics*, 13(4), 857–862. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.13.4.12mao>
- Heath, R., & Coombs, W. (2006). *Today's Public Relations: An Introduction*. Thousand Oaks, California. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233055>
- Heath, R. L. (2013). *Handbook of Public Relations*. Thousand Oaks, UNITED STATES: SAGE Publications. Retrieved from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bayloru/detail.action?docID=1195903>
- Kampf, Z. (2013). The Discourse of Public Apologies: Modes of Realization, Interpretation and Mediation. *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries*, 86, 147–165.
- Kennedy, M. (2018, May 2). Spring ISD superintendent speaks out after principal's comments about special needs student. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.click2houston.com/news/spring-isd-superintendent-speaks-out-after-principals-comments-about-special-needs-student>
- Kenney, T. (2018, May 2). Texas Principal “Heartbroken” After Her Thoughtless Comment About Black Special Needs Student Stirs Backlash. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://atlantablackstar.com/2018/05/02/texas-principal-heartbroken-thoughtless-comment-black-special-needs-student-stirs-backlash/>
- Kirk, B. (n.d.). Spring ISD Principal Apologizes for Insensitive Comments | Spring, TX Patch. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://patch.com/texas/houston/spring-isd-principal-apologizes-insensitive-comments>
- Lee, S., & Chung, S. (2012). Corporate apology and crisis communication: The effect of responsibility admittance and sympathetic expression on public's anger relief. *Public Relations Review*, 38(5), 932–934. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.08.006>

- Len-Ríos, M. E., Finneman, T., Han, K. J., Bhandari, M., & Perry, E. L. (2015). Image Repair Campaign Strategies Addressing Race: Paula Deen, Social Media, and Defiance. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 9(2), 148–165.
- Liu, B.F. (2010). Effective Public Relations in Racially Charged Crises: Not Black or White. Retrieved July 22, 2018, from https://search-credoreference-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/content/entry/wileycc/effective_public_relations_in_racially_charged_crises_not_black_or_white/0
- Liu, Brooke Fisher. (2008). From aspiring presidential candidate to accidental racist? An analysis of Senator George Allen’s image repair during his 2006 reelection campaign. *Public Relations Review*, 34(4), 331–336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.06.002>
- Logan, N. (2016). The Starbucks Race Together Initiative: Analyzing a public relations campaign with critical race theory. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(1), 93–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X15626969>
- Marsh, C. (2006). The syllogism of apologia: Rhetorical stasis theory and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 32(1), 41–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.11.002>
- Martinez, M. (n.d.). Texas principal makes joke about calling cops on special needs student | Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/state/texas/article210313844.html>
- Moody-Ramirez, M., & Cole, H. J. (2018). *Race, gender, and image repair theory: how digital media change the landscape*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Ojeda, T. W., Sofia. (2018a, May 1). Spring ISD principal ‘takes responsibility’ for controversial comments about special-needs student.’ Retrieved July 13, 2018, from <https://www.click2houston.com/news/spring-isd-principal-under-fire-accused-of-hurtful-comments-about-special-needs-student>
- Ojeda, T. W., Sofia. (2018b, May 1). Spring ISD principal ‘takes responsibility’ for controversial comments about special-needs student.’ Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.click2houston.com/news/spring-isd-principal-under-fire-accused-of-hurtful-comments-about-special-needs-student>
- Pompper, D. (2005). “Difference “in Public Relations Research: A Case for Introducing Critical Race Theory. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(2), 139–169. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1702pass:\[_\]5](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1702pass:[_]5)
- Rhodes, S. (n.d.). Parents react after hearing Spring ISD principal’s remarks... Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://www.click2houston.com/news/parents-react-after-hearing-spring-isd-principals-remarks-about-a-special-needs-student>

- Sandlin, J. K., & Gracyalny, M. L. (2018). Seeking sincerity, finding forgiveness: YouTube apologies as image repair. *Public Relations Review*, 44(3), 393–406. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.04.007>
- Slocum, D., Allan, A., & Allan, M. M. (2011). An emerging theory of apology. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 63(2), 83–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1742-9536.2011.00013.x>
- Smith, Nick. (2008). *I Was Wrong: The Meaning of Apologies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sturges, D. L. (1994). Communicating through a Crisis: A Strategy for Organizational Survival. *Management Communication Quarterly : McQ (1986-1998); Thousand Oaks*, 7(3), 297.
- Tracy, K. (2007). The Discourse of Crisis in Public Meetings: Case Study of a School District's Multimillion Dollar Error. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 35(4), 418–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880701617133>
- WBAY. (n.d.). Appleton School District apologizes for slavery assignment. Retrieved October 18, 2018, from <https://www.wbay.com/content/news/Appleton-School-District-apologizes-for-slavery-assignment-469073533.html>
- Web Staff. (2018, May 3). Spring ISD principal reprimanded for inappropriate comment about special needs child. Retrieved December 18, 2018, from <https://cw39.com/2018/05/02/spring-isd-principal-reprimanded-for-inappropriate-comment-about-special-needs-child/>
- Weiner, B., Graham, S., Peter, O., & Zmuidinas, M. (1991). Public Confession and Forgiveness. *Journal of Personality*, 59(2), 281–312. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.ep9107221720>
- Williams, B. (n.d.-a). Appleton School District Apologizes for Objectionable Slavery Essay. Retrieved October 28, 2018, from <https://wixx.com/news/articles/2018/jan/12/appleton-school-district-apologizes-for-objectionable-slavery-essay/>
- Williams, B. (n.d.-b). Community Discusses Appleton Slavery Essay Assignment. Retrieved October 28, 2018, from <https://wtaq.com/news/articles/2018/jan/16/community-discusses-appleton-slavery-essay-assignment/>
- Yang, P. (n.d.). Appleton residents want schools to change how they teach the history of slavery | WLUK. Retrieved October 28, 2018, from <https://fox11online.com/news/local/appleton-residents-want-schools-to-change-how-they-teach-the-history-of-slavery>