THE ORGANIZATION-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION: THE EFFECT OF THE ORGANIZATION-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP ON PUBLICS' PERCEPTIONS OF CRISIS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ORGANIZATION

by

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(Under the Direction of Bryan H. Reber)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of organization-public relationships on publics' perceptions of a crisis and attitudes toward an organization in crisis. This study used a quasi-experimental, between-subjects design in which 262 participants were exposed to a fictitious crisis case at their university and the university's four different crisis-response strategies. The results of a two-way ANOVA revealed that regardless of the level of relationship, publics in the internal cause group were more likely to attribute responsibility to the organization than were those in the external cause group. A three-way MANOVA found the unique effects of relationship, crisis responsibility, and the type of crisis-response strategy on attitudes toward the organization in the crisis, but two-way and three-way interactions among these predictor variables were not significant. The findings suggest that the cultivation of relationships with publics, as well as the effective use of crisis-response strategies, is an essential part of successful crisis management.

INDEX WORDS: Organization-public relationships, Crisis communication, Causal attribution, Crisis responsibility, Crisis-response strategies

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recently public relations scholars have given much attention to relationship management, suggesting that the function of public relations is to build and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship between organizations and publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2007; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). The relational perspective of public relations emphasizes that public relations can generate mutual understanding and benefits between organizations and their publics through the management of organization-public relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). By building and maintaining long-term relationships with key publics, public relations also increases organizational effectiveness, which has been a primary issue in public relations research (Huang, 2001). More generally, the practice of public relations that focuses on relationship building ultimately brings about economic, societal, and political gains both for organizations and for publics (Ledingham, 2003).

Given the importance of cultivating good organization-public relationships, the focus of research in public relations has shifted from evaluating communication processes or outcomes to examining the factors that influence the development and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and publics (Bruning, 2002). In addition to antecedents of satisfying, long-term organization-public relationships (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Grunig & Huang, 2000), public relations researchers have also paid considerable attention to the linkage between well-developed relationships and positive outcomes (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). For

example, several studies have demonstrated that well-managed relationships between an organization and its publics enhance publics' attitudes toward an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2007) and behavioral intention (Bruning & Ralston, 2000; Huang, 2000; Ki & Hon, 2007; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) and even lead to actual behavior (Bruning, 2002).

This relational approach is also applicable to diverse critical situations in which organizations struggle with problems related to their publics. In organization-public relationships, a crisis occurs when an organization fails to meet the social norms and expectations of its publics or when it acts inconsistently within the relationship (Coombs, 2000). Crises affect an organization's relationships with its multiple publics, and a good organization-public relationship can, in turn, play a critical role in managing an organization's reputation during a crisis (Coombs, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2001, 2004; Kim & Lee, 2005).

The public may perceive a crisis differently, depending on its perception of an organization, as well as of obvious facts such as how frequently crises occur and how serious their impacts may be. The public's perceptions of the crises and of the organization are influenced by the organization-public relationship. The organization's relationship with its publics should impact how publics perceive a crisis, the organization in crisis, and strategies for restoring the organization's damaged image. In this respect, it is expected that crises can be perceived differently, depending on the organization-public relationship and, thus, a public's level of acceptance of crisis communications also differs, according to its relationship with an organization (Kim & Lee, 2005).

Although relationship management contributes to a growing body of research in public relations, little attention has been devoted to examining the impact of public-organization

relationship on publics' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in crisis communication. Therefore, the primary purpose of this research is to explore the role of organization-public relationships in crisis management. By employing the dimensions of the organization-public relationship and several crisis-response strategies, this study examines the effect of the organization-public relationship on the public's perceptions of a crisis and attitudes toward an organization in crisis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship Management in Public Relations

According to Thomlison (2000), "*Relationship management in public relations settings implies the development, maintenance, growth, and nurturing of mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their significant publics*" (p. 178, emphasis in original). As relationship management becomes a more essential part of organizational functioning, it is necessary to explicate the concept of relationship and identify the basic elements of a well-developed relationship (Broom et al., 1997). Evaluations of relationship dimensions can demonstrate the state of ongoing organization-public relationships and further predict publics' perceptions and intended behaviors (Ledingham, 2003). In this respect, this study, in advance of discussing the importance of relational approaches to crisis communication, seeks to conceptualize the organization-public relationship and identify the dimensions or elements of the relationship by reviewing the relevant literature in various areas, including interpersonal communication, relationship marketing, and public relations.

Defining Organization-Public Relationships

A relationship is considered to be the interdependence between two or more persons (O'Hair, Friedrich, Wiemann, & Wiemann, 1995). People have a relationship when they are somehow related to one another. In other words, people are all mutually dependent to a certain degree. Therefore, the degree of relationship can be defined by observable interaction events,

intersubjectivity, or cognitive interdependence (Surra & Ridley, 1991). As such, studies on relationship focus on the idea of interdependence. Wright (1984) defines friendship, one of the most common interpersonal relationships, as a relationship involving voluntary or unconstrained interaction in which participants respond to one another personally. Moreover, friendship is also conceptualized as a voluntary interdependence between two persons over time that is intended to facilitate social-emotional goals of the participants (Hays, 1988). Applied to the organizational context, relationship is defined as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of the other entity" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62).

The nature and dynamics of relationships can be explained further by using economic and humanistic paradigms (Kim, 2001). The economic paradigm explains relationships in terms of cost and benefit analysis. The main theories that support this paradigm are social exchange theory and social penetration theory. The humanistic paradigm, however, focuses on the importance of emotional and humane aspects that make up relationships. Dialectic theory and uncertainty reduction theory are included in this humanistic paradigm. In another vein, the research on relationships between organizations has a theoretical basis on resource dependence theory and exchange theory (Broom et al., 1997). More generally, social exchange theory provides a useful theoretical framework for studying relationships (Thomlison, 2000). It explains changing needs, expectations, and environmental demands in relationships between organizations and their publics, offering traditional marketing perspectives as well as interpersonal, relationship-sensitive perspectives that have important implications and applications for public relations research and practice (Thomlison, 2000).

In terms of social exchange theory, social relationship is defined as the voluntary transference of some objects or activities from one person to another in return for other objects or activities (Roloff, 1981). The concept of social exchange theory is based on the assumption that humans are rational beings, choosing relationships and actions that maximize their benefits and minimize their costs. In social exchange, when one receives benefit from another, that person feels an obligation to return the benefit, even though the return itself is not comparable to the benefit in magnitude, cost, or other ways (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). It is simply a feeling based on mutual trust and requires repayment for what has been received. If all humans seek returns, all relationships can be interpreted as being maintained by the exchange of returns. In other words, all human behaviors can be determined by exchange of returns, and if a person only receives, but does not return, then the social relationship is terminated or minimized. Not only do rewards provide one of the economic or material benefits, but they also involve psychological or social factors, such as respect, love, loyalty, social recognition, and obedience.

Emphasizing the certain standard or expectation that each person has for the behavior of his or her partner, Thomlison (2000) defines social exchange theory as the economic model of relationships in which meeting or exceeding a relational partner's expectations for the relationship becomes vital to that relationship's quality and longevity. From this perspective, it is the meeting of publics' expectations that serves as the cornerstone for an organization to facilitate long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with its publics. These long-term, satisfying organization-public relationships will, in turn, influence attitudes about an organization and behavioral intentions in favor of the organization (Ki & Hon, 2007).

Research on Relationship Dimensions

Most of the relationship research in public relations has been based on interpersonal communication or relationship marketing. This is because the concept of relationship was adopted in those areas first, and relational studies have been actively conducted in these fields. Therefore, interpersonal communication and relationship marketing, as well as public relations, have been included in identifying the elements of the organization-public relationship in this study.

Stafford and Canary (1991) specify the elements of relationship and the strategies for maintaining relationships in their study of close relationships. They considered control mutuality, commitment, liking, and satisfaction as the components of a relationship. Five strategies that people use to manage their romantic relationships were identified to measure how their perceptions of the strategies differ depending on their relationships. These strategies are positivity, openness, assurance, networking, and shared task.

Knobloch and Solomon (2003) identify three key characteristics that people associate with their relationships: reliance on relational knowledge, interdependence, and mutual commitment. They classify all messages used in conversation as content and relational messages, and they use two types of messages to examine predictions about how features of relationship conceptualizations are evident in conversation. According to their findings, partners who employ relationship-focused information to guide their behavior are more likely to discuss intimate topics. Also, Knobloch and Solomon note that mutual commitment encourages people to increase the efficacy of their relationship talk by using implicit messages. Although relationship is primarily a concept evolving from interpersonal communication, relationships in interpersonal

communication are too subjective and introspective to be directly applied to research on organization-public relationships (Kim, 2001).

In the field of marketing, there have also been numerous studies regarding the concept of relationships as central to both research and practice. Wilson (1995), in his study of relationships between buyers and sellers, proposes 13 dimensions that affect their relationships, including commitment, trust, cooperation, mutual goals, and performance satisfaction. Just as Wilson considers commitment and trust as important factors for developing a relationship, many other studies support the critical role of these two factors for successful relationship marketing. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust and commitment are fundamental factors in facilitating important relational outcomes from the marketing perspective. They propose the Key Mediating Variable model of relationship marketing, in which trust and commitment serve as important mediating variables for promoting commitment and trust.

Roberts, Varki, and Brodie (2003) define relationship as the formation of bonds between the firm and the consumer. These bonds include social bonds (social support), knowledge bonds (expertise-based support), psychological bonds (reputation-related assurance), and ideological bonds (ethical compatibility). With emphasis on trust and commitment, they propose five dimensions to define relationship quality: trust in partner's honesty, trust in partner's benevolence, satisfaction, affective commitment, and affective conflict. Unlike relational studies in interpersonal communication, those in relational marketing emphasize objective factors associated with exchange relationships. Relationships in the marketing field involve cognitive and behavioral components related to transactions, rather than emotional and perception-oriented components related to feelings and thoughts in personal experience.

In a public relations context, Broom et al. (1997) suggest that relationships consist of patterns of linkages through which the parties involved pursue and service their interdependent needs. Employing systems theory, they emphasize that relationship formation and maintenance represent a process of mutual adaptation and contingent responses. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) consider the organization-public relationship to consist of five dimensions: openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment. They suggest that the relationship a company has with its consumers differentiates consumers who will stay in the relationship from those who will leave the relationship.

Hon and Grunig (1999) propose six elements of relationship in order to measure the perceptions of an organization's relationships with its key publics. These six elements are control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship. Also, Kim (2001) tested more than 100 items collected from various fields such as interpersonal communication, marketing, and public relations, using factor analysis and confirmatory analysis to develop a valid and reliable instrument for measuring the organization-public relationship. The analyses finalized sixteen items constituting four dimensions of the relationship: trust, commitment, local or community involvement, and reputation.

Unlike the aforementioned relational research in public relations, Bruning and Ledingham (1999) suggest that relationships consist of different levels of dimensions. In other words, satisfaction, trust, and other relational components are included in different dimensional levels of relationship, such as the dimensions of professional relationship, personal relationship, and community relationship. Bruning and Galloway (2003) also divide relationships into five dimensions: anthromorphism, professional benefit/expectation, personal commitment, community improvement, and comparison of alternatives.

Dimensions of Relationship

Having reviewed the literature in the aforementioned areas, eight dimensions of relationship have been established. These dimensions are control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, openness, exchange relationship, communal relationship, and intimacy.

Control mutuality. Control mutuality refers to the degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence one another (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Stafford and Canary (1991) define control mutuality as the degree to which partners agree about which of them should decide relational goals and behavioral routines. In order to discuss control mutuality, it is necessary to consider the imbalance of power within a relationship. Power differences are part of the social context, which influences exchanges (Blau, 1964). A person who monopolizes a large number of valued resources may be able to violate the fair rate of exchange with some impudence. Based on a resource-dependence approach of social exchange theory, control mutuality can be explained—concentration of power is inevitable because valuable resources are limited, and the desire to have such resources overlaps among various parties. Therefore, the relationship between organizations and publics also cannot escape a certain level of imbalance (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). However, when such imbalance of power shifts excessively toward organizations, they may abuse the power solely for their own benefit. Thus, an appropriate restriction on each party is needed to maintain a stable relationship.

Trust. Many researchers include trust as a critical concept in discussing relationships. Canary and Cupach (1988) define trust as the willingness to take a risk because the relational partner is perceived as benevolent and honest. Anderson and Weitz (1989) define trust as a belief that one's future needs will be satisfied by another's actions. From the perspective of relationship marketing, trust requires confidence in an exchange party's reliability and integrity (Morgan &

Hunt, 1994). Hon and Grunig (1999) also define trust as one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open itself to the other party.

Given these diverse, yet complementary, definitions of trust, social exchange theory can explain its essence in the study of relationship. If we divide exchanges largely into economic exchanges and social exchanges, social exchanges are based on trust, not involved in definite or comparable returns for benefits received, whereas economic exchanges are based on legal structure (Blau, 1964). Social exchanges emphasize the expectation of making some return for what one has received based on mutual trust. In this perspective, relationships are built upon trust, and the persons in the relationship can determine the legitimacy through an evaluation of mutual trust.

Satisfaction. Satisfaction refers to the degree of positive feelings that one has about another. Unlike control mutuality and trust, it includes affection and emotion (Huang, 2001). Hecht (1978) defines satisfaction as the favorable affective response to the reinforcement of positive expectations in a certain kind of situation. Hon and Grunig (1999) also conceptualize satisfaction as the extent to which one party feels favorably toward another because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced.

From the perspective of social exchange, the balance of benefit versus cost affects the continuity of the relationship (Roloff, 1981). The persons who are in a relationship are not necessarily trying to abuse each other in a selfish way. They tend to provide each other with greater benefits in order to experience fulfilling results. Also, an ideal relationship occurs when the parties in the relationship provide sufficient benefits to each other and both parties feel satisfied with the relationship. In this respect, the relationship is continued when the comparative returns are greater than the costs, but terminated when costs exceed benefits.

Commitment. Commitment is the degree to which both partners are invested in maintaining a relationship. Morgan and Hunt (1994) consider commitment as an effort to maintain a continuous and long-term relationship with another in an exchange relationship. They also show that commitment is the core factor that differentiates the successful relationship from the unsuccessful one. Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) further state that commitment represents the highest stage of relational bonding. According to Hon and Grunig (1999), commitment refers to the extent to which one party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote. They identify two aspects of commitment: affective commitment (attachment to an entity) and continuance commitment (commitment to continue a certain line of action).

Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) study of social exchange in relationships indicates that every relationship has the core trait of having interaction between parties and that all mutual relationships are connected to activities that involve mutual dependence or resource sharing. As the dependence on a partner increases, the degree of relationship with that partner increases and the desire to end the relationship decreases. In addition, the commitment to the one party reduces the search for other alternatives. Thus, it promotes the long-term relationship with the current exchange partner.

Openness. Openness refers to the sharing of thoughts and feelings by each party. Jablin (1985) states that each party perceives the other to be a willing and receptive listener when involved in open communication. Ferguson (1984) points out that openness is one of the important concepts in discussing the organization-public relationship. Also, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) suggest that openness is one of five dimensions constituting the relationship,

evidenced by their research suggesting that the organization-public relationship can affect consumers' satisfaction with and loyalty to the organization.

Although synonymously associated with another relationship dimension, trust, openness differs from it in that openness offers a more impersonal tone than trust, which is often applied in interpersonal rather than organizational interaction and communication. Because of its impersonal nature, openness becomes a vital factor that helps to encourage and strengthen relationships at the organizational level.

Exchange relationship. In exchange relationships, benefits are given with the expectation of receiving a comparable benefit in return or as repayment for a benefit received previously (Clark & Mill, 1993). In other words, a party that receives benefits incurs an obligation or debt to return the favor. If a partner does not repay an obligation or does not accept a reward, the other partner becomes unwilling to provide benefits to that partner. Although an exchange relationship is the central concept in relationship marketing, the public's perception of an exchange relationship with organizations is not always desirable enough to bring out the ideal organization-public relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Publics expect organizations to meet their needs and to make an investment in the community for which the organizations get little or nothing in return.

Communal relationship. In contrast to the exchange relationship, a communal relationship focuses on providing benefits to another party according to the other party's needs or in order to show a general concern for the other party. In communal relationships, the receipt of a benefit does not change the recipient's obligation to respond to the other's needs (Clark & Mills, 1993). It does not involve an obligation or debt to return a comparable favor. Hon and Grunig (1999) point out that organizations need communal relationships with publics because they can

benefit from them by building a reputation for being concerned about publics' well-being and by reducing conflicts with publics. Consequently, organizations can gain more support from their publics and boost potential profits over the long term (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In essence, a communal relationship means obtaining happiness through the mutual benefit of the organization and its publics without the regular giving of costly benefits.

Intimacy. Intimacy usually refers to the emotional feelings of warmth for and friendliness to a subject. Sternberg (1997) defines intimacy as the feeling of closeness, connectedness, and perceived interdependence in a relationship. According to Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) social exchange theory, the persons who are in a relationship use all available information to consider the future benefit and cost of that relationship, in addition to considering the present benefit and cost of the relationship. Furthermore, if one expects that benefit will exceed cost, then the person reveals more information to the other person. The sharing and exposure of information creates further feelings of intimacy between the persons involved in the relationship. Therefore, the sharing and exposure of information increases according to the level of expected benefits in comparison to the cost. Then intimacy between partners becomes stronger and sharing of personal information occurs more rapidly. In other words, the level of intimacy reflects how closely two parties are related.

Relational Approach to Crisis Communication

A crisis is defined as "a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization as well as its publics, services, products, and/or good name" (Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 480). Additionally, an organizational crisis is viewed as "a specific, unexpected and non-routine organizationally based event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals" (Seeger,

Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 7). As a life-changing event, a crisis can determine an organization's prosperity or mortality, and thus, effective crisis communication strategies are essential for an organization in a crisis to avoid serious damage to its financial stability, organizational reputation, and general ability to perform normal business practices. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996) assert that to be effective, a crisis communication or management plan should be grounded in theory, suggesting that the practice of crisis communication is a long-term process that should be based on fundamental principles that guide practitioners to achieve certain communication goals.

Attribution Theory and Crisis Management

Attribution theory provides a theoretical foundation for a relational approach to crisis management (Coombs, 2000). It assumes that people try to search for causes when they encounter unusual or unexpected events. People engage in the process of causal attribution while seeking for answers to a "why" question—why an outcome or event has occurred (Weiner, 1986). Proposing a dichotomous way to identify causes, Heider (1958) stated that "the result of an action is felt to depend on two sets of conditions, namely factors within the person and factors within the environment" (p. 82). According to this fundamental distinction, a crisis event is attributable to internal or personal causes or external or environmental factors.

By adding two more dimensions of causes to the internal-external dimension, Weiner (1986) proposes three basic causal properties: locus (internal-external), stability (stable-unstable), and controllability (controllable-uncontrollable). A locus dimension of causality indicates whether an outcome or event is perceived as due to factors internal to the actor or factors related to environment. Stability refers to the extent to which the cause of an outcome frequently happens. Controllability reflects whether the cause is controllable by the actor or by others. These dimensions help people determine what caused a negative outcome or event.

McAuley, Duncan, and Russell (1992) also identify four causal dimensions that people might use when determining attributions: stability, external control, personal control, and locus. Despite being similar to Weiner's (1986) constructs of causality, McAuley et al.'s structure of perceived causality considers controllability as being divided into two separate dimensions (external control and personal control) rather than as a single dimension having two discrete categories (controllable and uncontrollable). As distinct dimensions of causality, external control assesses whether the event is controlled by others, while personal control indicates whether the event's cause is controllable by the actor. Coombs and Holladay (1996) adapted McAuley et al.'s causal dimensions to examine how causal attributions were elicited differently depending on the type of crisis. However, they combined personal control and locus into a single dimension (locus/personal control) because both constructs serve as a similar function generating perceptions of intentional actions.

Perceptions of causality lead to an assignment of responsibility, which should be viewed as the antecedent of other cognitive and affective reactions (Weiner, 1995). Within an organizational crisis context, publics may perceive organizational crisis responsibility as strongest if (1) the cause of the event is stable, (2) external control is low, and (3) the locus is strongly internal (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). In other words, an organization should be held more responsible for a crisis when a negative event repeatedly occurs to the organization and when the crisis was not controlled by external groups irrelevant to the organization. The perception that the crisis has something to do with the organization is also more likely to lead the public to judge the organization as being responsible for the crisis. In analyzing various crisis situations based on crisis responsibility, Coombs (1998) found that internal attribution of a crisis cause was positively related to crisis responsibility and negatively related to an organizational

image even though external attribution of a cause was unrelated to either crisis responsibility or image. In addition to causal perceptions, Coombs considered performance history and crisis severity as crisis situation elements that may affect the public's attributions of crisis responsibility to an organization.

According to Coombs (2000), organizational crisis responsibility is equated to the degree to which key publics attribute blame for a crisis to an organization. However, Weiner (1995) argues for the distinction between responsibility inferences and blame, suggesting that punishment and other social reactions are indirectly affected by assignments of responsibility through the mediating role of blame. Attributions of organizational crisis responsibility are influenced by perceptions of a crisis situation in terms of causal factors, and these attributions, in turn, affect people's feelings and behaviors (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). As an organization is viewed as having more responsibility for a crisis, anger toward the organization is more likely to be evoked rather than sympathy, and the possibility of receiving support and other helpful behaviors decreases (Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991). However, the effective use of crisis-response strategies can alter the public's perception of crisis responsibility, as well as feelings and intended behaviors toward an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2004).

Lee (2004) examined consumers' cognitive, perceptual, and affective reactions to an organizational crisis. Despite indicating no significant effects of crisis severity, the results showed significant effects of causal attribution and organizational crisis responses on consumers' evaluations regarding the crisis. Specifically, Lee's study found that participants who read about a crisis with an internal cause attributed more responsibility to the organization, had more negative impressions of the organization, showed less sympathy toward the organization, and mistrusted the organization more than those who read about a crisis with an external cause.

Regarding consumers' perceptions toward an organization's crisis response, the participants in the denial-of-crisis responsibility condition evaluated the organization more negatively than did those in the acceptance-of-crisis responsibility condition with respect to these four outcome variables—responsibility attribution, negative impression, sympathy, and trust in the organization.

By applying Weiner's (1995) depiction of a sequential process of motivation and behavior to crisis management, the process through which crisis attributions influence crisis outcomes can be outlined as follows: a crisis event → causal perception → responsibility attribution → [organization's responses] → possible change in responsibility attribution → blame or approval → punishment or support. As illustrated, in order for an organization to deal with a crisis effectively, the selection of communication strategies should be based on causal attributions people make about the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2004). That is, there are appropriate matches between crisis types and crisis-response strategies according to attribution of crisis responsibility.

In sum, attribution theory can contribute substantially to understanding how publics perceive crisis events and to developing crisis-response strategies that should be matched with a crisis situation (Coombs, 1998). By utilizing a response strategy appropriate for a crisis situation, public relations practitioners can change not only the perceived organizational responsibility among the public, but can also obtain supportive behaviors and other indicators of concern. Further, strategic crisis communication can reduce the possibility of the reputational damage in the long term (Coombs, 2004). Since crisis responses play a large part in successful crisis management, it is important to understand the crisis situation that may determine the selection of the crisis response (Coombs, 1998). Relationship history, as a potentially important component

in evaluating a crisis situation, can influence perceptions of crisis responsibility and subsequent selection of crisis-response strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 2001).

Relationship Building and Crisis Management

Considering that mutuality of awareness, influence, benefit, and behavior are required for successful relationships, Thomlison (2000) stresses that "relationship management in public relations settings implies the development, maintenance, growth, and nurturing of mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their significant publics" (p. 178). Managing a relationship is integrally based on whether an organization is meeting the social norms and expectations of its publics (Coombs, 2000). A violation of the social rules or expectations can be a symptom of the crisis, which contributes to damaging not only the image of the organization, but also its financial status. More importantly, a crisis causes disruption to the organization-public relationship because the extent to which expectations are met determines the quality and longevity of relationships (Ledingham, 2003).

On the other hand, the organization-public relationship plays a large role in managing crises (Coombs, 2000). Marra (1992) argues that as an organization maintains more well-developed relationships with its key publics, it is less likely to suffer from financial, emotional, or perceptual damage and is better able to deal with criticism against the organization during a crisis. Positive organizational relationships with key publics are a valuable preventive measure by which an organization can avoid the worst consequences in the aftermath of a crisis (Kim & Lee, 2005). In contrast, ignoring or abusing relationships with publics prior to a crisis may lead to serious damage to an organization's reputation resulting from the crisis and may even make the situation worse than what it should be (Coombs, 2000). Therefore, long-term organizational relationships with internal and external publics can be a more important factor than traditional

crisis planning in determining the success or failure of crisis communication (Murphree & Rogers, 2004).

Favorable relationships between an organization and its stakeholders may serve as a "buffer" in a crisis situation, which protects an organization's reputation and future relationships against serious damage in the aftermath of a crisis (Coombs, 2000). This effect of favorable relationships is defined as "the halo effect," since stakeholders having a favorable relationship history with an organization consider a negative event as a deviation from an organization's typical practices (Coombs, 2000).

When a crisis emerges, a favorable relationship history may lead publics to ignore negative information related to the crisis and enable an organization to manage the crisis situation by only using mildly defensive strategies such as justification and ingratiation (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Alternatively, an unfavorable relationship history may inflate publics' acceptance of negative information and bring about additional reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Moreover, the use of accommodative strategies would be required to alter publics' perceptions of a crisis situation and generate positive attitudes toward an organization's response (Kim & Lee, 2005). Coombs and Holladay (2001) termed this negative effect of an unfavorable relationship as "the velcro effect," noting that relationship history as well as crisis history can have a significantly negative effect on attributions of responsibility and reputational damage. Supporting the effects of favorable and unfavorable relationships, Coombs and Holladay (2004) also note that "a favorable relationship history is reflected in good works by the organization while an unfavorable one is characterized by conflict and failures by the organization to fulfill obligations to stakeholders" (p. 111).

Incorporating the relationship history in the symbolic approach to crisis management, Coombs and Holladay (2001) examined the effects of crisis history and relationship history as part of an organization's performance history on perceptions of a crisis and of the organization in the crisis. Despite small effects, relationship history and crisis history appeared to affect perceptions of crisis responsibility. Also, both performance histories influenced organizational reputation, but the effect was produced by negative aspects of histories. Specifically, people having an unfavorable relationship or crisis history were more likely to evaluate an organization's reputation negatively than were those having a favorable or neutral relationship or crisis history. By comparing both history effects, Coombs and Holladay also found that relationship history had a stronger impact on organizational reputation than did crisis history.

In addition, Kim and Lee (2005) examined how the level of organization-public relationship affects the public's perceptions toward a crisis and the organization's image restoration strategies. The results showed that the public with a favorable relationship with the company viewed the same crisis less severely and perceived the accused company as being less responsible for the crisis than did the public with a hostile relationship. Despite no statistical group difference regarding full apology and corrective action, differences between the favorable and the hostile relationship groups were found with respect to attitudes towards the other five strategies—justification, ingratiation, attacking the accuser, denial, and excuse. Compared to the hostile relationship group, the favorable relationship group appeared to have more trusting and accepting attitudes toward those image restoration strategies. The results suggest that the more positive perceptions the public has toward an organization, the broader choices of strategies the organization will have. Emphasizing relationship building as being central to proactive crisis management, Kim and Lee suggest that the best outcomes can be achieved when an organization

incorporates both proactive and reactive strategies based on ongoing relationships between the organization and its publics.

Crisis Response Strategies

The best way to protect the organizational image is to prevent crises. However, it is not possible for an organization to avoid or prevent all possible crises (Coombs, 1999). Therefore, organizations need to have an excellent ability to overcome critical situations in order to protect their images from serious damage. When a crisis occurs, it is critical for an organization to minimize the damage to its public image and to restore it by implementing an effective strategy (Coombs, 1995).

The basic assumption underlying various discussions of crisis management is that an organization's success during a crisis depends on its crisis response strategy. Utilizing a crisis response strategy effectively, an organization can eliminate or diminish damage to its image and influence how its publics perceive and interpret the situation (Coombs, 1995, 1998, 1999; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001; Lee, 2004). It may not be a good decision for an organization to take full responsibility for a crisis without regard to whom the cause of the crisis is attributed. However, many studies indicate that a completely irresponsible action taken to avoid the public's criticism is also not desirable for repairing an organization's image (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Englehardt, Sallot, & Springston, 2004; Lee, 2004). Thus, strategic communication with the public during a crisis is critical to an organization. In this sense, Benoit's (1995) image restoration theory and Coombs' (1995) repertoire of crisis-response strategies provide the framework not only for developing crisis-response strategy, but also for examining an organization's efforts to repair its damaged image. These two typologies of crisis-response strategies are similar in that counterpart strategies have common communicative goals. However,

Coombs' crisis-response strategies are based on the attribution theory and considered more situation-oriented.

Benoit's Image Restoration Theory

The theory of image restoration focuses on crisis responses through which organizations may restore their public image rather than identifying the kinds of crisis situations or the stage in crisis (Benoit, 1997). Benoit's (1995) image restoration theory includes the five general approaches of denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the act, corrective action, and mortification. In addition, three of these strategies have sub-categories.

The first strategy for image restoration is denial (Benoit, 1997, p. 179). Denial can take two forms: simple denial and shifting blame. An organization that is accused of misdeeds can deny committing the wrongful act or assert that it was committed by another party. Rather than deny committing a wrongful act, an accused organization may reduce responsibility for the wrongdoing. This strategy is called evasion of responsibility and has four sub-categories: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intention (Benoit, 1997, p. 180).

Another general strategy for repairing image, reducing the offensiveness of the act, is divided into six sub-categories: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking one's accuser, and compensation (Benoit, 1997, p. 180). An organization can emphasize its positive characteristics or use minimization to persuade the publics that the act is not as serious as it is perceived to be. Differentiation can be used to reduce the offensiveness of the act by distinguishing it from other more offensive acts. With transcendence strategy, the organization attempts to persuade the public that, although the wrongful act alone may be offensive, the act can be viewed as positive in a larger context. A fifth option is to attack its accuser, and as a result, the company can minimize the damage of the wrongful act by reducing

the accuser's credibility. With the last option, compensation, an organization offers payment to the victim in order to lessen the negative feeling resulting from its misdeed.

The fourth strategy of image restoration is corrective action, in which the organization promises not only to correct the current problem, but also to prevent similar offensive acts in the future (Benoit, 1997, p. 181). The final strategy for repairing image is mortification, in which an accused organization may express its sorrow for victims and ask for forgiveness (Benoit, 1997, p. 181).

Coombs's Crisis Response Strategies

Coombs (1995) also identifies a repertoire of crisis-response strategies and provides a set of guidelines for crisis communication on the basis of attribution theory. He asserts that the selection of an appropriate strategy should be determined by crisis situation factors, including crisis type, veracity of evidence, damage, and performance history. Coombs's repertoire of crisis-response strategies includes five general approaches: nonexistence, distance, ingratiation, mortification, and suffering strategies. When appropriate, four of these general strategies were divided into sub-strategies.

Nonexistence strategies, which include denial, clarification, attack, and intimidation, attempt to eliminate the crisis by demonstrating that the organization has nothing to do with the fictitious crisis (Coombs, 1995, p. 450). Denial simply argues that the crisis did not occur or does not exist. As a further step from the denial strategy, clarification tries to explain why no crisis exists and why the report of the event is not true. The third nonexistence strategy, attack, confronts those who wrongly claimed that the crisis exists and falsely argues that the crisis was committed by the organization. The most aggressive nonexistence strategy is intimidation. With intimidation, the organization threatens the accuser by exerting organizational power.

Distance strategies admit that there is a crisis but try to weaken the association between the crisis and the organization (Coombs, 1995, p. 451). Distance strategies can take two forms, excuse and justification, each of which includes options. Excuse attempts to minimize crisis responsibility through the denial of intention or the denial of volition. Justification tries to minimize the damage resulting from the crisis by convincing publics that the situation was not as serious as similar crises in the past. The options for justification include minimizing injury, asserting that the victim deserved the damage from the crisis, and claiming that the crisis event was misrepresented.

Three ingratiation strategies—bolstering, transcendence, and praising others—attempt to gain public approval by associating the organization with objects positively valued by publics (Coombs, 1995, p. 452). Bolstering tries to emphasize the existing positive characteristics of the organization in order to reduce publics' negative feelings associated with the crisis. Another option is transcendence, in which the organization attempts to place the crisis as part of a larger context where the event can be viewed as being more favorable. Praising others is the final form of the ingratiation strategies. The organization can praise the target group to win approval from that group.

Mortification strategies, which seek to win forgiveness and gain acceptance for the crisis, are divided into three sub-categories: remediation, repentance, and rectification (Coombs, 1995, p. 452). Remediation expresses the organization's willingness to help the victims of the crisis through offering payment or restitution to them. With the strategy of repentance, the organization apologizes for the crisis and asks publics to forgive the organization's wrongful act. If the public accepts its apology and forgives the company for the offensive act, the amount of criticism associated with the act is reduced. However, the company should be sincere in order to

win forgiveness from its publics. The last option for mortification is rectification. With this strategy, an organization attempts to fix the damage or problem resulting from the crisis and take steps to prevent the same crisis from occurring again in the future.

Finally, suffering strategy seeks to gain sympathy from publics by portraying the organization itself as a victim of the crisis (Coombs, 1995, p. 453). This strategy is different from other crisis-response strategies in that it tries to depict the organization as a powerless, vulnerable entity that is susceptible to malicious schemes.

In his research, Coombs (1998) integrated various crisis communication strategies and proposed the accommodative-defensive continuum. This continuum includes seven categories: attacking the accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action, and full apology and mortification. These strategies should be used to repair the organization's tarnished image depending on the critical connections between crisis attributions, image, and crisis responsibility.

Furthermore, by combining the attribution theory with crisis management, Coombs and Holladay (2004) propose the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), suggesting that the crisis communication strategy that is well-matched to a crisis type should be more effective than the strategy that does not consider a crisis situation. They argue that attributions of personal control determine the degree to which stakeholders perceive an organization as having responsibility for a crisis, and perceived organizational responsibility, in turn, leads to potential reputational damage. Therefore, they suggest that to maximize the effectiveness of the communication strategy, more accommodative crisis-response strategies should be used as attributions of crisis responsibility to an organization increase.

Several studies have adapted Coombs' (1995) typology of crisis-response strategies to examine the effectiveness of organizations' efforts to repair their crisis-damaged images (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Englehardt et al., 2004). For example, Coombs and Schmidt (2000) examined the effectiveness of Texaco's image restoration strategy in its racism crisis. They tested five strategies—bolstering, corrective action, shifting blame, mortification, and separation—and concluded that neither the use of the first four strategies alone nor the combination separation strategy had a significantly distinctive effect on the organization's reputation and potential supportive behavior. Moreover, only the strategy of shifting blame, and not the other four strategies, had a similar effect on account honoring. One of the possible explanations for these results was that the effectiveness of strategies was caused by other factors, such as Texaco's positive performance history, its good reputation, and its well-developed relationship with its public. Thus, the results suggest that it is necessary for further study to take into account other factors affecting the consequences of the crisis strategies, such as the seriousness of a crisis, the public perception of crisis responsibility, the organization's performance history, and the organization's relationships with its publics.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

When a crisis occurs, various publics seek causes and make causal attributions based on their perceived internal and external control of an organization over the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Weiner, 1986). Causal attributions made by these publics may lead them to perceive an organization as having more or less responsibility for the crisis (Weiner, 1995). In terms of crisis communication strategies, what an organization says and does is all part of crisis management and determining an organization's prosperity and survival (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1995, 1998). An organization's relationship with its public, however, can also contribute to managing a crisis, not only by reducing the public's negative perception of the crisis, but also by promoting positive attitudes toward the organization experiencing the crisis. Drawing on the foundation of the literature review, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Participants who perceive a crisis as having an internal cause will attribute more responsibility to the organization than will those who perceive the crisis as having an external cause.

H2: Participants with a favorable relationship with an organization will attribute less crisis responsibility to the organization than will those with an unfavorable relationship.

H3: Participants' perceptions of the cause of a crisis (either internal or external) will lessen or intensify perceptions of crisis responsibility based on their relationships with the organization.

H4: Participants with a favorable relationship with an organization will have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than will those with an unfavorable relationship.

H5: Participants who perceive an organization as having less responsibility for the crisis will have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than will those who perceive the organization as having more responsibility.

H6: Participants in the nonexistence condition will have a more unfavorable attitude toward the organization than will those in the mortification condition.

H7: Participants' attributions of crisis responsibility will improve or worsen their attitudes toward the organization depending on their relationships with the organization.

H8: The type of crisis-response strategy being used would improve or worsen participants' attitudes toward the organization based on their relationships with the organization.

H9: Participants' attributions of crisis responsibility will improve or worsen their attitudes toward the organization according to the type of strategy being used.

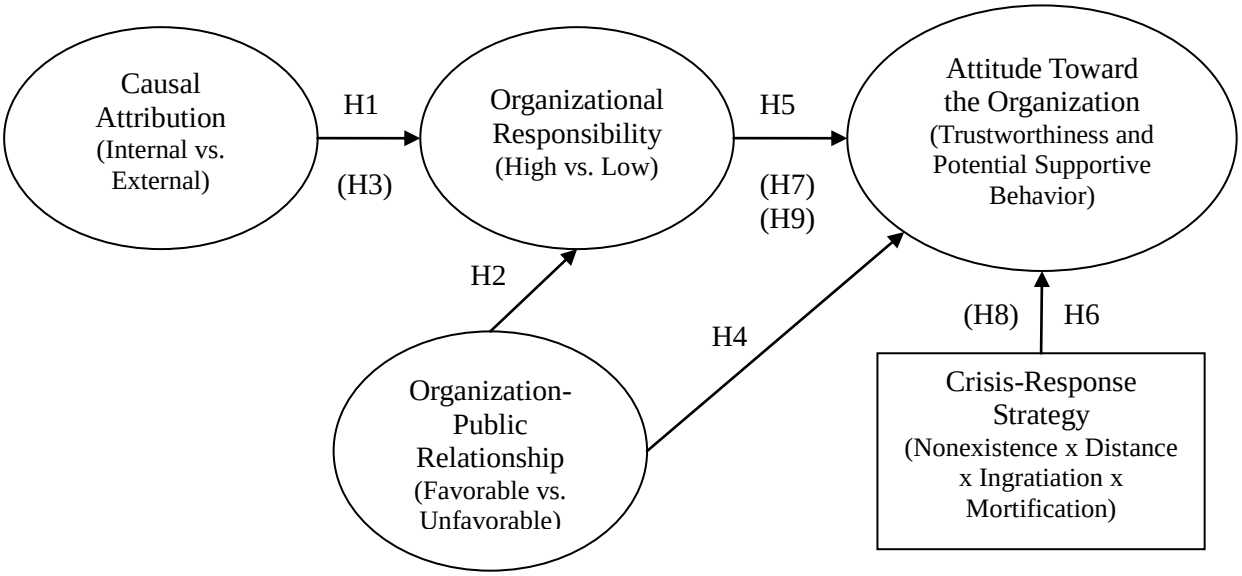

Figure 1. Research Model

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study employed a quasi-experimental, between-subjects design in which subjects whose group membership was determined by a nonmanipulated variable (e.g., relationship, perception of a cause, and attribution of crisis responsibility) were randomly assigned to different treatments (e.g., organizational messages responding to the crisis) (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). By using a purposive sampling method, a total sample of 262 participants was selected from the student population at the University of Georgia. The experimental sessions took place in two stages. In the first stage, the participants were asked how they perceive their relationships with the university. As a follow-up, the second stage of the experiment was carried out one week after the background measurement was measured. The participants were divided into two groups based on their relationship scores and then randomly assigned to one of the four different stimuli in the second phase. Specifically, they were presented with a description of a hypothetical crisis situation and asked about their perceptions of the crisis cause and crisis responsibility. Then each participant read one of the four different messages put forth by the university regarding the crisis and responded to the measures of attitude toward the crisis-response message. Hypotheses were tested through two-way ANOVA and three-way MANOVA procedures conducted through the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Participants

Participants were recruited from undergraduate communication courses at the University of Georgia by asking faculty for access to students in their classrooms. Extra credit was given to the students for completing their participation in both phases of the experiment. A total of 394 students who were enrolled in introductory courses of advertising, journalism, and public relations participated in the first phase of the experiment, with 264 of these students completing participation in the second phase. Two students who were enrolled in multiple classes being used for recruitment for this study participated twice. As a result, these students were dropped from the study after the data collection phases. Thus, the total sample size used for data analysis was 262.

A larger percentage of participants were females (85.1%, n = 223) than males (14.9%, n = 39). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25, with an average age of 20. The class standing of participants was as follows: 5.7% (n = 15) were first-year students, 39.7% (n = 104) were second-year students, 39.7% (n = 104) were third-year students, 13.7% (n = 36) were fourth-year students, and 1.1% (n = 3) were fifth-year students. The majority of participants were Caucasian (86.3%, n = 226), while 5.7% (n = 15) were African American, 4.2% (n = 11) were Asian, 1.1% (n = 3) were Hispanic, and 2.7% (n = 7) were in another racial category.

Crisis Case Selection and Stimuli Development

Scenarios about a crisis situation and response messages to the crisis were created on the basis of a previous crisis case at the University of Colorado. In 2004 the University of Colorado was accused of using sex and alcohol as tools for recruiting football players. This case was chosen as the basis for the present experimental study because the university was perceived to have control over and responsibility for the crisis at the neutral level, although publics'

perceptions of that negative event may vary. Another rationale for choosing this case was that the University of Georgia has one of the most popular football programs in the United States, and thus, its students would be more attentive participants and more likely to thoroughly read and answer questions regarding the chosen topic. To avoid potential problems associated with the use of the actual name of the university, the accused university in scenarios was named University Z. However, participants were asked to try to imagine that the negative event happened at the university that they were currently attending before they read a story about the crisis.

In an effort to simulate the real-world setting, the descriptions of a crisis situation and the university's four types of responses to the crisis were produced by taking accounts from the actual coverage of the football recruiting scandal at the University of Colorado by two local Colorado newspapers: *The Colorado Daily* and *The Daily Times-Call*. News articles about the event published in these newspapers between January 1, 2004 and June 30, 2005 were reviewed for the creation of scenarios because it was the time period when the media extensively reported news stories about the recruiting scandal and the university's handling of the crisis following its outbreak. The full texts of the articles were retrieved from the Web sites of the newspapers.[1]

By employing Coombs' (1995) repertoire of crisis-response strategies, four different messages responding to the crisis were manipulated. Each response scenario was designed to demonstrate nonexistence, distance, ingratiation, or mortification strategy. Scenario A was created for the nonexistence strategy, which includes denial, clarification, attack, and intimidation. Scenario B demonstrated the hypothetical case in which the university implements distance strategy, which is comprised of excuse and justification. Scenario C was designed to illustrate the ingratiation strategy, which includes bolstering, transcendence, and praising others.

[1] *The Colorado Daily*: www. coloradodaily.com; *The Daily Times-Call*: www.longmontfyi.com

Last, Scenario D indicated a combination of mortification strategies—remediation, repentance, and rectification. All four different response scenarios were similar in length, with 22 or 23 lines of text, to rule out a possible confounding effect of treatment. Table 4.1 provides a description of the manipulated messages designed to demonstrate crisis-response strategies (See Appendix D for the full descriptions of the crisis-response strategies).

Table 4.1
Crisis-response Strategies

Crisis-response strategies	Description
Nonexistence	
Denial	• University Z strongly denied the charges in a press conference. • The head coach read from a prepared statement emphasizing that allegations against him and his coaching staff that question his integrity and practices are false.
Clarification	• All recruits – as well as their parents and high school coaches – must read and sign a document that outlines standards a visiting student-athlete must follow while on an official visit. The letter is also signed by the student host.
Attack	• "The unfounded allegations that have been made should be an insult to educated people," he said. • "The District Attorney (DA) has made a number of 'extra-judicial' statements to the media that improperly implied that UZ football players were guilty of rape, a charge which was never filed…," he said.
Intimidation	• To discredit the District Attorney, the university has already hired a high-profile former prosecutor, John B. He wrote a report critical of the DA's handling of the alleged rape case, in which no sexual assault charges were filed.
Distance	
Excuse	• The head coach said that alcohol and sex are a part of the college cultural experience, but not part of recruiting. • As a recruit's host, Jeremy also took the recruit to a gathering. "I believe there was most likely alcohol there because the guys who were there were over 21," he said.
Justification	• The head coach suspended Tom for next year's season opener against University A for taking some of the recruits to an 18-and-over strip club, which he said was Tom's only violation as a recruit host.
Ingratiation	
Bolstering	• University Z is ranked 15th among the top public universities for the eighth consecutive year.

	• It is not a hard task at all to find things about UZ to be proud of, according to UZ spokesperson.
Transcendence	• According to its spokesperson, despite the unfavorable publicity about UZ's football program, parents and prospective students across the country are not focusing on the football scandal. Instead, parents want to know about the quality of education for their children.
Praising others	• UZ President said, "Given the legal challenges stemming from UZ's alleged football culture, the fact that UZ remains in the top 15 is a strong testament to the quality and efforts of our faculty, staff and students. I am grateful for their efforts and pleased that UZ continues to be counted among America's very best."
Mortification	
Remediation	• UZ officials have made every effort and taken every action to settle sexual assault issues, while protecting the privacy of victims. • Both UZ's President and Athletic Director demonstrated their willingness to find out what actually happened at the off-campus party. • "We definitely want to be cooperative and show openness and concerns," UZ's President said at the end of the conference.
Repentance	• He expressed regret that UZ was not proactive in dealing with concerns and warnings about sexual misconduct in its football program.
Rectification	• They claimed that the recruits would no longer be left to the care of football players without supervision. They also enforced a strict 11:00 p.m. curfew on visiting recruits. • "We will not tolerate sexual harassment or exploitation in our athletic department or anywhere in the university," he (UZ's President) said.

Manipulation Check

The manipulation of crisis-response strategies was tested with nine graduate students majoring in mass communication and journalism. First, they were instructed to read a story about a crisis situation and to briefly review definitions and explanations of the strategies in the booklet for manipulation check before being exposed to the university's response messages. Each student was presented with three of the four response scenarios and instructed to follow these two steps: (1) select one of the four strategies in the list that he or she thought the given story demonstrated, and (2) underline sentences in the story that served as evidence indicating that the selected strategy is used. The graduate students used as judges all agreed that a description of the crisis

situation was well-designed in terms of organizational responsibility at the neutral level. They also confirmed that each scenario of crisis-response strategy was appropriately manipulated by judging the validity of scenarios as adequate.

Pilot Study

A pilot test was conducted to detect possible measurement problems and to check the validity of independent and dependent variables. By conducting a pilot study, a researcher can correct unexpected problems of instruments and procedures and refine the research design for the main experiment (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). This pilot study was designed to see if there were any questions that were difficult to understand or had ambiguous wording. It was also used to figure out the necessary amount of time to administer each of the two sessions. Twenty-eight undergraduate students participated in this pilot study, and it took approximately 10 to 15 minutes for them to complete the questionnaires in each phase. Since no major problems with respect to wording and formatting were found, there was no need to revise the questionnaires or to make changes in procedures for administration of experiment. In addition, the data collected in the pilot test, along with those from the main study, were used for data analysis to test the study's hypotheses.

Procedure

The data collection procedures for this experimental study took place in two stages. The first phase of the experiment was designed to measure the relationships between the university and the participants. This procedure was needed to randomly assign a balanced number of people to each set of conditions within each level of relationship (favorable vs. unfavorable) for the treatment session following the first phase. In addition to perceived relationships with the university, participants were asked to provide basic demographic

information, including their gender, age, class standing, and ethnicity. When participants completed the first questionnaire, they were asked to provide their availability for the following week, along with their e-mail addresses, for the second part of the experiment. The initial data collection was carried out at the beginning of regular class sessions in an agreement with the professors for the classes.

The students who agreed to participate in the second part of the study and who offered an e-mail address were contacted through e-mail to arrange follow-up treatment sessions that did not conflict with their schedules. As a result, 38 sessions were administered with 264 students for 3 weeks, having 5 to 20 students in each session. Those experimental sessions were implemented outside the class one or two weeks after the initial data collection.

Prior to implementation of the experimental sessions, based on the results obtained from the first stage, the participants were divided into two groups: those in a favorable relationship and those in an unfavorable relationship with the university. The participants within each group were randomly assigned to the four different stimuli in the second phase.

In the second stage, all participants were instructed to read a fictitious crisis case that occurred in the athletic department of University Z and to imagine that it happened at their university. The following pre-experiment statement was given to the participants before they read a description of the crisis situation:

> During the course of your reading about this case, please try to imagine that it happened at your university. Try to imagine how you would feel and react if it happened at your university. While this case is only illustrative, it is based on news coverage of incidents at another university's athletic program.

After reading a description of the crisis situation, participants were asked about their perceptions of the crisis cause and organizational responsibility for the crisis. Then they were presented with the university's message reflecting one of four crisis-response strategies: nonexistence, distance, ingratiation, or mortification. After reading the response scenario description, the participants responded to the questions assessing their attitudes toward the university. Attitudes toward the university were measured in terms of trustworthiness and potential supportive behavior.

After completing the questionnaire, the participants were asked to keep one copy of the consent form and return the other copy and the questionnaire to the researcher. Throughout the first and second phases of the study, the last four digits of the participant's phone number were used as his or her identification number. This research procedure and all experimental materials, including consent form, crisis scenarios, and questionnaires, were approved by the Institutional Review Board one month prior to the implementation of the experiment.

Questionnaire Construction and Measures

Two booklets were prepared for this experimental study. The first two pages of each booklet included a consent form, and participants were asked to sign both copies of the consent form and to keep the first copy as proof of their participation in the study. The first questionnaire included a background instrument measuring participants' relationships with the university and demographic items. The second questionnaire contained crisis scenarios and measures assessing participants' evaluations of the crisis. It began with a fictitious crisis case followed by the measures of causal attribution and crisis responsibility and also included a scenario of the university's response to the crisis and the measure of attitudes toward the university.

Relationship Measure

To measure relationships between the university and its public, Hon and Grunig's (1999) measurement of relationships was employed because this instrument has been widely applied to relationship research in public relations (Ki & Hon, 2007). Hon and Grunig's measurement consisted of 26 items assessing six dimensions of relationship: 6 items for trust, 4 items for control mutuality, 4 items for commitment, 4 items for satisfaction, 4 items for communal relationship, and 4 items for exchange relationship. Among those relationship dimensions, trust has three subdimensions: integrity, dependability, and competence. Table 4.2 presents the items that tap into each dimension of relationship.

Table 4.2
Relationship Measure

Relationship dimensions	Items
Trust	1. My university treats people like me fairly and justly.
Integrity	2. Whenever my university makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.
Dependability	3. My university can be relied on to keep its promises.
	4. I believe that my university takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.
Competence	5. I feel very confident about my university's standing as a university.
	6. My university has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
Control mutuality	7. My university and people like me are attentive to what each other say.
	8. My university believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.
	9. In dealing with people like me, my university has a tendency to throw its weight around.*
	10. My university really listens to what people like me have to say.
Commitment	11. I feel that my university is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.
	12. I can see that my university wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.
	13. There is a long-lasting bond between my university and people like me.
	14. Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with my university more.

Satisfaction	15. I am happy with my university. 16. Both my university and people like me benefit from the relationship. 17. Most people like me are happy in their interactions with my university. 18. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship my university has established with people like me.
Communal relationships	19. My university does not especially enjoy giving others aid.* 20. My university is very concerned about the welfare of people like me. 21. I feel that my university takes advantage of people who are vulnerable.* 22. I think that my university succeeds by stepping on people.*
Exchange relationships	23. Whenever my university gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return. 24. Even though people like me have had a relationship with my university for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favor. 25. My university will compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something. 26. My university takes care of people who are likely to reward it.

** Reversed items*

Causal Attribution Measure

Causal attribution was measured by 9 items adapted from McAuley et al.'s (1992) causal dimension scale. As in Coombs and Holladay's (1996) study, this study used three causal subscales—locus of causality, personal control, and external control—that are associated with internal controllability and intentionality. Each of the three causal dimensions was measured with 3 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." The items assessing causal perceptions are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3
Causal Attribution Measure

Causal attribution	Items
Locus of causality	If it happened at my university, 1. The cause(s) of the crisis is something that reflects an attitude of my university. 2. The cause(s) of the crisis is something inside of my university. 3. The cause(s) of the crisis is something about my university.
Personal control	4. The cause(s) of the crisis is something manageable by my university. 5. The cause(s) of the crisis is something my university can regulate. 6. The cause(s) of the crisis is something over which my university has power.
External control	7. The cause(s) of the crisis is something over which others have control. 8. The cause(s) of the crisis is something under the power of other people. 9. The cause(s) of the crisis is something other people can regulate.

Crisis Responsibility Measure

Crisis responsibility refers to the degree to which publics assign responsibility for a crisis to an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Crisis responsibility was assessed using a 2-item scale developed by Lee (2004). Regarding the participants' perceptions of organizational responsibility, Questions 10 and 11 in the second questionnaire asked participants about the extent to which they agree with the following items: (a) "If it happened at my university, my university should be blamed for the crisis," and (b) "If it happened at my university, my university should bear responsibility for the crisis." These two items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree."

Attitude Measures

Attitudes toward the university were measured in terms of the university's trustworthiness and the public's potential supportive behavior. Trustworthiness was assessed using 4 items adapted from Lee's (2004) degree of trust scale and McCroskey's (1966) character

scale. The measure of potential supportive behavior was modified from the items developed by Coombs (1998), and 3 items were used to assess the degree to which participants would take intended supportive actions. All of these items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." A total of 7 items were used to measure attitudes toward organizational responses. These items are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4
Trustworthiness and Potential Supportive Behavior Measures

Attitude measures	Items
Trustworthiness	Based on this response, I believe
	12. My university was basically honest.
	13. I would trust my university to tell the truth about the incident.
	14. I would lose my confidence in my university.
	15. My university would be capable of dealing with the crisis.
Potential supportive behavior	16. I would say nice things about my university to other people.
	17. I would sign a petition in support of some action that my university was trying to take.
	18. I would call or e-mail a government official in support of some action that my university was trying to take.

Statistical Procedures

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. To test Hypotheses 1 through 3, a two-way (2 x 2) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. H1 and H2 involve the main effects of relationship and causal attribution on crisis responsibility, respectively. H3 examines the interaction effect between relationship and causal attribution. Regarding the second set of hypotheses, H4 through H9, a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed with a three-way (2 x 2 x 4) factorial design in order to examine the unique and combined effects of relationship, crisis responsibility, and crisis-response strategy on

attitudes toward the organization when different crisis-response strategies were employed to mitigate a crisis. H4, H5, and H6 involve the main effects of the three predictor variables, respectively. H7, H8, and H9 involve the two-way interactions of possible pairs among the three variables.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

This study employed various statistical techniques to identify the dimensionality of study concepts as primary steps for subsequent analyses and to provide statistical evidence for the hypotheses. First, factor analyses and reliability tests were performed prior to examining the hypotheses, and the results of these preliminary analyses are reported in this chapter prior to the results of the hypothesis testing. Based on these results, composite scores for each variable were calculated, and relationship and causal subgroups were formed for subsequent analyses. Then factorial univariate and multivariate procedures were administered for hypothesis testing. The results are presented in order as stated above.

Factor Analyses of Relationship and Casual Attribution Measures

Before testing the hypotheses, separate factor analyses were conducted on the measures of relationship and causal attribution in order to identify the dimensional structures of each measure and relationships among those underlying dimensions. All factor analyses were administered using principal component analysis with promax rotation, which is one of the oblique rotation procedures. Oblique rotation methods have been preferred by many researchers (e.g., Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999; Gorsuch, 1997) since those methods provide more accurate and realistic solutions than do orthogonal rotations, representing how constructs are likely to be correlated in reality (Conway & Huffcutt, 2003). Considering the conceptual nature of the two variables (relationship and causal attribution), it was necessary to

allow for correlations among factors underlying these concepts. Moreover, oblique rotations produce fewer factor loadings and, thus, are more likely to result in superior simple structure (Conway & Huffcutt, 2003). Specifically, promax rotation is regarded as an optimal choice in that this method employs an oblique rotation technique based on an orthogonal rotation (varimax) (Finch, 2006).

Factor Analysis of a Measure of Relationship

A factor analysis was conducted with the 26-item measure of relationship in order to assess the dimensionality of relationship and to determine whether the resulting factors represent the conceptual dimensions of relationship as defined in this study. Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship measure, on which this study assessed relationships, comprises six dimensions: trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationships, and exchange relationships.

The initial principal component solution using promax rotation extracted five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The total variance explained by the five factors was 65.3%, higher than the rule of thumb percentage (at least 50% or more) to determine the number of factors retained (Harlow, 2005). However, the resulting factors were not congruent with the theoretical components, and the items within each factor were not conceptually consistent.

Since Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship measurement scale is composed of six subscales, an additional factor analysis was performed, setting the number of factors to six rather than using the criterion of eigenvalues exceeding 1.0. As a result, the principal component analysis with promax rotation confirmed six factors, accounting for approximately 70% of the total variance. The forced six factor solution revealed a higher percentage of the total variance accounted for and resulted in a more interpretable solution than did the former analysis. Although the resulting factors did not perfectly correspond to the expected factors, the factor

structure and the structural relations among the six factors appeared to be equivalent to those of the theoretical dimensions as supporting the conceptualization of relationship.

Factor 1, which emerged as the predominant factor, accounted for 38.8% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 10.08. This factor included all eight items measuring satisfaction and commitment, along with one item measuring communal relationships. All factor loadings were equal or greater than .69. Factor 2 explained 10.6% of the variance and included seven items assessing control mutuality and two subdimensions of trust (integrity and dependability). Factor 3 consisted of four items that tapped into exchange relationships, accounting for 6.2% of the total variance. These four items had positive loadings greater than .60. Consistent with the conceptual definitions of relationship dimensions, all items loaded on the other dimensions were negatively correlated with Factor 3. Factor 4, which explained 5.5% of the total variance, was composed of three items related to communal relationships. Factor 5 contained two items associated with a subdimension of trust (competence), accounting for 4.3% of the variance. Factor 6 consisted of one item measuring control mutuality, explaining 3.4% of the variance. This single item was loaded on the sixth dimension with a loading of .894; however, its factor loading was .072 on Factor 2, in which the other items of control mutuality were included. This result may be due to the negative wording of this item.

Across the dimensions, all factor loadings were greater than a loading criterion of .40, ranging from .606 to .894 (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). Table 5.1 presents the factor loadings, the communalities, and the eigenvalues and variances for which each factor of relationships accounted. The factor loadings were derived from the structure matrix that provides the correlations between the items and the factors (Meyers et al., 2006).

Table 5.1
Factor Analysis of a Measure of Relationship

Items	Component						Communality
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
18. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship my university has established with people like me. (Satisfaction 4)	**.876**	.606	-.109	.477	.457	.121	.778
11. I feel that my university is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me. (Commitment 1)	**.830**	.613	-.041	.374	.355	.100	.714
12. I can see that my university wants to maintain a relationship with people like me. (Commitment 2)	**.830**	.557	-.016	.329	.301	.040	.715
13. There is a long-lasting bond between my university and people like me. (Commitment 3)	**.826**	.416	.055	.433	.359	.104	.713
16. Both my university and people like me benefit from the relationship. (Satisfaction 2)	**.815**	.498	-.050	.384	.562	.142	.713
17. Most people like me are happy in their interactions with my university. (Satisfaction 3)	**.774**	.548	-.072	.542	.469	.207	.649
15. I am happy with my university. (Satisfaction 1)	**.745**	.516	-.060	.483	.647	.100	.665
14. Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with my university more. (Commitment 4)	**.704**	.332	-.013	.258	.372	-.063	.543
20. My university is very concerned about the welfare of people like me. (Communal relationship 2)	**.692**	.636	-.189	.642	.273	.074	.708
4. I believe that my university takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions. (Trust 4 – Dependability)	.540	**.867**	-.097	.392	.406	.132	.771
8. My university believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate. (Control mutuality 2)	.520	**.832**	-.179	.389	.424	.051	.708
10. My university really listens to what people like me have to say. (Control mutuality 4)	.544	**.831**	-.161	.351	.329	.109	.700
2. Whenever my university makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me. (Trust 2 – Integrity)	.485	**.791**	-.102	.397	.224	.097	.642

7. My university and people like me are attentive to what each other say. (Control mutuality 1)	.547	**.766**	-.128	.472	.392	.022	.609
3. My university can be relied on to keep its promises. (Trust 3 – Dependability)	.429	**.728**	-.185	.421	.541	.110	.624
1. My university treats people like me fairly and justly. (Trust 1 – Integrity)	.474	**.606**	-.149	.578	.332	-.183	.553
24. Even though people like me have had a relationship with my university for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favor. (Exchange relationship 2)	-.051	-.150	**.867**	-.200	-.056	-.190	.753
23. Whenever my university gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return. (Exchange relationship 1)	-.095	-.130	**.818**	-.243	-.170	-.143	.700
25. My university will compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something. (Exchange relationship 3)	.021	-.093	**.804**	-.225	-.066	-.276	.672
26. My university takes care of people who are likely to reward it. (Exchange relationship 4)	.044	-.202	**.617**	.020	.247	-.159	.523
21. I feel that my university takes advantage of people who are vulnerable. (Communal relationship 3)*	.333	.359	-.199	**.870**	.453	.225	.795
22. I think that my university succeeds by stepping on people. (Communal relationship 4)*	.476	.446	-.213	**.768**	.489	.440	.720
19. My university does not especially enjoy giving others aid. (Communal relationship 1)*	.337	.327	-.183	**.753**	.191	-.045	.621
6. My university has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (Trust 6 – Competence)	.472	.462	-.046	.466	**.833**	-.069	.745
5. I feel very confident about my university's standing as a university. (Trust 5 – Competence)	.578	.500	-.089	.367	**.824**	.071	.743
9. In dealing with people like me, my university has a tendency to throw its weight around. (Control mutuality 3)*	.050	.072	-.251	.100	-.059	**.894**	.828
Eigenvalue	10.08	2.77	1.60	1.42	1.12	0.89	
% of variance explained	38.75	10.64	6.15	5.46	4.29	3.41	
Total variance explained				68.69			

* *Reverse-coded items*

Correlations among the six factors are shown in Table 5.2. Factors 1, 2, 4, and 5 were highly or moderately correlated, with correlation coefficients ranging from .481 to .624. Despite weak correlations, these four factors were also positively associated with Factor 6. In contrast, Factor 3, reflecting exchange relationships, had negative correlations with the other five factors, with correlation coefficients ranging from -.048 to -.225. These results suggest that exchange relationships tend to be opposed to communal relationships accompanied by the other four relationship indicators (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Therefore, the correlations among the factors lend some support to the conceptualization of relationship factors as being related.

Overall, the factor structures of relationship, as well as correlations among the factors of relationship, appeared to be an adequate representation of the conceptual dimensions of relationship proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999). However, since this study sought to examine the overall effect of relationship—rather than the individual effects of relationship dimensions—on publics' perceptions of a crisis and attitudes toward an organization in a crisis, a summated index of relationship was used to test hypotheses.

Table 5.2
Correlations Among the Dimensions of Relationship

Component	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Factor 1	.624	-.048	.502	.481	.096
Factor 2		-.194	.493	.398	.085
Factor 3			-.225	-.050	-.218
Factor 4				.444	.158
Factor 5					.099

Factor Analysis of a Measure of Causal Attribution

Since the causal attribution measure that this study adapted from McAuley et al. (1992) was based on three dimensions (locus of causality, personal control, and external control), nine causal items were also subjected to factor analysis. The principal component analysis with an oblique rotation method extracted three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, accounting for 80.2% of the total variance. Table 5.3 presents the factor analysis results for causal attribution.

Table 5.3
Factor Analysis of a Measure of Causal Attribution

Items	Component			Communality
	1	2	3	
3. The cause(s) of the crisis is something about my university.	**.942**	.340	-.026	.888
2. The cause(s) of the crisis is something inside of my university.	**.924**	.319	-.005	.855
1. The cause(s) of the crisis is something that reflects an attitude of my university.	**.898**	.379	.009	.809
5. The cause(s) of the crisis is something my university can regulate.	.286	**.920**	.206	.849
6. The cause(s) of the crisis is something over which my university has power.	.318	**.883**	.139	.782
4. The cause(s) of the crisis is something manageable by my university.	.409	**.833**	.203	.708
8. The cause(s) of the crisis is something under the power of other people.	-.001	.056	**.902**	.834
9. The cause(s) of the crisis is something other people can regulate.	.010	.295	**.864**	.762
7. The cause(s) of the crisis is something over which others have control.	-.032	.205	**.855**	.734
Eigenvalue	3.48	2.37	1.37	
% of variance explained	38.71	26.30	15.21	
Total variance explained		80.23		

The results suggest that the factor structure was a clear replication of the original scale with respect to clarification of distinct dimensions. Despite having fewer dimensions, the factor solution produced the causal factors consonant with the causal constructs identified in McAuley et al.'s study. Factor 1, "locus of causality," consisted of three items that concerned whether the public perceived the crisis as reflecting the organization's characteristics, accounting for 38.7% of the variance. Factor 2, "personal control," explained 26.3% of the variance and included 3 items associated with the controllability of the crisis. Factor 3, "external control," contained three items that assessed whether the public perceived the cause of the crisis as externally controllable, accounting for 15.2% of the total variance. All items loaded on the dimensions as conceptually expected, with factor loadings greater than .80. Correlations among these three factors are shown in Table 5.4. The personal control was moderately correlated with the other two factors, having a correlations coefficient of .368 with the locus of causality of .206 with the external control. As expected, the correlation between the causality and the external control was negative (-.007), but not sufficient to interpret that the factors were correlated (Meyers et al., 2006).

Table 5.4
Correlations Among the Causal Dimensions

Component	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1	.624	-.048
Factor 2		-.194

Internal Scale Reliability and Construction of Composite Scores

Reliability tests using Cronbach's alpha were performed to examine the overall reliability of the variables as well as to determine the internal consistency of the items tapping into the underlying dimensions of the variables. First, the subscale scores for each of relationship dimensions demonstrated adequate internal consistency reliability: .846 for trust, .689 for control

mutuality, .844 for commitment, .886 for satisfaction, .786 for communal relationships, and .789 for exchange relationships. Considering conceptual definitions and negative correlations between exchange relationships and the other dimensions, the item scores for exchange relationships were reversely coded. As a result, the Cronbach's alpha for the overall reliability of the relationship items was .922.

The subscales for three causal dimensions also showed good internal reliability, with alphas of .911 for locus of causality, .855 for personal control, and .844 for external control. As in Coombs and Holladay's (1996) study, the locus of causality and personal control were considered together as "internal control," indicating the degree to which the public perceived the crisis cause as the organization's misdeed. Since the external control was conceptually opposed to the internal control and was negatively correlated with internal control, the item scores for external control were reverse coded so that higher values were equivalent to lower values on internal control. With reverse-coded item scores, the overall reliability for causal attribution was .723.

The internal consistency of the items for crisis responsibility was also adequate, with an alpha of .858. In addition, the alpha scores for trustworthiness and supportive behavior were .753 and .632, respectively. Scales that have Cronbach's alpha above .70 are considered to have adequate internal reliability (Nunnally, 1994), but the lower limit can be .60 in exploratory research (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Alphas of .80 indicate satisfactory scale reliability (Howitt & Cramer, 2005). After reliability tests confirmed a sufficient level of internal consistency for the measures of the variables, the individual scores of the items selected for each variable were averaged to create composite scores.

The total relationship score was computed by averaging individual scores across all 26 relationship items. Higher scores were intended to reflect more favorable relationships that the students had with the university. To obtain a composite measure of causal attribution, individual scores of the nine items measuring internal and external control were averaged. Higher scores on this summated attribution index indicate a higher level of internal controllability perceived by the public. Additionally, the summated indices for crisis responsibility, trustworthiness, and supportive behavior were produced by calculating the mean values of the items intended to assess each variable.

Testing Hypotheses

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the organization-public relationship on publics' perceptions of a crisis and their attitudes toward an organization in crisis. In addition to an organization's relationships with its publics, this study considered other variables (causal perception, responsibility attribution, type of crisis-response strategy) that may have independent and combined effects on publics' perceptions and attitudes during a crisis. The nine hypotheses were divided into two sets based on these two dependent variables—publics' perceptions and their attitudes. The first set (H1 through H3) measured the publics' perceptions and was examined using ANOVA procedures. The second set (H4 through H9) measured the publics' attitudes and was examined using MANOVA procedures.

Tests of Hypotheses 1 to 3

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 examined the effects of relationship (favorable vs. unfavorable) and perceived cause (internal vs. external) on responsibility attribution to the organization with respect to the crisis. As a prior step to test hypotheses, the participants were categorized into groups based on their relationships with the university and their causal attribution for the crisis.

Table 5.5 presents the means, standard deviations, and medians for relationship, causal attribution, and crisis responsibility. Relationship groups were formed by using a median split so that participants were divided evenly into two relationship groups; the favorable relationship group consisted of those with a total relationship score of 4.83 or more (n = 131), and the unfavorable relationship group consisted of those with a relationship score below 4.83 (n = 131). The means of relationships were 5.33 (SD = .375) for the favorable relationship group and 4.15 (SD = .505) for the unfavorable relationship group.

Table 5.5
Means, Standard Deviations, and Medians of Relationship, Causal Attribution, and Crisis Responsibility

Variables	Mean	SD	Median
Relationship	4.74	.737	4.83
Causal attribution	4.29	.841	4.39
Crisis responsibility	5.35	1.41	5.75

In addition, the participants were divided into two groups with respect to their perceived degree of internal cause. The use of a median split procedure resulted in two relatively balanced groups, with participants whose causal attribution index score was greater than or equal to 4.39 labeled as the internal cause group (n = 131) and participants whose score was smaller than 4.39 labeled as the external cause group (n = 131). The means of causal attribution were 4.96 (SD = .455) for the internal cause group and 3.62 (SD = .558) for the external cause group.

Two-way ANOVA (2 x 2) was conducted to test the first set of hypotheses—H1, H2, and H3. As the test for the assumptions of the ANOVA, the Levene's test confirmed that the error variance of the dependent measure was not significantly different across groups ($F(3, 165) = .860$, $p = .463$). H1 stated that participants who perceived the crisis as having an internal cause would attribute more responsibility to the organization than would those who perceived the crisis as

having an external cause. As shown in Table 5.6, the results of ANOVA indicate that the main effect of causal attribution was significant ($F(1, 258) = 36.496$, $p < .05$). Participants who perceived the crisis as having an internal cause ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.042$) were more likely to attribute more crisis responsibility to the university than were those who perceived the crisis as having an external cause ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.560$); thus, H1 was supported.

Table 5.6
Two-way ANOVA for Crisis Responsibility

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Partial Eta Squared
Relationship	3.279	1	3.279	1.869	.173	.007
Causal attribution	64.019	1	64.019	36.496	.000	.124
Relationship x Causal attribution	1.484	1	1.484	.846	.359	.003
Error	452.573	258	1.754			

However, the main effect of relationship was not significant ($F(1, 258) = 1.869$, $p = .173$). This result was inconsistent with H2, which predicted that participants in the favorable relationship group would attribute less crisis responsibility to the organization than would those in the unfavorable relationship group. Even though the mean of crisis responsibility for participants in the favorable relationship group ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.473$) was lower than the mean for those in the unfavorable relationship group ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.348$), this mean difference was not statistically significant.

H3 proposed that participants' perceptions of the cause of crisis would lessen or intensify perception of crisis responsibility depending on their relationships with the organization. Contrary to expectation, the results also revealed that there was no interaction effect between the relationship and the causal attribution ($F(1, 258) = .846$, $p = .359$). In other words, participants

attributed crisis responsibility to the university based on their perceived cause of the crisis (internally or externally controlled) regardless of their current relationships with the university. Therefore, H3 was not supported. Table 5.7 displays cell means and group means for crisis responsibility.

Table 5.7
Means and Standard Deviations of Crisis Responsibility Among Cell Groups

Relationship	Causal attribution	Crisis responsibility		
		Mean	SD	N
Favorable	Internal cause	5.81	1.074	71
	External cause	4.67	1.641	60
	Total	5.29	1.473	131
Unfavorable	Internal cause	5.88	1.010	60
	External cause	5.04	1.478	71
	Total	5.43	1.348	131
Total	Internal	5.84	1.042	131
	External	4.87	1.560	131
	Total	5.36	1.411	262

Tests of Hypotheses 4 to 9

To examine the second set of hypotheses, crisis responsibility was intended to serve as an independent variable, along with the type of relationship and the type of crisis-response strategy. Thus, regarding a total score of crisis responsibility, the participants were separated into two balanced groups by using a median split procedure. The high crisis responsibility group consisted of those participants with a total responsibility score of 5.75 or more (n = 131), and the low crisis responsibility group consisted of those with a responsibility score below 5.75 (n = 131). The means of crisis responsibility were 6.44 (SD = .452) for the high responsibility group and 4.27 (SD = 1.196) for the low responsibility group. As shown in Table 5.5, the grand mean for

crisis responsibility was 5.36 (SD = 1.411). In addition, the means of trustworthiness and supportive behavior were 4.49 (SD = 1.064) and 4.38 (SD = 1.067), respectively.

Since the second set of hypotheses involved two dependent variables (trustworthiness and supportive behavior) that were conceptually related, MANOVA procedures were conducted for hypothesis testing in order to guard against the inflation of Type I errors caused by conducting multiple ANOVAs independently (Meyers et al., 2006). A three-way (2 x 2 x 4) factorial MANOVA was conducted to examine the combined and unique effects of relationship (favorable vs. unfavorable) and crisis responsibility attribution (high vs. low) on the attitude toward the organization (i.e., trustworthiness and supportive behavior) regarding four different crisis-response strategies given (nonexistence x distance x ingratiation x mortification). Specifically, the MANOVA procedures tested the main effects of each of the three dependent variables (relationship, crisis responsibility, and response strategy) as well as three possible two-way interactions (relationship x responsibility, relationship x strategy, and responsibility x strategy). In addition to two-way interactions, a three-way interaction was examined.

Prior to testing the hypotheses, correlations among the dependent variables were examined to justify the use of MANOVA. Trustworthiness and supportive behavior were found to be significantly correlated, with a correlation coefficient of .534 ($p < .01$). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was also statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 68.948$, $p < .05$), supporting the evidence of sufficient correlation between the two variables. In addition, the results of the Box's M test provided evidence that the covariance matrices across all groups were not significantly different ($M = 47.812$, $F(45, 64390.28) = 1.006$, $p = .461$). The Levene's tests for each dependent variable also showed that variances for each dependent measure across different cell groups were equal

(F(15, 246) = 1.021, p = .433 for trustworthiness; F(15, 246) = 1.428, p = .135 for supportive behavior).

The six hypotheses were examined by performing MANOVA, followed by univariate analyses for each dependent variable. The alpha level was adjusted for the two separate ANOVAs by applying a Bonferroni adjustment, thereby resulting in an adjusted alpha level of .025 (= 0.05/2). H4 stated that participants in the favorable relationship group would have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than would those in the unfavorable relationship group. As shown in Table 5.8, the results of the three-way MANOVA indicate that the main effect of the relationship was significant (Wilks Λ = .975, F(2, 245) = 3.183, p < .05).

Table 5.8
Multivariate Analysis Results for Attitude Toward the Organization

Source	Wilks' Λ	F	H df	Error df	p-value	Partial Eta Squared
Relationship	.975	3.183	2	245	.043	.025
Crisis responsibility	.925	9.943	2	245	.000	.075
Response strategy	.897	4.537	6	490	.000	.053
Relationship x Responsibility	.998	.291	2	245	.748	.002
Relationship x Strategy	.989	.471	2	245	.830	.006
Responsibility x Strategy	.976	.978	6	490	.440	.012
Relationship x Responsibility x Strategy	.973	1.114	6	490	.353	.013

In addition, the results of the univariate analyses (Table 5.9) showed that the main effect was significant for trustworthiness (F(1, 246) = 5.735, p < .025), suggesting that the participants in the favorable relationship group (M = 4.67, SD = 1.079) would think of the university's response as being more trustworthy than would those in the unfavorable relationship

group (M = 4.32, SD = 1.022). However, the main effect of relationship was found to be not significant for supportive behavior (F(1, 246) = 3.537, p = .061). Therefore, H4 was partially supported.

Table 5.9
Univariate Analysis Results for Trustworthiness and Supportive Behavior

Source	Dependent Variable	df	MS	F	p-value	Partial Eta Squared
Relationship	Trustworthiness	1	5.404	5.735	.017	.023
	Supportive behavior	1	3.894	3.537	.061	.014
Crisis responsibility	Trustworthiness	1	18.815	19.967	.000	.075
	Supportive behavior	1	5.185	4.709	.031	.019
Response strategy	Trustworthiness	3	8.702	9.235	.000	.101
	Supportive behavior	3	2.707	2.458	.063	.029
Relationship x Responsibility	Trustworthiness	1	.327	.347	.556	.001
	Supportive behavior	1	.020	.018	.893	.000
Relationship x Strategy	Trustworthiness	3	.508	.539	.656	.007
	Supportive behavior	3	.254	.231	.875	.003
Responsibility x Strategy	Trustworthiness	3	.569	.604	.613	.007
	Supportive behavior	3	1.323	1.202	.310	.014
Relationship x Responsibility x Strategy	Trustworthiness	3	1.613	1.712	.165	.020
	Supportive behavior	3	.996	.905	.439	.011
Error	Trustworthiness	246	.942			
	Supportive behavior	246	1.101			

H5 predicted that participants who perceived the organization as having less responsibility for the crisis would have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than would those who perceived the organization as having more responsibility. The main effect of crisis responsibility (Table 5.8) was found to be significant (Wilks Λ = .925, F(2, 245) = 9.943, p < .05). As indicated in Table 5.9, the results of the univariate comparisons revealed a significant

main effect for trustworthiness ($F(1, 246) = 19.967$, $p < .025$) as well as a marginally significant effect for supportive behavior ($F(1, 246) = 4.709$, $p = .031$). In other words, the participants who judged the university as having low responsibility ($M = 4.79$, $SD = .931$) viewed the organization's reaction to the crisis as being more trustworthy than did those who attributed high responsibility to the university ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.106$). The low-responsibility participants ($M = 4.54$, $SD = .888$) were more likely to have supportive behavior for the university than were the high-responsibility participants ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.201$). Based on these results, H5 was supported.

H6 proposed that participants in the mortification condition would have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than would those in the nonexistence condition. The multivariate results (Table 5.8) showed that the main effect of the crisis-response strategy was significant (Wilks $\Lambda = .897$, $F(6, 490) = 4.537$, $p < .05$). However, the univariate results indicate that the main effect was significant for trustworthiness ($F(3, 246) = 9.235$, $p < .025$) but not for supportive behavior ($F(3, 246) = 2.458$, $p = .063$).

As demonstrated in Table 5.10, Tukey HSD post hoc tests suggested that the mortification strategy ($M = 5.09$, $SD = .849$) was significantly more effective at increasing trustworthiness than were the other response strategies—the nonexistence strategy ($M = 4.29$, $SD = .995$), the distance strategy ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.086$), and the ingratiation strategy ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.093$). Potential supportive behaviors were also promoted most with the mortification strategy ($M = 4.71$, $SD = .900$), which was found to be significantly more effective than the nonexistence strategy ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.004$). Regarding both trustworthiness and supportive behavior, mortification appeared to be a more desirable and effective strategy than nonexistence. Therefore, H6 was supported.

Table 5.10
Tukey HSD Post Hoc Tests for Multiple Comparisons

Attitude toward the organization	Strategy	Strategy	Mean difference (I - J)	S.E.	p-value
Trustworthiness	Nonexistence (n=60)	Distance	-.020	.171	.999
		Ingratiation	-.009	.171	1.000
		Mortification	-.798*	.174	.000
	Distance (n=69)	Nonexistence	.020	.171	.999
		Ingratiation	.011	.165	1.000
		Mortification	-.778*	.168	.000
	Ingratiation (n=69)	Nonexistence	.009	.171	1.000
		Distance	-.011	.165	1.000
		Mortification	-.789*	.168	.000
	Mortification (n=64)	Nonexistence	.798*	.174	.000
		Distance	.778*	.168	.000
		Ingratiation	.789*	.168	.000
Supportive behavior	Nonexistence (n=60)	Distance	-.078	.185	.975
		Ingratiation	-.102	.185	.946
		Mortification	-.492*	.189	.047
	Distance (n=69)	Nonexistence	.078	.185	.975
		Ingratiation	-.024	.179	.999
		Mortification	-.414	.182	.108
	Ingratiation (n=69)	Nonexistence	.102	.185	.946
		Distance	.024	.179	.999
		Mortification	-.390	.182	.144
	Mortification (n=64)	Nonexistence	.492*	.189	.047
		Distance	.414	.182	.108
		Ingratiation	.390	.182	.144

** Sig. $p < .05$*

H7 stated that participants' attributions of crisis responsibility would improve or worsen participants' attitudes toward the organization depending on their relationships with the organization. As shown in Table 5.8, the two-way interaction between the relationship and crisis-responsibility was not significant (Wilks $\Lambda = .998$, $F(2, 245) = .291$, $p = .748$); thus, H7 was not supported. Additionally, inconsistent with expectations, there was no indication of a significant interaction effect between the relationship and the crisis-response strategy (Wilks $\Lambda = .989$, $F(6,$

490) = .471, p = .830) as well as between crisis-responsibility and the response strategy (Wilks Λ = .976, F(6, 490) = .978, p = .440). The results supported neither H8 nor H9; while the former predicted the type of strategy being used would improve or worsen participants' attitudes toward the organization based on their relationships with the organization, the latter posited that participants' attributions of crisis responsibility would affect their attitudes toward the organization according to the type of strategy being used. In addition to the non-significant two-way interactions, the three-way interaction among the independent variables was found to be not significant (Wilks Λ = .973, F(6, 490) = 1.114, p = .353).

Overall, the main effects of the relationship, crisis responsibility, and crisis-response strategy appeared to be significant, whereas none of the combined effects was significant. Given these results, the participants in the favorable relationship group who attributed low responsibility to the university had the most favorable attitudes toward the university when the mortification strategy was used (M = 5.42, SD = .691 for trustworthiness; M = 3.39, SD = .842 for supportive behavior). In contrast, the participants in the unfavorable relationship group who perceived the university as having high responsibility had the least favorable attitudes toward the university when receiving the nonexistence strategy (M = 3.39, SD = .842 for trustworthiness; M = 3.81, SD = 1.466 for supportive behavior) (See Table 5.11). Throughout the MANOVA and separate ANOVAs, the results also suggest that the perceived trustworthiness of the university in responding to the crisis contributed to the significant multivariate F-tests for the main effects.

Table 5.11
Means and Standard Deviations of Trustworthiness and Supportive Behavior Among Cell Groups

Attitude toward the organization	Relationship	Responsibility	Strategy	Mean	SD	N
Trustworthiness	Favorable	High	Nonexistence	4.43	.997	14
			Distance	4.20	1.223	19
			Ingratiation	4.07	1.128	15
			Mortification	4.92	.953	15
		Low	Nonexistence	4.60	1.004	15
			Distance	4.65	1.153	13
			Ingratiation	4.84	.987	19
			Mortification	5.42	.691	21
	Unfavorable	High	Nonexistence	3.39	.842	14
			Distance	4.10	1.030	26
			Ingratiation	3.78	1.121	16
			Mortification	4.88	.843	12
		Low	Nonexistence	4.65	.662	17
			Distance	4.61	.824	11
			Ingratiation	4.38	.948	19
			Mortification	4.98	.892	16
Supportive Behavior	Favorable	High	Nonexistence	4.52	1.115	14
			Distance	4.09	1.256	19
			Ingratiation	4.00	1.266	15
			Mortification	4.84	.899	15
		Low	Nonexistence	4.29	.589	15
			Distance	4.90	.927	13
			Ingratiation	4.67	1.072	19
			Mortification	4.83	.873	21
	Unfavorable	High	Nonexistence	3.81	1.466	14
			Distance	4.10	1.250	26
			Ingratiation	4.06	1.212	16
			Mortification	4.56	.833	12
		Low	Nonexistence	4.24	.654	17
			Distance	4.39	.757	11
			Ingratiation	4.44	.963	19
			Mortification	4.54	1.017	16

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Crisis communication can provide an opportunity for an organization's growth and development, but it can also create a threat to its survival (Seeger et al., 2003). Such communication suggests ways in which the public perceives a crisis and forms attitudes toward an organization's response to the crisis. More importantly, well-developed relationships with its various publics can play a significant role in communicating during a crisis (Kim & Lee, 2005). Despite growing attention to relationship building as a dominant paradigm of research and practice in public relations, little research has been conducted using organization-public relationship (OPR) variables in examining crisis communication.

In this regard, this study attempted to investigate how relationships between an organization and its publics affect the publics' perceptions of a crisis regarding organizational responsibility. Another aim of this study was to explore how the publics' attitudes toward an organization in crisis differ based on their relationships with the organization and their attributions of responsibility when the organization implements different response strategies to restore its image. An experimental design involving a fictitious crisis situation at the university was used, and univariate and multivariate analyses were conducted to examine the nine hypotheses. The following is an analysis of the research findings, including interpretations, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Research Findings and Interpretations

The two sets of hypotheses proposed in this study reflect the issues of responsibility attribution and attitude formation during a crisis. H1 to H3 examined the effects of relationship and causal perception on attributions of organizational responsibility for a crisis, while H4 to H9 examined the effects of relationship, perceived responsibility, and crisis-response strategy on attitudes toward an organization in crisis when different crisis-response strategies were used to alleviate a crisis situation.

Attributions of Crisis Responsibility

In terms of the causal attribution theory, H1 proposed that participants who perceived a crisis as having an internal cause would attribute more responsibility to the organization than would those who perceived the crisis as having an external origin. A two-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of the cause on perception of organizational crisis responsibility. The internal cause group appeared to view the university as having more responsibility than did the external cause group. This result confirms the findings of other studies, suggesting that the public determines the degree to which an organization is responsible for a crisis when individuals in the public make attributions of the cause of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). For example, Lee (2004) found that the participants in the internal cause condition perceived an organization as having more responsibility for a crisis than those in the external cause condition. Coombs and Holladay (2001) also reported a strong correlation between personal control and crisis responsibility.

Greater internal attribution of a crisis cause should lead to more crisis responsibility assigned to an organization (Lee, 2004). Further, publics' attribution of crisis responsibility to an organization increases the likelihood of reputational damage relating to the selection of crisis

response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2004). Considering the linkage from causal attribution to reputational damage, attributions that publics make about the cause of a crisis function as the baseline for the selection of crisis response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2004).

H2 stated that participants with a favorable relationship with an organization would attribute less crisis responsibility to the organization than would those with an unfavorable relationship. Inconsistent with this expectation, there was no statistical difference between the favorable and the unfavorable relationship groups in attributions of crisis responsibility to the university. This finding did not correspond to prior work on the impact of relationships during a crisis. For example, the findings from Coombs and Holladay's (2001) study indicate that relationship history shapes how publics evaluate a crisis and an organization in crisis. Despite having a small effect, an unfavorable relationship history or poor crisis history led publics to assign more crisis responsibility to the organization. By measuring perceived relationships with actual companies, Kim and Lee (2005) also found that participants with favorable relationships perceived a company as having less responsibility, evaluating the same crisis less severely than did those with hostile relationships with the company.

A plausible explanation for the results of this study is that a favorable relationship may increase the public's expectations for organizational performance (Coombs, 2000). Consequently, high expectations would lead to disappointment in an organization for its wrongful acts and negligence of crisis prevention, even if a wrongful act is unintentional or a crisis seems out of the realm of possibility. In other words, participants with a favorable relationship may tend to blame the organization for unsuccessfully handling potential sources of crisis and attribute responsibility to the organization, hoping that the organization will take actions to reduce the uncertainty of the situation and control problems related to the crisis.

Alternatively, another explanation can be put forward to interpret the small, nonsignificant difference between the favorable and unfavorable relationship groups. There may be something unique about the nature of higher education that leads internal and external publics to hold stricter standards for institutions of higher learning, especially in the wake of a negative event; consequently, the university could not take advantage of maintaining good relationships with key publics in regard to exemption of crisis responsibility. Even though a crisis is inevitable and can occur in both the public and private sectors (Coombs, 1999), institutions of higher education may be expected to take control of issues that are potential crises and even stand stable aside from allegations of wrongdoing.

It is also possible that regardless of their relationships with the university, publics more frequently have negative perceptions of organizational responsibility for a crisis when it is related to ethical matters (e.g., racial discrimination, misconduct of faculty members, and football recruiting scandals), as in the crisis case created for this study. Moreover, the high mean scores of crisis responsibility, which were above the average point (4) for both relationship groups, lend some support to this possible explanation. The participants in the favorable relationship group ($M = 5.29$) attributed as much responsibility to the organization as did those in the unfavorable relationship group ($M = 5.43$). These high mean scores of crisis responsibility for both relationship groups could also be related to the type of public sampled in this study. Relationships between the university and its internal publics, such as current students and alumni, are presumably akin to personal ownership, in which publics hold higher expectations and standards for organizational performance and conduct. A crisis is a violation of those expectations (Coombs, 2000), and thus, internal publics may attribute more responsibility for a

crisis to an organization than do external publics, regardless of their relationship history with an organization.

The nonsignificant main effect of the relationship could also be explained by the existence of an interaction between the relationship and causal attribution because it is possible that a significant disordinal interaction effect will cancel out the impact of the relationship on attribution of crisis responsibility regarding perceived internal cause and perceived external cause, respectively. H3 addressed this interaction effect, predicting that participants' perceptions of the cause of a crisis would lessen or intensify perceptions of crisis responsibility based on their relationships with the organization. However, the results provided no indication of an interaction between the level of the relationship and the perceived cause of the crisis. Thus, H3 was not supported. The results also suggest that regardless of their relationships with an organization, publics are likely to judge whether the organization should be blamed and take more responsibility for a crisis based on their perceptions of the cause of the crisis.

Attitudes Toward the Organization in Crisis

H4 stated that participants with a favorable relationship with an organization would have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than would those with an unfavorable relationship. The results of a three-way MANOVA showed a significant main effect of the relationship on participants' attitudes toward the organization regarding the organization's response to the crisis. Even though the relationship did not seem to influence the judgment of the crisis regarding organizational responsibility, it appeared to directly affect the attitude toward the organization in crisis. The results suggest that as compared to participants with an unfavorable relationship, those with a favorable relationship are more likely to have positive perceptions of the trustworthiness of the organization's internal sources regarding a crisis and tend to support

the organization's recovery from a critical situation and its move forward with little or no consequence. This result is consistent with Kim and Lee's (2005) study, which found that participants with favorable relationships had more trusting and accepting attitudes toward an organization's image restoration strategies than did those with hostile relationships.

Clearly, the organization-public relationship is one of the most important variables influencing the public's perceptions and behavioral intentions when an organization takes action to alleviate a crisis. Bruning and Ralston (2000) emphasize the influence of organization-public relationships on the public's perceptions, evaluations, and behavioral intentions, suggesting that these relationships are a fundamental factor in organizational functioning. More specifically, Marra (1992) argues that an organization maintaining strong and well-developed relationships with its key publics is less vulnerable to financial, emotional, or perceptual damage and is better able to deal with criticism against the organization during a crisis than is an organization with weak and poorly developed relationships with its publics. This means that building positive relationships prior to the onset of a crisis is essential for successful crisis management. Further, long-term organizational relationships with internal and external public members can play a more significant role in crisis management than traditional crisis planning does (Murphree & Rogers, 2004).

In addition to relationships, perceived crisis responsibility was also examined as a potential predictor of publics' attitudes toward an organization in crisis. H5 posited that participants who perceived an organization as having less responsibility for the crisis would have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than would those who perceived the organization as having more responsibility. As expected, the results indicated that crisis responsibility had a significant effect. Specifically, the univariate comparisons revealed a

significant main effect of crisis responsibility on trustworthiness, as well as a marginally significant effect on potential supportive behavior. In other words, the organization was more likely to be regarded as being trustworthy and to obtain publics' support for its healing activities when publics perceived an organization as having little responsibility for a crisis rather than when viewing it as having great responsibility.

These findings provide additional evidence of associations between organizational crisis responsibility and other variables relevant to a crisis situation. Previously, in Coombs and Holladay's (2001) study, crisis responsibility appeared to be an important link through which personal control influenced organizational reputation and potential supportive behavior. However, they found that potential supportive behavior, rather than by crisis responsibility, was predominantly influenced by organizational reputation.

H6 predicted that participants in the nonexistent condition would have a more unfavorable attitude toward the organization than would those in the mortification condition. As a result of a multivariate analysis, the mortification strategy appeared to be significantly more effective than the other three strategies. However, the results of univariate analyses showed that the type of crisis-response strategy did not significantly influence the participants' likelihood of enacting potential supportive behavior regarding the organization's recovery, whereas the use of mortification strategy generated a more favorable perception of the organization as being trustworthy. One explanation for these inconsistent results is that there may be other factors to consider when interpreting the results for intentions of supportive behaviors in comparison with those for the organization's trustworthiness. For instance, due to physical efforts required to perform supportive behaviors, it may be more difficult to induce behavioral intention than to elicit trusting attitudes toward an organization.

Even though the effect of the crisis-response strategy was significant only for trustworthiness, and not for potential supportive behavior, the findings reinforce the notion that mortification strategies can be most successful because they have the capability of repairing an organization's image and gaining forgiveness from the public (Englehardt et al., 2004). The type of crisis communication strategy may influence the public's understanding of a crisis and its perceptions of organizational crisis responsibility (Lee, 2004). It is plausible that the public's initial judgment of organizational crisis responsibility may change after people are exposed to an organization's response. An organization's attempt to deny responsibility for a crisis may evoke negative feelings and anger among publics, while its acceptance of crisis responsibility may be considered more honorable and help the organization gain public approval (Coombs, 2004; Englehardt et al., 2004; Lee, 2004). Among the four strategies manipulated in this study, mortification was the only strategy in which the university was held responsible for the negative event, and, indeed, it appeared the optimal choice.

Crisis responses involving acceptance of responsibility can generate sympathy and forgiveness (Weiner et al., 1991) and even promote stronger potential supportive behavior and more positive corporate image (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). Emphasizing the role of crisis response, Lee (2004) suggests "a possibility of looping/back and forth (causal attribution → judgment of crisis responsibility → organization's crisis response → judgment of crisis responsibility) pattern of perceivers' causal attribution processes" (p. 613). Since organizational crisis response can alter the public's perception of crisis responsibility, the appropriate choice of crisis response strategies is central to crisis management. Nonetheless, it is not always possible to emphasize only the positive aspects of mortification strategies. Just as a completely irresponsible action to avoid the public's criticism is scarcely beneficial for an organization's image

enhancement, it may not be a good decision for an organization to take full responsibility for a crisis without regarding the degree to which the organization is the cause of the crisis.

H7 and H8 addressed the interaction effects of the organization-public relationship with crisis responsibility and the type of crisis-response strategy, respectively, on publics' attitudes toward an organization in crisis. While H7 stated that participants' attributions of crisis responsibility would improve or worsen their attitudes toward the organization depending on their relationships with the organization, H8 proposed that the type of crisis-response strategy being used would improve or worsen participants' attitudes toward the organization based on their relationships with the organization. The results of the multivariate analysis indicated that neither of the presumed effects was statistically significant. According to Coombs (2000), favorable relationships and initial credibility are important factors to utilize to improve the effectiveness of an organization's words and actions taken to reduce a crisis. However, based on the findings of this study, it is plausible that relationships between an organization and its key publics do not exert influence differently based on crisis responsibility perceived by publics or the crisis communication strategy being used by an organization.

Regarding another possible interaction, H9 predicted that participants' attributions of crisis responsibility would improve or worsen their attitudes toward the organization according to the type of strategy being used. However, the results showed no indication of a significant interaction between crisis responsibility and the type of strategy. This finding is not in accord with Coombs' (1998) assertion that crisis responsibility functions as a basis for selecting an adequate crisis-response strategy that matches a crisis situation.

Noting the importance of perceived crisis responsibility, Coombs (1998) proposes an accommodative-defensive continuum that presents varying strategies as the level of crisis

responsibility intensifies. According to the continuum, more accommodative strategies should be employed as internal attributions of crisis responsibility to an organization increase. Still, it is not reasonable to assume that defensive strategies such as denial and attacking the accuser may be more persuasive and effective when publics attribute low responsibility to the organization. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this assumption can be supported by "the nonlinear nature of perceivers' causal attribution processes" (Lee, 2004, p. 613). Because publics may rely on an organization's response as a cue to whether the organization should take more responsibility for a crisis, potential matches between initial crisis responsibility and crisis response strategies often cannot be applied as theoretically supposed.

Regarding the type of organization, the negative event created for this study is always likely to bring about attributions of crisis responsibility regardless of the public's understanding of a crisis cause. Moreover, because people believe that educational institutions are obligated to maintain a high level of ethics and guide their students to follow a code of behavior, participants may not be willing to forgive an organization, even if little crisis responsibility is attributed to the organization.

In addition to nonsignificant two-way interactions, a three-way interaction among relationship, crisis responsibility, and crisis-response strategies was found to be nonsignificant. Overall, regarding the second set of hypotheses (H4 to H9), this study confirmed the unique effect of each independent variable (relationship, crisis responsibility, and type of crisis-response strategy) on attitudes toward the organization in crisis, but it did not provide evidence for significant two-way and three-way interactions among these predictor variables. Even though the presumed interaction effects were not significant, the findings underscore the importance of well-developed relationships in crisis communication, indicating the organization-public relationship,

independent of the other two factors, exerts its influence on trusting and supportive attitudes toward an organization among its key publics.

Implications

This study sought to shed more light on a relational approach to crisis communication, based on the assumption that managing beneficial relationships is critical to an organization's survival, as well as to its development in times of crisis (Coombs, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2005). The findings of this study provide important insight into some of the key factors that influence publics' attributions of crisis responsibility and contribute to forming their attitudes toward an organization's responses to the crisis, thereby possibly determining the success or failure of an organization's strategic communication to resolve a crisis situation.

First, in accord with the tenets of attribution theory, this study confirmed that causal perceptions publics make about a negative event can vary, and more importantly, those perceptions affect their attributions of responsibility to an accused organization in relation to the negative occurrence. Given the linkage between causal ascriptions and responsibility attributions, understanding how internal and external publics perceive the cause of a crisis should be the primary step in planning communication activities to mitigate a crisis. As the cause of a crisis is perceived to pertain more to an organization than to its external environment, more accommodative strategies should be undertaken to address a crisis, such as accepting responsibility and taking healing actions (Coombs, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2004).

Considering the fact that the level of relationship (favorable vs. unfavorable) between the university and the participants did not appear to significantly influence attributions of organizational responsibility, it is also concluded that publics make judgments of organizational responsibility for a crisis based on causal attributions without considering their relationships with

an organization prior to the crisis. These results imply that publics make a more objective and fairer judgment of organizational responsibility than is theoretically assumed, and thus, an organization may not benefit from positive relationships with its publics with respect to exemption from responsibility for a crisis. Alternatively, the lack of support for the effect of relationship on crisis responsibility could also mean that internal publics (e.g., students, alumni, faculty, and staff) hold higher standards of honesty and integrity for organizational conduct, as well as greater expectations for organizational performance and results, than do external publics (e.g., the media, the community, and the local government). The failure to meet those expectations and standards may lead publics to perceive an organization as having more responsibility than is presumed, thereby decreasing the strength of the relationship. This plausible rationale may be useful to public relations scholars in analyzing uncommon devotion that may exist in relationships between an organization and some publics (e.g., long-term employees, members of activist groups, members of volunteer organizations, and stakeholders of public institutions).

While inconsistent with Coombs and Holladay's (2001) findings that relationship history shapes people's perceptions of a crisis, these findings lend some support to the possibility that publics' assignments of crisis responsibility to an organization may result from a general perception about how an organization should have dealt with potential crisis issues, combined with the expectations based on their relationships with an organization. That is, favorable relationships with publics could sometimes be troublesome or problematic, because publics having a favorable relationship with an organization are more likely to have higher expectations for the organization's behaviors and more likely to hold the organization to a higher level of accountability for behavioral outcomes than are publics having an unfavorable relationship with

the organization (Coombs, 2000). Further, it is also possible that those relational expectations inflated by positive aspects of relationships may, in turn, result in disruption of relationships, as well as an assignment of crisis responsibility, since the degree to which expectations publics have for an organization are met determines the continuation of relationships between an organization and its publics (Ledingham, 2003). These possibilities provide a rationale for public relations researchers to further examine important variables that serve as opportunities and constraints for an organization in striving to eliminate the attribution of crisis responsibility.

The results of this study also point to the importance of utilizing effective crisis communication during a crisis situation, suggesting that the effective use of crisis-response strategies may lead publics to perceive an organization as being sincere and trustworthy and may elicit positive attitudes toward an organization and its messages responding to a crisis. Taking into account the significant effect of crisis responsibility, it is concluded that a crisis-response strategy implemented by an organization, in combination with perceived organizational crisis responsibility, may alleviate or escalate a crisis situation, having additive effects on publics' attitudes toward an organization and its response messages. However, the selection of an appropriate crisis response may even reframe publics' perceptions of organizational responsibility and shape their general comprehension of a crisis in favor of an accused organization by altering publics' initial understandings of negative issues related to a crisis. Thus, there may exist an opportunity for an organization to achieve a successful resolution of a crisis, regardless of the amount of responsibility assigned to the organization by strategically communicating with its key publics.

Finally, the most important implication of this study is the recognition of the significant role that the organization-public relationship plays in crisis management. Although

researchers have recently begun to investigate the impact of relationships with key publics on public relations' effectiveness, such relationship effects on the intended outcomes of crisis communication (e.g., trusting attitudes and supportive behaviors) have not yet been extensively examined. The results of this study suggest that well-managed relationships have the potential to reduce a negative impression of an organization in a crisis and to encourage trusting and supportive attitudes toward an organization. Consistent with Coombs and Holladay's (2001) study, these results imply that the organization-public relationship, independent of crisis responsibility, predicts perceptions of the organization in a crisis and potential supportive behavior. Moreover, the connection between the organization-public relationship and trusting and supportive attitudes found in this study also supports a relational model proposed by Ki and Hon (2007) in which perceptions of the organization-public relationships influence attitudes and behavioral intentions toward an organization among members of a key public.

Overall, the findings of this study provide important implications for public relations scholars and practitioners seeking to attain a more complete understanding of a crisis and to increase the effectiveness of crisis management efforts. Adding empirical evidence to the growing literature on relationship management, this study contributes to developing a theoretical framework for the application of a relational approach to the study of crisis communication. For the practice of public relations, this study reinforces the need for an organization to build and nurture favorable relationships with key publics as a preventive measure to reduce financial, emotional, and perceptual damage resulting from a crisis (Kim & Lee, 2005; Marra, 1992). By cultivating organizational relationships with various key publics prior to the onset of a crisis, public relations practitioners can not only enhance the effectiveness of crisis-response strategies during a crisis, but also improve their capability to manage a future crisis.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite important findings and implications, there are several limitations to this study that should be considered. First, despite being the most appropriate research method for this study, experimentation may limit the interpretations of the findings of this study. Unnatural conditions created in the experimental design may produce results that have little direct application to real-world settings, where participants are influenced by confounding variables (Shadish et al., 2002). Specifically, participants were forced to imagine how they would feel or react if a hypothetical crisis situation, posited in this study, happened at their university. This unnatural setting may have hindered the presumed causality from occurring. It is possible that, rather than the manipulation of an organization's response messages, participants' imaginary processes may have resulted in different interpretations of scenario descriptions, even though every participant received the same form of stimuli.

Second, this study did not consider all possible variables that may play a significant role in mitigating or intensifying a crisis situation. For example, crisis history, along with relationship history, appeared to be a predictor of organization reputation and potential supportive behavior in Coombs and Holladay's (2001) study. The severity of crisis could also evoke negative perceptions and emotional reactions to an organization in a crisis (Lee, 2004). Coombs (1995) suggests four factors that may influence publics' causal attributions and the selection of crisis-response strategies: crisis type, veracity of evidence, damage, and performance history. In order to enhance internal validity and external validity, further research could examine other key factors, such as crisis history, organizational reputation, and prior credibility, that come into play in determining the success or failure of crisis communication in reality.

The third limitation of the study pertains to sampling. This study used only a sample of students recruited from communication courses. The sampled students may not be representative

of the student population as well as other key publics, such as the faculty, the media, and the community. Relationships between the university and students are assumed to be close to personal ownership, in which students may be more likely to share common interests and goals with the university than are other key publics. This may lead to different results for attribution of responsibility and formation of supportive attitudes toward an organization. Similarly, the selection of an organization poses a limitation to the application of this study's findings to organizational crises in general. The university, an organization selected for the experiment, may have a unique characteristic that leads to biased results. For instance, participants may have assigned crisis responsibility to the university, regardless of their relationships with the university, because they had higher expectations and standards for an institution of higher education than for other organizations regarding preparations of potential crises. Therefore, it may be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to other organizations and their internal and external publics.

This study also used only one type of crisis. Considering the assumption that crisis responsibility can vary according to the type of crisis (Coombs, 1998), the manipulation of different crisis types could provide more insight for understanding the nature and scope of crises and developing effective crisis communication plans. Future research that considers sampling from various key publics or multiple replications across different crisis cases would strengthen the findings from this study and possibly reconfirm the important implications for public relations research and practice.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the research titled "the organization-public relationship and crisis communication," which is conducted by Hyojung Park, a master's student in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Reber (542-3178). The purpose of the research is to examine the effect of the organization-public relationship on the public's perception of crisis and the public's attitude toward crisis response strategies.

I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information related to me returned to me, removed from the research record, or destroyed. Participation or non-participation in the research will have no impact on my class standing.

No discomforts, stresses or risks are expected in participating in this study. I will earn extra credits for my participation. This study may provide no direct benefit to me, but it may have an important implication for universities that a good relationship with students plays much of a role in managing crisis.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to complete a questionnaire about relationships in the first stage. One week after the first session, I will be invited to take part in the second part of the research. I will be asked to read a fictitious crisis case and complete a questionnaire about crisis communication. My participation will last approximately 10-15 minutes for each stage.

I understand that my participation is confidential. I will be assigned an identifying number and this number will be used on all of the questionnaires I fill out. This consent form will be stored separately from the questionnaire.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached at: hyojung@uga.edu or (706) 614-0296.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this study and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Park, Hyojung

Name of Researcher Signature Date

Telephone: 706-614-0296

Email: hyojung@uga.edu

Name of Participant Signature Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address: IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE I: BACKGROUND INSTRUMENT

Section I

The following items ask about how you feel about your university and the relationship your university has with the public. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
1. My university treats people like me fairly and justly.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
2. Whenever my university makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
3. My university can be relied on to keep its promises.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
4. I believe that my university takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
5. I feel very confident about my university's standing as a university.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
6. My university has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
7. My university and people like me are attentive to what each other say.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
8. My university believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
9. In dealing with people like me, my university has a tendency to throw its weight around.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
10. My university really listens to what people like me have to say.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7

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Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
11. I feel that my university is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I can see that my university wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. There is a long-lasting bond between my university and people like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with my university more.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I am happy with my university.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Both my university and people like me benefit from the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Most people like me are happy in their interactions with my university.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship my university has established with people like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. My university does not especially enjoy giving others aid.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. My university is very concerned about the welfare of people like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I feel that my university takes advantage of people who are vulnerable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I think that my university succeeds by stepping on people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
23. Whenever my university gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Even though people like me have had a relationship with my university for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favor.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. My university will compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. My university takes care of people who are likely to reward it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section II

This demographic information is for descriptive purpose only.

27. What is your sex?

1) Male 2) Female

28. How old are you? _____ years old

29. What is your class standing?

1) First year 2) Second year 3) Third year

4) Fourth year 5) Fifth year 6) Graduate student

30. How long have you been attending your university?

1) 1 year 2) 2 years 3) 3 years

4) 4 years 5) 5 years 6) more than 5 years

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31. How do you describe yourself?

1) American Indian or Alaska native
2) African American
3) Asian
4) Caucasian
5) Hispanic or Latino
6) Other

32. Please provide **the LAST FOUR digits of your phone number**. It will be used as **your ID** in the second session of this study.

_____

33. Please indicate your availability next week to participate in the second part of the study. Based on the information you give below, the next session will be individually arranged.

*** Please put a check mark next to **ALL the hours you are available** and provide **your e-mail address**.

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

	Tue 3/00	Wed 3/00	Thu 3/00	Fri 3/00
10:00 – 10:30 a.m.				
10:30 – 11:00 a.m.				
11:00 – 11:30 a.m.				
11:30 – 12:00 p.m.				
12:00 – 12:30 p.m.				
12:30 – 1:00 p.m.				
1:00 – 1:30 p.m.				
1:30 – 2:00 p.m.				
2:00 – 2:30 p.m.				
2:30 – 3:00 p.m.				
3:00 – 3:30 p.m.				
3:30 – 4:00 p.m.				
4:00 – 4:30 p.m.				
4:30 – 5:00 p.m.				
5:00 – 5:30 p.m.				
5:30 – 6:00 p.m.				

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE II: SCENARIO DESCRIPTIONS AND MEASURES

Section I

1. You are going to read a story about a fictitious crisis case that occurred in the athletic department of University of Z. During the course of your reading about this case, please try and imagine that it happened at your university. Try to imagine how you would feel and react if it happened at your university.

While this case is only illustrative, it is based on news coverage of incidents at another university's athletic program.

The University Z football program is currently under fire as a result of a civil lawsuit against the university charging the school with fostering a hostile environment for women that set the stage for the rapes.

UZ's football program and recruiting practices have been implicated for developing a culture of athletic privilege and recruiting practices that routinely stepped outside legal bounds by using alcohol and sex as enticement for young recruits.

The inception of the UZ' scandal was an off-campus party in December, for football recruits. Two women claim they were raped during or after the event. Former UZ student Mary A filed a civil suit in July, against the university, alleging she was gang-raped by several UZ football players and recruits during and after a December party. Another woman joined the suit later in the year.

The issue got more public attention when a deposition in the civil case by District Attorney was released. She accused the UZ football program of using sex and alcohol – including prostitutes, sex parties and visits to strip clubs – to recruit high school football players.

District Attorney stated that UZ athletic officials knew about, but chose to ignore, the practice of holding "sex parties" for potential recruits and players because the school would lose its "competitive edge" in recruiting against other big football schools. DA also said every player and recruit who attended the party played a role in the assault because of the atmosphere created by the party. "To some degree, they are all responsible for the rape, even if they didn't have sex," she said.

2. The following items are about the causes of the event you've just read. Before you answer the questions below, try to imagine how you would feel and react if this event happened at your university. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neutral,
5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

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	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
If it happened at my university,							
1. The cause(s) of the crisis is something that reflects an attitude of my university.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The cause(s) of the crisis is something inside of my university.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The cause(s) of the crisis is something about my university.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The cause(s) of the crisis is something manageable by my university.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. The cause(s) of the crisis is something my university can regulate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. The cause(s) of the crisis is something over which my university has power.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. The cause(s) of the crisis is something over which others have control.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. The cause(s) of the crisis is something under the power of other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. The cause(s) of the crisis is something other people can regulate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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3. The following items ask about organizational responsibility. Before you answer the questions below, try to imagine what you would feel about the university's responsibility for the event if this event happened at your university.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neutral,
5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
If it happened at my university,							
10. My university should be blamed for the crisis.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
11. My university should bear responsibility for the crisis.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7

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Section II

1. You are going to read one of the university's responses to the event you've previously read. During the course of your reading about this response, please try and imagine that it happened at your university.

(A)

The University Z strongly denied the charges in a press conference that featured the Athletic Director and head football coach. Both strongly argued against District Attorney's allegations that the school used sex and alcohol to attract recruits.

The head coach read from a prepared statement emphasizing that allegations against him and his coaching staff that question his integrity and practices are false. Calling DA's allegations "wrong, inaccurate and false," he said, "Neither myself nor any of my coaches have ever encouraged or condoned sex as part of the recruiting process, period."

The Athletic Director also read from a statement denying the allegations and said he was "deeply and personally offended" by the allegations against the football department. "The unfounded allegations that have been made should be an insult to educated people," he said.

According to Athletic Director and head football coach, all recruits – as well as their parents and high school coaches – must read and sign a document that outlines standards a visiting student-athlete must follow while on an official visit. The letter is also signed by the student host, whose job is to escort the recruit around the town in an attempt to give him a better idea of college life.

To discredit District Attorney, the university already has hired a high-profile former prosecutor, John B. He wrote a report critical of DA's handling of the alleged rape case, in which no sexual assault charges were filed. "DA has made a number of 'extra-judicial' statements to the media that improperly implied that UZ football players were guilty of rape, a charge which was never filed and which had no basis for being filed against any UZ football player," he said.

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2. Before you answer the questions below, try to imagine how you would feel if your university responded to the recruiting scandal like what you just read. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Neutral,
5=Somewhat agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
Based on this response, I believe							
12. My university was basically honest.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
13. I would do trust my university to tell the truth about the incident.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
14. I would lose my confidence in my university.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
15. My university would be capable of dealing with the crisis.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
16. I would say nice things about my university to other people.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
17. I would sign a petition in support of some action that my university was trying to take.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7
18. I would call or e-mail a government official in support of some action that my university was trying to take.	___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5	___ 6	___ 7

** Please provide **the LAST FOUR digits of your phone number**. It will be used for coding purposes only.

_____

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX D

STIMULI: CRISIS-RESPONSE STRATEGIES

1. Nonexistence Strategy

(A)

The University Z strongly denied the charges in a press conference that featured Athletic Director and head football coach. Both strongly argued against District Attorney's allegations that the school used sex and alcohol to attract recruits.

The head coach read from a prepared statement emphasizing that allegations against him and his coaching staff that question his integrity and practices are false. Calling DA's allegations "wrong, inaccurate and false," he said, "Neither myself nor any of my coaches have ever encouraged or condoned sex as part of the recruiting process, period."

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According to Athletic Director and head football coach, all recruits – as well as their parents and high school coaches – must read and sign a document that outlines standards a visiting student-athlete must follow while on an official visit. The letter is also signed by the student host, whose job is to escort the recruit around the town in an attempt to give him a better idea of college life.

To discredit District Attorney, the university already has hired a high-profile former prosecutor, John B. He wrote a report critical of DA's handling of the alleged rape case, in which no sexual assault charges were filed. "DA has made a number of 'extra-judicial' statements to the media that improperly implied that UZ football players were guilty of rape, a charge which was never filed and which had no basis for being filed against any UZ football player," he said.

2. Distance Strategy

(B)

The University Z head football coach and team linebacker Tom C, who was the recruit's host, spoke to the media about UZ's football program recruiting scandal. The head coach suspended Tom for next year's season opener against University A for taking some of the recruits to an 18-and-over strip club, which he said was Tom's only violation as a recruit host.

In a statement to the media, the head coach said that alcohol and sex are a part of the college cultural experience, but not part of recruiting. "I really do believe that being accused of providing sex and alcohol to recruits is a despicable accusation for a coach," he said.

Two UZ football players – Jeremy A and Matthew B – also said that alcohol and the promise of sex were not offered to recruits under their care or to them when they were recruited.

Both of them said they were not offered alcohol at all during their recruiting visits. Rather, Matthew stated that the structure of the UZ program has helped him deal with his alcohol problem.

Jeremy said he wasn't recruited, but has plenty of experience with the program. "I have hosted a recruit and I can tell you it is very structured," he said, noting that he took the recruit to meet his own family and then to his apartment.

As a recruit's host, Jeremy also took the recruit to a gathering. "I believe there was most likely alcohol there because the guys who were there were over 21," he said. "I did not offer alcohol to my recruit because that is just flat against the rules." Both Jeremy and Matthew emphasized that older players are like big brothers who the younger players want to impress. They said it hurts to let them down.

3. Ingratiation Strategy

(C)

The University Z is ranked 15th among the top public universities for the eighth consecutive year, according to the 2007 edition of *U.S. News & World Report's* "Best College" guide.

UZ President said, "Given the legal challenges stemming from UZ's alleged football culture, the fact that UZ remains in the top 15 is a strong testament to the quality and efforts of our faculty, staff and students. I am grateful for their efforts and pleased that UZ continues to be counted among America's very best."

It is not a hard task at all to find things about UZ to be proud of, according to UZ spokesperson. "It's part of our ongoing program of bringing attention to the wonderful things that our students, faculty and staff are doing," he said. "This effort is nothing especially new."

In fact, all kinds of good things are going at UZ in the shadow of the university's now-infamous football program recruiting scandal. According to its spokesperson, despite the unfavorable publicity about UZ's football program, parents and prospective students across the country are not focusing on the football scandal. Instead, parents want to know about the quality of education for their children, he said.

"While we are trying to settle the ongoing issues with our football program soon, we continue to improve academic quality and broad access in all that we do. I believe that this effort is paying off for our people with institutions and programs of acknowledged excellence," he stated.

Despite the decline, the university expects to meet its admission goals for this year.

4. Mortification Strategy

(D)

University Z President held a press conference regarding the UZ football recruiting scandal. He expressed regret that UZ was not proactive in dealing with concerns and warnings about sexual misconduct in its football program.

He said that UZ officials have made every effort and taken every action to settle sexual assault issues, while protecting the privacy of victims. He also said that he is searching for local and national experts to get counsel on forming an independent investigation to examine the claims that UZ's football program used sex and alcohol to entice recruits at the off-campus party.

UZ President and Athletic Director jointly announced that they would impose on the athletic department rules to make sure that recruiting and other practices within the department are above-board. Specifically, they claimed that the recruits would no longer be left to the care of football players without supervision. They also enforced a strict 11:00 p.m. curfew on visiting recruits.

UZ President emphasized that the integrity and reputation of UZ are more important than a "competitive advantage" in recruiting. "We will not tolerate sexual harassment or exploitation in our athletic department or anywhere in the university," he said. "We have determined to have a high level of oversight and accountability in our football program and athletic department."

Both UZ President and Athletic Director demonstrated their willingness to find out what actually happened at the off-campus party and see what they could improve in UZ's recruiting practices. "We definitely want to be cooperative and show openness and concerns," UZ President said at the end of the conference.

APPENDIX E

E-MAIL INVITATIONS TO A FOLLOW-UP EXPERIMENTAL SESSION

1. Invitation E-mail

Dear Participating Students:

Hi. I'm Hyojung Park, the second year master's student who came to [Class Name] last Wednesday to collect the data for my thesis research. That had been the first stage of my data collection. If you remember, I also asked you to take part in the second portion of the study a week later.

This is my email invitation asking you to participate in a follow-up session. Based on the information about your availability that you gave me, I arranged a follow-up session that would work best for you. It will take only 10 to 15 minutes. The time and location of the session are as follows:

* When: [Assigned Date and Time]
* Where: Journalism Room [Number]

As the second part of my experimental research, I am examining attitudes in reference to the university's crisis-response strategies. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. However, if you come to the second session and complete your participation, you will receive extra credits in [Course Number].

It is only with your help that this research can be successful. I would greatly appreciate your participation in my research.

Thank you.
Hyojung

2. E-mail Reminder

Dear Participating Students:

This is a reminder that tomorrow is the day that I asked you to take part in the second session of my research. Please come, and help me to complete this study. I would greatly appreciate your assistance with my research. The time and location of this follow-up session are as follows:

* When: [Assigned Time] tomorrow
* Where: [Building and Room Number]

I'm looking forward to seeing you there tomorrow. Thank you very much!
Hyojung