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The Role of Culture in Image Restoration: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Strategies Used by John Edwards and Dominique Strauss-Khan

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JOHN EDWARDS AND DOMINIQUE STRAUSS-KHAN

By

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Image has become a commodity, an essential asset both to individuals and

organizations. When image is threatened, we are compelled to do repair work to help us

save face. In the 1990s, William Benoit developed an encompassing theory of image

restoration, guiding us through the different options available to organizations and

individuals involved in a crisis. However, the study of image restoration has traditionally

remained highly ethnocentric, focused on Western culture and assuming that individuals

and organizations respond to crises in similar ways, regardless of the particular aspects of

the culture to which they belong. This study applies Hofstede's model of cultural

differences to Benoit's theory of image restoration. Specifically, it analyzes the examples

of two politicians involved in sexual scandals: John Edwards, from the United States, and

Dominique Strauss-Khan, from France. It concludes that cultural context is extremely

important in the study of image restoration and that cultural and media variables play an

important role in the effectiveness of image repair strategies.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Individuals as well as organizations have an image or reputation they need to preserve, as it represents what they want to be and how they want to be perceived. "Image is the perception of a person (or group, or organization) held by others" (Benoit & Brinson, 1999, p. 145). That image is forged not only by an individual's actions, including communication, but also by external circumstances and the actions and communications of others. Image "is a valuable commodity" (Benoit, 1995, p. vii) that is crucial to success and made even more valuable today in an expanding media environment in which reputations can be undone in a matter of hours, sometimes only minutes.

When image or reputation is threatened by a crisis or undesirable event, one is compelled to respond with actions to restore reputation. As Goffman (1971) explains, "when a face has been threatened, face-work must be done" (p. 27). "Face-work" refers to the measures a person or organization is likely to adopt to save reputation and carry on with business. When an individual or corporation is at fault, either will feel obliged to offer some excuse or justification of behavior. Rooted in the study of *apologia* or "speech of self-defense" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 273), Benoit's theory of image restoration aims to develop a comprehensive and integrated theory of the excuses and apologies individuals and corporations resort to when their image is threatened.

The study of apologia has primarily focused on individuals accused of wrongdoing. However, as Hearit (2006) points out, "in recent times organizations have become the source of more and more apologiae" (p. 13). Since Benoit first developed his theory of

image restoration in the 1990s, virtually every major scandal affecting either a public figure or an organization has been analyzed from the point of view of image restoration, the strategies used dissected and the effectiveness of efforts evaluated. With a few exceptions (García, 2011; Haruta & Kallahan, 2003; Taylor, 2000; Wertz & Kim, 2010), the literature is missing cross-cultural analyses that establish a comparison between the way a crisis was handled by individuals or organizations from different cultural backgrounds, and how culture influenced those responses. Image restoration analysis has remained highly ethnocentric and based on Western culture (Haruta & Kallahan, 2003), assuming that strategies are universal and should work in every country, regardless of cultural differences. However, communication and culture are highly dependent on one another, and this relationship cannot be ignored. As early as 1959, Edward Hall championed the idea that "culture is communication and communication is culture" (p. 169), and Gudykunst (1997) agreed that "communication and culture reciprocally influence each other" (p. 327). Most analyses, however, study communication "in a cultural vacuum" (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 327).

Media systems also are intrinsic to and reflective of culture (García, 2011). As McCombs and Shaw stated in their 1972 study of the agenda-setting function of the mass media, the media have the power to shape public opinion, particularly during political elections, and to influence perceptions. Media treatment of political scandals differs among countries. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004) in their classification of media systems, the United States and France have followed separate models. The media developed in the United States independently from state intervention, which encouraged "the strong development of techniques of investigative reporting and the strong emphasis

on scandal that have been legendary since Watergate" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 233).

According to Splichal and Garrison (2003), coverage of the Gary Hart affair in 1987

changed the rules of the game in regards to the media's respect for the private lives of

their public figures. Journalists have the responsibility of acting as the watchdogs of their

leaders, acting in practice as the fourth estate of power. Mediterranean cultures, on the

other hand, have traditionally been much more forgiving when it comes to politicians'

peccadilloes, which are considered part of their private realm and not a matter of public

concern. Unlike their U.S. counterparts, French journalists have traditionally maintained

a relationship of compliance with their political leaders, which has resulted in deference

toward everything that relates to their private lives. Therefore, the sexual misconduct of

government officials has traditionally been kept secret and hidden from the public.

Whereas much of the literature on image restoration has focused on the strategies

used by U.S. politicians (Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Denton & Holloway, 2003; Len-Ríos &

Benoit, 2004; Sheldon & Sallot, 2009; Simons, 2000), there is a research void in the area

of image restoration efforts used by politicians from different cultural backgrounds, with

the exception of García (2011), who established a comparison between strategies used by

Presidents Bill Clinton and Silvio Berlusconi to study the role cultural, political and

media variables played in their respective image restoration efforts.

This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how cultural differences may affect crisis

communication. It will do so by examining the cases of politicians from different

countries who are caught in scandal, with emphasis on the role of culture in crisis

management and on the need to take cultural differences into account when devising

appropriate communication strategies, as well as the internal peculiarities of the media

system in each country. Similar to García (2011), two political leaders involved in sex-related scandals have been chosen for study: former U.S. Senator John Edwards and former French minister and head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Dominique Strauss-Khan (DSK). Each held similar positions at the time of the scandals, Edwards competing for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, DSK preparing his candidacy for the 2012 French Socialist Party presidential nomination to run against President Nicolas Sarkozy. After facing serious allegations that would eventually destroy their presidential aspirations and reputations, both engaged in image restoration efforts in which they attempted to justify their conduct and asked for forgiveness.

This study seeks to determine whether culture played a significant role in the strategic choices made by Edwards and DSK, and to what extent cultural differences marked the effectiveness, or failure, of those strategies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature on image repair and restoration has been growing since the 1990s, when William Benoit published his theory of image restoration, which represents the first comprehensive attempt to integrate early approaches in the areas of rhetoric and apologia. Since then, public discourse in the wake of a politician, celebrity or corporation misstep increasingly has been analyzed to uncover the communication strategies used by the person or organization.

Image or reputation is defined as "the perception of a person (or group, or organization) held by the audience, shaped by the words and actions of that person, as well as by the discourse and behavior of other relevant actors" (Benoit, 1997b, p. 251). Crises are events that threaten to damage the reputation of an organization or public figure and demand an explanation of behavior (Coombs, 1999).

Benoit (1995, 1997a, 2000) argued that the early approaches to image restoration were largely independent from one another and failed to create an encompassing, comprehensive theory. He also saw the analyses as descriptive rather than prescriptive, limited to "identifying options rather than making recommendations concerning which options to use" (Benoit, 1995, p. 9). Thus, Benoit articulated a general theory and outlined strategies to mitigate harm induced by a crisis. He did so by integrating early rhetorical approaches to image restoration, i.e., Rosenfield's analog analysis (1968), Burke's theory of dramatism (1968), Ware and Linkugel's theory of apologia (1973) and Ryan's theory of *kategoria* and apologia (1982), along with attempts to develop typologies of accounts (Goffman, 1971; Schlenker, 1980; Schonbach, 1980; Scott &

Lyman, 1968; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). "Accounts" are defined as "statements made to explain untoward behavior and bridge the gap between actions and expectations" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 46).

The following considers the literature from early approaches to the present with emphasis on political leaders rather than organizations.

Early Efforts

Dramatism and apologia. Early inquiries into image restoration focused on political speeches by figures involved in controversy. Rosenfield's (1968) analysis of two speeches that sought to counter damaging accusations, one by Richard Nixon and one by Harry Truman, represents the first attempt to provide a theoretical basis to image restoration discourse. Rosenfield established an analogy between the speeches so that "each address serves as a reference standard for the other" (p. 435). Both speeches follow the same structure: exposition of the facts, attacks on the opponent, presentation of data and recycling of arguments from previous speeches.

Burke's theory of dramatism (1968) revolves on the concept of guilt, a negative feeling experienced when one deviates from established norms of good behavior. Burke identified two ways of purging guilt and restoring one's reputation: victimage, or shifting the blame, and mortification, or admitting fault and asking for forgiveness.

Rosenfield and Burke's theories were soon replaced by Ware and Linkugel's study of apologia, "the speech of self-defense" (1973, p. 273). Their analysis of Edward "Ted" Kennedy's "Chappaquiddick" image repair discourse is considered a classic in the field. They identified four strategies to repair image: *denial* implies rejection of responsibility; *bolstering* tries to present the speaker in a favorable light; *differentiation* separates the

facts from the larger context with which the audience associates the event; and

transcendence, the opposite of differentiation, as it identifies the event as part of some

larger, positive context with which the audience does not necessarily associate the event.

Ryan (1982) found that one's defense, or apologia, should be carefully chosen based

on the nature of the attack, or *kategoria*. "The apology should be discussed in terms of

the apologist's motivation to respond to the accusation, his selection of the issues […]

and the nature of the supporting materials for the apology" (p. 254). Ryan considers

accusation and apology as a "speech set" (p. 256) and recommends establishing an

analogy between both types of speeches. He illustrated his approach by examining the

controversies between Pope Leo X and Martin Luther (1982) and between U.K.'s prime

minister Stanley Baldwin and King Edward VIII (1984), which he later expanded with

other cases of individuals and corporations.

Taxonomies of accounts. To develop his own typology of image restoration

strategies, Benoit also elaborated on the work of authors who had advanced taxonomies

of accounts. In their study of delinquent behavior, Sykes and Matza (1957) identified five

"techniques of neutralization" (p. 667), or justifications of deviant behavior that

delinquents learn to use to minimize the perverse nature of their acts: *denial of*

responsibility; *denial of injury*, which claims that no harm was caused and no one was

hurt; *denial of the victim*, which suggests that the victim deserved what happened and the

crime is redefined as a form of "retaliation or punishment" (p. 668); *condemnation of the*

condemners, which entails a shift in the focus of attention from the crime to the motives

of the attackers; and *appeal to higher loyalties*, "sacrificing the demands of the larger

society for the demands of the smaller social groups to which the delinquent belongs" (p. 669).

Scott and Lyman (1968), influenced by Sykes and Matza, drafted a typology of accounts that could apply to the general population. In their study of the sociology of talk, which they consider "the fundamental material of human relations" (p. 46), they made a distinction between excuses, "accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong or inappropriate but denies full responsibility" (p. 47), and justifications, "accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it" (p. 47). Subsequently, they identified four types of excuses: *accidents* occur when external factors influence behavior; *defeasibility* is explained in terms of lack of information, which would include lack of intent or "failure to foresee the consequences" (p. 48); *biological factors* that drive deviant behavior; and *scapegoating*, which explains one's behavior as a response to someone else's actions. They appeal to Sykes and Matza's (1957) "techniques of neutralization" as valid forms of justification, although they admit their wider application to the general population "has yet to be explored" (p. 51). To Sykes and Matza's original techniques, they added two sorts of justification: a *sad tale* (p. 52), which justifies the actor's current behavior by relating it to something bad that has occurred in the past; and *self-fulfillment*.

For Goffman (1971), remedial work serves to transform "what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable" (p. 109). This can be achieved by three devices used in conversation: accounts, apologies and requests. He catalogued five possible accounts: a *traverse* or *joinder* (p. 109) is issued to deny the act or, if the act is reckoned, to deny responsibility in it; *conceding* the wrongdoing but *relabeling* the act as

not offensive; *admitting* the act occurred and the actor committed it, but arguing the actor was *unable to anticipate* the outcome of his actions; claiming *lack of responsibility*; alleging *lack of attention* when performing the act or *lack of information* about its potential consequences. In turn, apologies have five elements: expression of *embarrassment and regret*, expression of *sympathy*, *repudiation* of the act, *promise to amend* ways in the future, and "performance of *penance* and the volunteering of *restitution*" (p. 113). Requests, unlike accounts and apologies, typically occur before the event and consist of "asking license of a potentially offended person to engage in what could be considered a violation of his rights" (p. 114). Thus, requests would not be remedial but supportive work.

Based on accounts used by individuals who were asked to imagine themselves in a failure event, Schonbach (1980) expanded Scott and Lyman's taxonomy of excuses and justifications to include two new categories: *concessions*, which may include conceding guilt, conveying regret and offering compensation; and *refusals*, which comprise denial, blaming others and attacking the accuser (pp. 196-197).

Similarly, Schlenker, in a study on impression management, (1980) identified three forms of accounts: *defenses of innocence* or denial of responsibility; *excuses*, which are attempts to minimize responsibility; and *justifications*, which aim to mitigate the negative nature of the acts (p. 137).

Next, Tedeschi and Reiss (1981) offered another revision of Scott and Lyman's taxonomy, focusing solely on excuses and justifications, and adding some new categories of behavior explanation: *meta-accounts*, "attempts to avoid explaining or justifying behavior" (p. 293); *disclaimers*, "prospective excuses or justifications" (p. 295) because

they are made prior to the offensive event; *apologies* and *blame*, which involves an evaluation of the person's "moral worth" (p. 300).

Benoit's Integrated Approach

Benoit (1995) sorted the literature into two groups: excuses and justifications (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981) and denial, refusals and claims of innocence (Goffman, 1971; Schlenker, 1980; and Schonbach, 1980) and apologies (Goffman, 1971; Schonbach, 1980).

Using these pioneer studies, Benoit developed a "general theory" (1995, p. viii) of image restoration. His integrated approach is now considered the dominant paradigm, particularly as it affects corporations and public figures. It is also considered the most comprehensive theory of image restoration because it synthesizes the literature in the fields of rhetoric and apologia, providing the full spectrum of options available to repair a tarnished image and recommendations on which work best depending on the situation (Hearit, 2006).

Benoit (1995) says that two components must be present in an attack on the image of an individual or an organization: The accused is held responsible for an action, and the action is considered offensive. He grounds his theory of image restoration in two premises: (1) Communication is a "goal-directed activity" (p. 63), and (2) One of the key goals of communication is to maintain a favorable image. Benoit's assumption that individuals choose messages according to the goal they are trying to achieve traces back to Aristotle's rhetorical tradition, which assumed different oratorical genres depending on the speaker's goals, the ultimate goal being to give a positive impression. Reputation is threatened when an individual or organization is held responsible for an act that is

considered offensive (Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004). To restore image, one feels compelled to take immediate action. Benoit's theory of image restoration is therefore based on one particular goal: "restoring or protecting one's reputation" (Benoit, 1995, p. 71).

Benoit therefore designed a typology that consists of five major strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action and mortification or apology. *Denial* means the accused person or organization denies all charges of wrongdoing, either denying the act occurred or denying responsibility. When the public believes the person is telling the truth, denial is actually the most effective strategy because it exonerates the accused of any culpability (Benoit, 1997a); perceptions are more important than reality, so if the audience thinks that the person was not at fault, image is most probably preserved. "The key point is not whether in fact the actor caused the damage, but whether the relevant audience believes the actor to be the source of the reprehensible act" (Benoit, 2000, p. 40). Image is in the eye of the beholder and influenced by various factors. However, Benoit (1997a) warns that to deny the truth usually ends up being uncovered, further damaging image.

The next strategy, *evasion of responsibility*, can be achieved in several ways. The first is what Benoit (1995) calls "provocation" (p. 76). If the alleged action is in response to an earlier action, the one who provoked the response may be held responsible for it. The second approach is "defeasibility" (Benoit, 1995, p. 76), or lack of information. If the person succeeds in giving the impression he was lacking information or not in full control of the situation, perceived responsibility is minimized. A third way is to produce an excuse based on an accident or on circumstances beyond the person's control. A final

method is to justify the action by saying it was done with "good intentions" (Benoit, 1995).

Reducing the offensiveness of the event is achieved through several tactics to shift attention away from the act, as well as put the accused in a favorable light. Through "bolstering," the actor manages to create a more positive impression by highlighting good deeds of the past or positive qualities he possesses (Benoit, 1995, p. 77). When the accused manages to minimize the negative feelings associated with the action, the offensiveness of the event is diminished. A third tactic is what Benoit (1995) calls "differentiation" (p. 77), comparing the act with other, more offensive acts. Thus, the wrongful action is perceived less negatively in comparison. Another tactic is "transcendence" (Benoit, 1995, p. 77), placing the action in a broader, more positive context. Attacking the accuser may also work if the one accused can reduce the credibility of the accusations, also diverting attention away from the original accusation (Benoit, 1995). A final tactic to minimize the offensiveness of the event is by offering some kind of compensation. Benoit (1995) warns that this sort of remuneration functions as a "bribe" (p. 79) but one that, if accepted by the victim, may be enough to restore the image of the accused.

Corrective action means the accused person or organization pledges to take preemptive action to avoid recurrence of the problem. An individual will most likely promise to change his way of life. An organization will announce the introduction of measures to help correct the problem (Benoit, 1995).

Mortification means the accused accepts full responsibility and apologizes. Benoit (1995) recommends coupling this strategy with plans to correct the problem. When a

person or organization is guilty, Benoit recommends admitting it from the beginning and asking for forgiveness. If the audience perceives the apology as sincere, it may be more ready to forgive, and image will be more easily restored. However, most people are reluctant to resort to mortification, and it may be even more difficult for politicians "because the stakes are higher" (Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004, p. 98). "Politicians are presumably loath to risk creating the impression that they made a mistake: constituents may fear future mistakes in their job" (Benoit, 1997b, p. 265). Because the public holds political actors accountable, their actions have potentially serious consequences (Benoit, 1997b). Thus, denial appears to be a preferred response (Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004), though mortification can be extremely effective (Benoit, 1997b; Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004). After initially attempting to deny his affair with Monica Lewinsky, President Clinton opted for apologizing for having the relationship and for not telling the truth. His strategy was successful in that he held high job approval ratings throughout (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). On the other hand, as Len-Ríos and Benoit (2004) explain, U.S. Congressman Gary Condit, who had a relationship with a former intern of the Federal Bureau of Prisons who went missing, did not admit to an ethical transgression or offer an apology. He failed to restore his image, and it cost him the 2002 Democratic primary in his district, which he lost by an 18% margin (Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004).

In the Wake of Benoit

Sheldon and Sallot (2009) tested the effects of crisis communication strategy and performance history on politicians involved in a *faux pas.* Like Benoit, they concluded that an immediate, open apology is the most effective strategy, simply because it is what the public expects. However, they also note that admitting wrongdoing may be more

difficult for politicians and question whether some strategies in Benoit's typology, corrective action and mortification in particular, may work in politics. The authors agree with Benoit that a combination of tactics is usually the most effective, as sometimes apologizing may not be enough. "Bolstering" in particular works well when politicians are in what Sheldon and Sallot (2009) call a "faux pas crisis" (p. 44). However, performance history does not seem to play an important role in repairing a politician's reputation, and the authors found that it is "not as important as the response strategy employed" (Sheldon & Sallot, 2009, p. 46). Ultimately, a politician involved in a crisis may never fully recover (Burns & Bruner, 2000), and the alternatives are "to construct and carry on with a new public image or abandon politics altogether" (Sheldon & Sallot, 2009, p. 48). Some, however, have recovered, such as President Clinton, whose approval rating for job performance was as high as 63% after the September 11, 1998, speech at the White House Prayer Breakfast (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). In any case, it is important for crisis managers to carefully analyze the type of crisis and the audience, and to tailor the message to both situation and audience (Benoit, 1997a; Sheldon & Sallot, 2004).

Tyler (1997) discusses options for corporations in crisis and similarly warns of the dangers of admitting wrongdoing and apologizing. Coombs (1998) agrees that an organization cannot always provide an apology. "The apology admits guilt and opens an organization to legal liability" (Coombs, 1998, p. 188). Tyler (1997) claims it is naïve of Benoit to believe apologizing "would work equally well in all situations" (p. 57). It is easier to apologize when the damages are measurable or the consequences not serious. But because the potential for liability is high in any crisis, the resultant ambiguous

apologies fail to satisfy victims or public. In the case of corporations, financial interests also limit crisis responses (Coombs, 1998, 1999).

Hearit (2006) used Benoit's typology in considering what constitutes an ethical apologia. Like Tyler and Coombs, he argues that corporations tend to give priority to a legal approach over a public relations one, not because it is more effective but because of concern about lawsuits. He agrees with Benoit that the most effective approach is to admit guilt and apologize; however, litigation can be extremely costly for the organization. Hearit's work focuses on the differences between apologia, "speech of defense" (p. 2), and apology, acknowledging guilt and expressing regret without defense.

Coombs (1995, 1998, 2004) has also written profusely on the topic. His work complements Benoit's as he touches upon issues that had not been considered by Benoit, such as attribution theory and performance history. However, Coombs draws upon Benoit's typology of strategies, which he considers "the centerpiece" of his repertoire (Coombs, 1995, p. 449). He identified seven strategies and arranged them in a sequence from defensive responses, which aim to protect the reputation of the accused, to accommodative responses, which show concern for the victims or for those affected by the wrongful act (Coombs, 1998).

Coombs' focus is on organizations involved in crises, using attribution theory as "the basis for explaining the relationships between crisis response strategies and crisis situations" (1995, p. 448). Central to this focus is understanding "the degree to which stakeholders blame the organization for the crisis events" (Coombs, 1998, p. 180). Four factors explain why the audience attributes the cause of the crisis to the organization itself or to some external element: crisis type, veracity of evidence, damage and performance

history (Coombs, 1995). A positive performance history creates credibility and makes it easier for the public to forgive the organization, whereas "a history of similar crises intensifies the reputational threat posed by a crisis" (Coombs, 2004, p. 266). He groups crises into four dimensions (Coombs, 1995): internal, when the crisis was caused by the organization; external, when the crisis was triggered by someone outside the organization or by external factors; intentional, when the event that triggered the crisis was on purpose; and unintentional, when the crisis event was not on purpose. He combines the four dimensions to create four categories of crisis: faux pas, unintentional and external; accidents, unintentional and internal; terrorism, intentional acts caused by external actors; and transgressions, intentional actions taken by the organization (1995).

The work of Coombs, Hearit and others serves to complement Benoit's theory of image restoration. However, Benoit's is still considered the most complete analysis of the techniques available to individuals and organizations faced with a threatened image.

Culture's Influence

Crisis management and image restoration studies have traditionally been highly ethnocentric and based on Western culture (Haruta & Kallahan, 2003). Most communication analyses ignore the influence that communication and culture exert on one another, and study communication "in a cultural vacuum" (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 327). This is also true in the area of crisis management, as only recently have authors begun to analyze the strategies chosen by corporations and individuals across cultures (García, 2011; Haruta & Kallahan, 2003; Taylor, 2000; Wertz & Kim, 2010). These authors agree that culture affects how audiences respond to crises. Thus, when developing a crisis strategy, it is vital to keep cultural differences in mind. If Benoit and Coombs noted the

importance the type of crisis and audience perceptions play, cultural differences should
be equally considered when crafting a response, since cultural factors "guide the behavior
of publics" (Taylor, 2000, p. 290). "Crisis communication […] must reflect varying
cultural values to be effective" (Haruta & Kallahan, 2003, p. 124). In their respective
analyses, Taylor (2000), Haruta and Kallahan (2003), Wertz and Kim (2010) and García
(2011) applied Geert Hofstede's (1980, 2001, 2005) model for measuring cultural
differences to study crisis management across cultures. Hofstede's model is considered
the paradigm theory in the study of cross-cultural communication, representing "the most
organization-oriented, empirical model for a comparative analysis between cultures and
business communication" (García, 2011, p. 294). Hofstede's model provides scales from
0 to 100 for each dimension of culture in 76 countries.

Hofstede sees culture as learned, not innate. "It derives from one's social environment
rather than from one's genes" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 4). Hofstede (1980)
defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the
member of one human group from another" (p. 25). Culture is shared by a society, it is a
collective phenomenon. Hofstede's theory is based on five dimensions of culture:

1. Power distance or the level of inequality in a society, and the way people deal
   with and accept it. The level of inequality in any society is measured by the
   existence of wide gaps among social classes.

2. Individualism versus collectivism. Collectivist societies are those in which the
   interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual; they are more
   cohesive and linked together, as ties between members are stronger. Individualist
   countries tend to be rich, collectivist countries poor (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

3. Masculinity versus femininity. Assertiveness prevails in masculine societies, whereas feminine societies are characterized by modesty (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In a masculine society, gender roles are clearly distinct; in feminine societies, they overlap (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This cultural difference is unrelated to the country's degree of economic development, not the case in the first two criteria.

4. Uncertainty avoidance, the degree to which societies tolerate risk and ambiguity. "What is different is dangerous" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 165) and produces high levels of anxiety in any society. Societies feel threatened by unknown situations and develop different ways to deal with fear.

5. Long- versus short-term oriented cultures. Long-term orientation cultures are concerned about the future and not just immediate rewards. Perseverance plays an important role. Short-term orientation is concerned about the present and immediate gains.

García (2011) appears to be the only author who has applied Hofstede's model of cultural differences to image restoration as it pertains to political leaders, establishing a comparison between the strategies of two leaders from different countries caught in sex scandals -- Presidents Clinton of the U.S. and Berlusconi of Italy. Like Taylor (2000), Haruta and Kallahan (2003), and Wertz and Kim (2010), García (2011) notes "the effectiveness of image restoration strategies varies across cultures" (p. 292).

Xifra (2012) adopted Benoit's model to analyze the image restoration strategies used by Dominique Strauss-Khan (DSK) in the television interview he gave after his return to France. Xifra's study focused on the nonverbal aspect of DSK's public confession, for

which he adopted Goffman's (1959) theory of the use of dramaturgic effects to create certain impressions on others. Xifra claimed that DSK used strategies similar to Clinton's during the Monica Lewinsky scandal and concludes that both discourses had "practically contrary effects" (p. 480). DSK did not manage to convince the French. In a survey conducted among French viewers by the company TNS-Sofres, only 4% of the audience thought his image had improved after the interview (Xifra, 2012, p. 482), whereas a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll indicated that Clinton's job performance approval remained at 62% following the August 17, 1998, speech, and 63% after the September 11, 1998, speech (Blaney & Benoit, 2001). Like García (2011), Xifra (2012) attributes the asymmetries in effectiveness to the importance culture plays in image restoration discourse and supports "the need to develop contextual approaches to image repair strategies in order to avoid ethnocentric biases" (p. 483). While DSK's strategy planners drew on Clinton's apologetic discourse, Xifra (2012) believes "they did not take cultural differences into account, as is still too often the case with public relations practitioners today" (p. 480).

Media Influence

Differences across cultures have also been measured via media systems. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's (1956) theory of media systems was considered for decades the dominant paradigm for understanding the relationship between the state and the media. The analysis established four models: the libertarian model, practiced in the United States and some Western nations; the authoritarian model; the Soviet/communist model; and the social responsibility model. In the 1970s this typology became the object of increased criticism because of its ethnocentrism, but also because the relationship between the state

and the media had changed. Picard (1985) replaced it with two models: the traditional liberal democratic model, practiced in the United States and the United Kingdom, and a more socially oriented view, practiced in most European nations.

A more current and accurate classification of media systems is that of Hallin and Mancini (2004), who have identified three groups: the Mediterranean, or polarized pluralist model of such countries as Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal and, to an extent, France; the North/Central European, or democratic corporatist model, characteristic of Scandinavia, Germany, Austria and Switzerland; and the North Atlantic, or liberal model of the United Kingdom and the United States. France is a borderline case but shares enough characteristics with its southern neighbors to be included in the Mediterranean model.

In Mediterranean countries, the media developed in close connection to party politics and not as much a result of a developing market economy, as in the United States and the United Kingdom. Thus, the media in southern Europe have traditionally been politicized. Commentary plays an important role in Mediterranean media, whereas in the Anglo-Saxon media, news has priority over commentary. The Mediterranean state has traditionally played a decisive role in media development, owning broadcasting systems as well as other media enterprises, such as news agencies. However, the role of the state is diminishing, and market-based media have begun to develop over the last few decades.

The North Atlantic model, on the other hand, is characterized by its emphasis on objective reporting and political neutrality. The state played a minor role in the development of the media, particularly in the United States, and newspapers flourished

along with industrial capitalism. The media are considered to have the responsibility of being the watchdogs of government.

The North/Central European model is characterized by a high degree of political parallelism, with a strong advocacy press closely linked to partisan ideologies. However, as Hallin and Mancini (2004) note, political partisanship is rapidly weakening, and the press is distancing itself from political identifications. The North/Central European model is also distinguished by an early tradition of press freedom, while the state has exerted significant control over the media, mainly through subsidies.

García (2011), in his cross-cultural analysis of image repair strategies in the cases of Bill Clinton and Silvio Berlusconi, is the only author who has established a link between media systems and cultural taxonomies as it pertains to image restoration. He claims the image restoration strategies used by these two leaders were appropriate in their respective cultural contexts, and argues that "the effectiveness of image restoration strategies can vary greatly according to cultural, political and media variables of each country" (p. 292). He applies Hofstede's model of cultural differences and Hallin and Mancini's classification of media systems to explain the differences between the U.S. and Italian cultures, and how Clinton and Berlusconi had these divergences in mind when developing their image restoration strategies.

Summary

Benoit's theory of image restoration, which integrated work in the fields of rhetoric and apologia, continues to prevail in analyses of public discourse during political scandals. As most such analyses pertain to U.S. individuals and organizations, "image restoration strategies have not been truly tested or compared across cultures" (Garcia,

2011, p. 293), and "little research on crisis communication has dealt specifically with cultural constraints on crisis responses" (Haruta & Kallahan, 2013, p. 123). It is clear that culture – as well as the media system reflecting it – influences public perception and response and must be taken into account when strategic communication is crafted. This paper therefore attempts to develop a contextual approach to crisis management "to avoid ethnocentric bias," in the words of García (2011, p. 296) by first describing the image repair techniques used in the Edwards and DSK cases and then attempting to discuss those strategies in terms of culture. The ultimate goal is to examine the relevance of culture to effective crisis communication. The study tries to answer the following questions:

1) What image repair communication techniques did Edwards and DSK use?

2) Were cultural differences reflected in their strategic communication choices?

3) Were media variable differences reflected in their strategic communication choices?

4) Were the strategies selected effective in achieving image restoration?

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study uses Benoit's typology of image restoration to describe strategies employed in two separate situations, and then examines the effect on those strategies of cultural idiosyncrasies. Benoit's typology of strategies, options to be chosen for image repair depending on strategies, are grounded in two assumptions: (1) Communication is a "goal-directed activity" (1995, p. 63) and (2) One of the key goals of communication is to maintain a favorable image. Benoit's strategies are applied to two cases of politicians involved in scandal: John Edwards, former U.S. senator and vice presidential candidate, and Dominique Strauss-Khan (DSK), former French minister and managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While the scandals are not parallel – Edwards was involved in a consensual extramarital relationship, DSK was charged with a felony – both involved attractive and highly esteemed candidates vying to become president of their respective countries. Both engaged in image restoration efforts to save face and rescue their political aspirations.

This study analyzes the differences and similarities between the communication strategies used by Edwards and DSK, following Benoit's typology of image restoration. In that typology, the actor may *deny* that the event occurred or that he was responsible. When the actor cannot deny responsibility, he will try to evade it, which can be achieved through *provocation*, when the actor claims that he is responding to someone else's offense; *defeasibility,* when the actor claims lack of information or control over the situation or that the act was an accident; and, finally, the actor can argue that the act was performed with *good intentions*. The actor may also try to reduce the offensiveness of the

event by *bolstering* his image; *minimizing* the offensiveness of the event; *differentiating* the act by comparing it to other similar, more offensive acts; using *transcendence*, which means placing the act in a broader, more positive context; *attacking* the accusers; and offering some sort of *compensation* to the victims. *Corrective action* promises to repair the damage or to take measures to prevent the act from happening again. The final strategy is *mortification*, which implies admitting responsibility for the event, apologizing and asking for forgiveness.

The research method selected is thematic analysis, a qualitative method "for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk saying and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p. 131). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82).

The first step in thematic analysis is to collect the data. This study applies thematic analysis to five transcripts: (1) The television interview Edwards gave to Bob Woodruff for ABC News "Nightline" on August 8, 2008, in the midst of the scandal; (2) the statement released to the media on January 21, 2010, admitting paternity of Rielle Hunter's child, Quinn; (3) the public statement Edwards gave outside the courthouse on May 31, 2012; (4) the interview DSK gave to Claire Chazal on French public television, TF1, on September 18, 2011, upon his arrival in France after charges were dropped in the United States; (5) and the only other interview DSK has given since, to Richard Quest of CNN, aired on July 10, 2013. Each of these texts was examined to help identify patterns.

Once patterns were identified, data were categorized accordingly. This was done by citing direct quotes and paraphrasing key messages found in Edwards and DSK's public statements. Quotes and messages were placed within the corresponding pattern. From patterns, themes emerged. Themes are identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985, p. 1960). Themes are supposed to provide cohesiveness and consistency.

Once strategies were identified and evaluated, their cultural appropriateness was explored by applying Hofstede's model of cultural variance, as it has proven "a powerful tool to analyze cultural differences" (Wertz & Kim, 2010, p. 92). Few studies using Benoit's theory of image repair have also used Hofstede's model to explore cultural coherence (García, 2011). In a similar attempt to analyze crisis management responses across cultures, others paired Coombs' crisis communication strategies with Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Haruta & Kallahan, 2003; Wertz & Kim, 2010). Culture, according to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), "consists of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 4). Hofstede's model is based on five dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long versus short-term oriented cultures. Hofstede arrived at these categories from a large data set provided by IBM employees of more than 50 nationalities who were surveyed to find differences in national value systems (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Hofstede identified differences in four areas: social inequality, the relationship between the individual and the group, concepts of masculinity and

femininity, and ways of dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In 1980, Hofstede published his findings in a book that identified four dimensions of culture. The results were subsequently confirmed in replication studies that administered the same questions to different groups of people outside IBM. Later, the results of a new questionnaire designed by Chinese social scientists produced a new cultural dimension that Hofstede labeled long versus short-term orientation.

The original survey included several questions for each category. The answers obtained from IBM employees from 50 countries, to which others were added following replication studies, were ordered by score numbers ranging from one to five. Countries were subsequently arranged in tables according to the scores. In the first category, power distance, 61 countries were measured and scores arranged in a table that goes from 104 to 38. In the second category, individualism, 74 countries were graded, with scores that range from 91 to 6. In the third category, masculinity, 74 countries were surveyed, with scores ranging from 110 to 5. In the fourth category, uncertainty avoidance, 74 countries were also measured and scores arranged from 112 to 8. In the fifth category, long-term orientation, 39 countries were appraised, with scores going from 118 to 0.

Therefore, this paper compares U.S. and French cultures and discusses their differences based on each of Hofstede's five dimensions of culture. This is done by comparing how these two countries scored in each of Hofstede's categories. It also discusses whether those differences appear to have been taken into account in the strategic responses of both leaders, and whether the success or failure of those strategies had to do with cultural sensitivity or lack thereof.

In addition, media variables are part of any nation's social and political structure, and so were also considered. This study takes as a model Hallin and Mancini's theory of media systems (2004), considered the most timely and widely accepted classification. Hallin and Mancini undertook a comparative analysis to establish differences and similarities among the media systems of the United States, Canada and Western Europe. The purpose of their study was "to develop a framework for comparing media systems and a set of hypotheses about how they are linked […] to the development of the political system" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 5).

The authors' framework for comparing media systems was based on four dimensions: the development of media markets and a mass circulation press; political parallelism, that is, "the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties" (p. 21); the level of journalistic professionalization; and the degree of state intervention in the media system. Based on these four dimensions, Hallin and Mancini identified three media systems: The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model is characterized by low mass-circulation press, strongly politicized media, low professionalization and high state intervention. The North/Central European or democratic corporatist model distinguishes itself by the early development of the press associated to political forces, a strong mass-circulation commercial media, an early development of journalistic professionalism, a decline in political parallelism since the 1970s and the coexistence of press freedom with a strong state intervention in the media. The North Atlantic or liberal model is characterized by the early development of a commercial press, particularly in the United States, where newspapers soon became profitable enterprises; a low level of political

parallelism; a high level of journalistic professionalism; and the limited role played by the state.

After differences between the French and U.S. media systems are described, this study discusses the role that media variables may have played in the strategic choices of Edwards and DSK as well as in the media coverage of their scandals.

Chapter 4

Findings

This section describes the image repair strategies used by John Edwards and Dominique Strauss-Khan. First, it provides context for their falls from grace, then identifies the image restoration strategies they used. It reviews the media and public reaction to those communication strategies and describes disparities between the United States and France, according to Hofstede's model of cultural differences and to Hallin and Mancini's media system models.

Background

John Edwards. The former senator from North Carolina ran for vice president of the United States in the 2004 presidential election as John Kerry's running mate, then campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008. He dropped out of the race in January 2008 after poor results in early primary contests. He was married to Elizabeth Edwards for 33 years until they divorced in 2010, shortly before her death from breast cancer in December of that year.

In October 2007, *The National Enquirer* published a series of articles claiming that Edwards was having an affair with Rielle Hunter, a former campaign worker who was pregnant at the time. Edwards initially denied the affair, labeling the publicity "tabloid trash." In August 2008, in a televised interview with Bob Woodruff on ABC News, he admitted having an affair with Hunter but denied fathering her child, Quinn, who was born in February 2008. He also said the affair had occurred while his wife's cancer was in remission, and that it was brief and over. In January 2010, he released a statement admitting being Quinn's father. Following his declaration, his wife filed for divorce. In

June 2011, Edwards was indicted on charges of campaign finance fraud. He was accused of accepting illegal campaign contributions, using campaign money to cover up an affair with Hunter and making false statements. Edwards's trial began on April 23, 2012. On May 31, he was acquitted on the count of having received and accepted illegal campaign contributions. A mistrial was declared on the other counts. On June 13, 2012, the Department of Justice dropped all charges against Edwards.

Dominique Strauss-Khan. DSK is a French economist and member of the Socialist Party. He is a former minister of finance of France and managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a position he held until forced to resign on May 18, 2011, following allegations of sexual assault on a hotel maid in New York City. When the news broke, he was preparing for the Socialist Party's presidential primary and was expected to become the next president of France by defeating the unpopular Nicolas Sarkozy. DSK was long-rumored to be a womanizer and had a reputation for having extramarital affairs. Since 1991, he has been married to Anne Sinclair, his third wife, a journalist and heiress to a vast fortune, which helped him advance his political career. The couple separated in 2012 and completed their divorce in March 2013.

On May 14, 2011, DSK was staying at the Sofitel Hotel in New York City. He had flown in the night before from Washington, D.C., and was supposed to fly to Paris that afternoon. After a hotel maid said he raped her in his hotel room, police arrested him as he was sitting on the plane awaiting takeoff. He was charged with sexual assault, attempted rape and kidnapping. The news photographs of a handcuffed DSK made the front pages of newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. In his native France, where a

privacy law protects those who are presumed innocent until proved guilty, these images caused uproar.

DSK was subsequently tried in New York City. After paying bail of $6 million in cash, he was under house arrest until September 2011, when declared innocent of all pending charges and returned to France. On September 18, he appeared on French public television TF1, where he was interviewed by Claire Chazal, a friend of his wife. He offered his version of the facts and apologized for what he considered "a moral failing" (Levard, 2011). This was the only interview he gave in almost two years, until he appeared on CNN on July 10, 2013, in his first interview in the U.S. since his downfall.

Image Restoration Strategies

Thematic analysis of the five statement transcripts revealed these recurring patterns in the discourses of both leaders: *simple denial*, *shifting the blame, defeasibility*, *good intentions, bolstering, minimization, attacking the accuser, compensation, transcendence, admitting responsibility, apologizing* and *asking for forgiveness*. Those patterns characterized the following themes, as described by Benoit: *denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the event, corrective action* and *mortification.* The following summarizes the themes that emerged in analyzing the image restoration strategies employed by Edwards and DSK.

Denial. Benoit said mortification is vital to image restoration efforts. However, as Sheldon and Sallot (2009) point out, "openly admitting mistakes may be more difficult for politicians than others because greater future costs are at risk" (p. 27). Since apologizing is not always an option in the case of politicians, "denial appears to be a preferred response" (Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004, p. 104).

Both Edwards and DSK resorted to denial at first. Rumors about Edwards began spreading in late 2007, just months after he announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination, and he denied all accusations, calling them lies. He did not admit guilt until the August 2008 televised interview on ABC News, after he had dropped out of the presidential race, but he continued to deny certain other accusations. When asked how he could have offended his cancer-stricken wife, Edwards said "it [the affair] happened during a period after she was in remission from cancer" (Goldston, 2008). This was untrue. Quinn was born in February 2008. In March 2007, Elizabeth Edwards announced her breast cancer had returned and was incurable.

Edwards also claimed that the affair with Hunter began after she had been hired in July 2006 to produce campaign films, thus denying that she was hired as a result of the affair they were having: "She was hired to come in and produce films and that's the reason she was hired" (Goldston, 2008). However, it is known that the couple met at a hotel bar in New York City in early 2006, so the affair apparently began long before he hired her that summer. Edwards seemed vague throughout the interview, not providing dates or details about the affair: "I think that my family is entitled to every detail. They've been told every detail. […]. I think that's where it stops in terms of the public because I think everything else is within my family and those privacy boundaries ought to be respected" (Goldston, 2008).

Edwards also denied being the father of Hunter's baby: "Not true. Published in a supermarket tabloid. That is absolutely not true" (Goldston, 2008). But then Woodruff showed Edwards a photo of Edwards holding a baby with Hunter standing nearby. Visibly flustered, Edwards denied the man in the photo was he and said he could not

explain how the picture had been taken: "I don't know if that picture is me, it could well be, it looks like me. I don't know who that baby is, I have no idea what that picture is. […] I don't know anything about that photograph. I don't know if the picture has been altered, manufactured, if it's a picture of me taken some other time, holding another baby – I have no idea. I was not at this meeting holding a child for my photograph to be taken, I can tell you that" (Goldston, 2008). When asked whether he thought his aide, Andrew Young, was the baby's father (which Young had publicly stated), Edwards's answer was "I don't know" (Goldston, 2008).

Edwards denied using campaign money to cover up the affair: "I've never paid a dime of money to any of the people that are involved. I've never asked anybody to pay a dime of money, never been told that any money's been paid. Nothing has been done at my request. So if the allegation is that somehow I participated in the payment of money – that is a lie" (Goldston, 2008). However, according to Young, Edwards had asked him to seek financial aid from some of his donors to keep the affair secret.

Like Edwards, DSK used denial. He did not try to deny that the act occurred or his responsibility in it, but denied the act involved an aggression: "What happened did not involve any violence, constraint, aggression or criminal act" (Levard, 2011). As Benoit (1997b) said, "it is also possible to admit performing the act while denying that it was in any way harmful" (p. 253). In the interview, DSK also was asked about his relationship with journalist Tristane Banon, who over the course of that summer had also accused him of trying to rape her, in 2003 while she was interviewing him; he responded that he did not commit any violent act and that her claim was "imaginary and slanderous" (Levard, 2011).

In the CNN appearance, DSK denied having a problem with women. To a question about whether he viewed women "as sexual objects" (Sebastian, 2013), he responded that his problem was "with understanding that what is expected from a politician of the highest level is different from what Mr. Smith can do in the street" (Sebastian, 2013). He denied having "any kind of problem with women" (Sebastian, 2013).

Both Edwards and DSK also tried to *shift the blame*, a variant of denial because "the accused cannot have committed the repugnant act if someone else actually did it" (Benoit, 1995, p. 75). Edwards reportedly asked Young to claim paternity of Hunter's child, which Young did do publicly. Edwards did not admit he asked Young to do this on his behalf, but Young declared so in a book published in 2010 and again in the trial of Edwards in 2012. When Woodruff asked Edwards whether he thought Young was the father of Hunter's baby, as Young had publicly declared, Edwards said he was aware of that public statement and did not know whether it was true (Goldston, 2008).

As Xifra (2012) points out, DSK also apparently tried to *shift the blame*. Both on TF1 and CNN, he did not rule out the possibility of having been the victim of a trap.

Evasion of responsibility. When the accused is unable to fully deny the accusations, he may try to reduce his responsibility in the acts to mitigate damage. Specifically, Edwards used *defeasibility,* claiming a lack of information or control of the situation. He said he did not know whether the person in the picture with the baby was he, adding that the picture could have been "altered or manufactured" (Goldston, 2008). In addition, in the statement he gave outside the courthouse on May 31, 2012, he said he did not know that taking the money violated campaign finance law, as the money was a personal gift, not a campaign contribution. He suggested that the acts were performed with *good*

intentions, which, according to Benoit, is another way of attempting to evade responsibility for a wrong act.

Reducing offensiveness of the event. There are several ways in which "a person accused of misbehavior may attempt to reduce the degree of ill experienced by the audience" (Benoit, 1995, p. 77). The accused tries to portray himself and the wrongful act in a more favorable light, so that the act is not perceived as negatively. In particular, Edwards and DSK both used *bolstering*, which is alluding to positive character traits and positive actions of the past.

Edwards had run his presidential campaign on the theme of promising to work to eradicate poverty. He shared his life story as a man of humble origins now advocating for America's poor and believing in equal opportunities for all Americans. After he abandoned the presidential race, he volunteered for work overseas, traveling in 2009 to El Salvador with the Fuller Center for Housing, a nonprofit organization that builds homes for those in need. He then went to Haiti after the January 2010 earthquake with supplies and to help with rebuilding. When leaving the courtroom in May 2012, Edwards said, "I don't think God is through with me. I think he believes there are still some good things I can do. What I am hopeful for is that all the kids I have seen in the poorest parts of this country and some of the poorest parts of the world, that I can help in whatever way I am still capable, and I want to dedicate my life to being the best dad I can be and to helping those kids who I think deserve help" (Quigley, 2012).

DSK also used *bolstering* in alluding to acts of the past. When discussing his future on TF1, he said, "All my life has been consecrated to being useful to the public good" (Levard, 2011). On CNN he noted his good deeds, saying his life had been spent in

"trying to help my people in France to have a better life. It appears to me while I was working at IMF that I could do this at the global level" (Sebastian, 2013); he added that he still wanted to help and had agreed to work for free at times to help those in need. According to Benoit (1995), "increasing positive feeling toward the actor may help offset the negative feelings toward the act" (p. 77).

Edwards attempted to *minimize the offensiveness* of his acts on several occasions. "If the rhetor can convince the audience that the negative act isn't as bad as it might first appear, the amount of ill feeling associated with that act is reduced" (Benoit, 1995, p. 77). As noted, Edwards said the affair happened during a period in which his wife was in remission from cancer. "That's no excuse in any possible way for what happened" (Goldston, 2008), he added. Months later, however, it was discovered and publicized that this statement was untrue. In a renewed attempt to minimize the offensiveness of his acts, Edwards then said the affair was brief and that he was not the father of Hunter's child.

DSK also used *minimization* to diminish "the amount of negative effect associated with the offensive act" (Benoit, 1995, p. 77). The acts he was accused of were particularly repulsive, as rape cannot be compared to a consensual sexual act. On French television, DSK emphasized that no violence or aggression was involved in the situation.

Another defense mechanism, Benoit said, is to *attack the accuser.* Edwards implied that a sector of the media was less than trustworthy and not practicing professional journalism: "Published in a supermarket tabloid. That is absolutely not true" (Goldston, 2008). Although he never personally attacked his aide, Young, in public statements, a large part of Edwards' defense at the 2012 trial centered on portraying Young as a liar who used part of the campaign money to build his dream house and take expensive trips,

money that supposedly was given to Edwards by two donors to help him "with a personal problem" (John Edwards, 2012). Young was also accused of taking money without the knowledge of Edwards.

DSK heavily relied on the strategy of *attacking the accuser* (Xifra, 2012). He claimed that Nafissatou Diallo, the hotel maid, "lied about everything, not only about her past, that's of no importance, but also about what happened. She has presented so many different versions that I cannot believe a single word. Her whole story is a lie" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011). The prosecutor's report, which DSK used throughout the interview to validate his argument, said that Diallo was not a credible source, that her testimony presented multiple gaps and inconsistencies.

DSK also said that he suspected financial motives might have been behind Diallo's accusations. Referring to the lawsuit Diallo later filed against him, DSK insisted he would not negotiate a settlement (Levard, 2011). However, he did agree to a settlement, as he admitted on CNN; he said his lawyers recommended he "pay her off" (Sebastian, 2013) to avoid a bigger waste of time and money. *Compensating the victim* is another way of reducing the offensiveness of the event. He had also accused journalist Tristane Banon of lying, claiming that she offered "an imaginary, slanderous version" (Levard, 2011) of what happened.

In addition, similar to Edwards, DSK accused the French magazine *L'Express* of being a "tabloid" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011) because it published extracts of a hospital document and identified it as Diallo's medical report.

DSK also attacked the U.S. judicial system: "When you are caught in the jaws of that machine, you have the impression that it can crush you. I felt that I was trampled on, humiliated, even before I had the chance to say a word in my defense. I have been the victim of terrible attacks and I have lost much in the process" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011). He portrayed himself as the victim of the U.S. judicial system, which, by allowing him to be paraded handcuffed, further damaged his image. In France, it is illegal to show suspects in handcuffs until they have been proved guilty. On U.S. television, he once again blamed the U.S. system, claiming that the "perp" walk occurs "at the moment when you're supposed to be innocent. You're shown to everybody as if you were a criminal at a moment where nobody knows if it's true or not. […] It's just unfair to put people in that way in front of the rest of the world when you just don't know what they have done" (Sebastian, 2013). Finally, he also portrayed himself as the victim of a possible conspiracy: "They [U.S. authorities] opted for helping the woman who was accusing me, instead of collaborating with me" (Levard, 2011).

DSK also used *transcendence*, which functions by placing the action in a broader context. "A person accused of wrongdoing might direct our attention to other, allegedly higher values" (Benoit, 1995, p. 78). As a former managing director of the IMF and a respected economist, DSK used transcendence by discussing the European financial crisis, the situation in Greece and the future of the Euro (Levard, 2011); this could shift attention away from the accusations to other topics. In the United States, he again discussed the Euro zone crisis in detail and offered his expert advice on how to resolve it, while blaming European countries for their incompetence.

Corrective action. The accused promises to change his habits to prevent the wrongful act from happening again. It indicates some sort of redemption. In this case, Edwards pledged to dedicate his life "to being the best dad I can be and to helping those kids who I think deserve help" (Quigley, 2012). He also assured there were still some good things he could do (Quigley, 2012).

Toward the end of the interview on TF1, DSK said he needed to "rest, spend time with my family and reflect on what has happened. However, all my life has been devoted to the public good, so… we will see" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011).

Mortification and apology. By engaging in mortification, the accused admits responsibility for the act, apologizes and asks for forgiveness. For those who are guilty, admitting their mistake and apologizing for it is often the most effective strategy (Benoit, 1997b; Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004). The public may be more willing to forgive someone who admits responsibility from the beginning. However, Benoit (1997b), Len-Ríos and Benoit (2004), and Sheldon and Sallot (2009) warn that apologizing may be more difficult in the case of politicians "because the stakes are higher" (Len-Ríos & Benoit, 2004, p. 98). President Clinton and Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy are just two examples of successful use of mortification to help restore image.

After initially denying an affair, Edwards repented in the Woodruff interview: "I made a very serious mistake – a mistake that I am responsible for and no one else […]. I asked (Elizabeth) for her forgiveness, I asked God for his forgiveness […]. I alone am

responsible for it. […] You cannot beat me up more than I have already beaten up myself" (Goldston, 2008).

In a public statement in January 2010, he voiced repentance over denying paternity: "It was wrong for me ever to deny she was my daughter, and, hopefully, one day, when she understands, she will forgive me" (Bosman, 2010).

Outside the courtroom in May 2012, he again took sole responsibility for his acts: "I want to talk about responsibility, and this is about me. While I do not believe I did anything illegal, I did an awful, awful lot that was wrong, and there is no one else responsible for my sins […]. I alone am responsible. If I want to find the person I don't have to go any further than the mirror because it was me and me alone" (Quigley, 2012).

DSK also apologized for "an inappropriate relationship, but more than that, it was a failure… a failure vis-a-vis my wife, my children and my friends, but also a failure vis-a-vis the French people, who had vested their hopes for change in me. […] I have missed my appointment with the French people" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011). He was referring to the fact he was expected to run against and defeat Nicolas Sarkozy for the French presidency. "I wanted to be a candidate. I thought I could be useful. All that is behind me" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011). He called it "a moral failure I am not proud of. I regret it infinitely. I have regretted it every day for the past four months, and I think I'm not done regretting it" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011). He also apologized to his wife, whom he called "an exceptional woman. […] I wouldn't have gotten through it without her. […]. I hurt her, I know, and I am sorry. But she wouldn't have been there for me, by my side, she wouldn't have supported me in that way if, from the very first

second, she didn't know that I was innocent" ("DSK reconnaît une "relation inappropriée" avec Diallo," 2011).

He also apologized on CNN, "because people are not expecting this kind of behavior from somebody having a public responsibility" (Sebastian, 2013). He admitted his own responsibility for having placed himself in the situation, claiming it was all his fault.

Effectiveness Evaluation: Media and Public Reaction

Political scientists and image experts said that Edwards' attempts to restore his image were ineffective and unsuccessful and further damaged his reputation. They said it may be close to impossible for Edwards to enter public life again, let alone politics: "I think John Edwards has no political future. Nada, zip," said Emory University political science professor Merle Black (Waggoner & Biesecker, 2012). Harlan Loeb, a crisis management expert, said Edwards would need to do considerable work over a sustained period to rehabilitate his image, and he advised Edwards to "eschew cameras, microphones and Twitter" (Waggoner & Biesecker, 2012). Said Belinda Luscombe (2010): "Americans are a tolerant people, but they have a line, and evidently when you cheat on your cancer-stricken wife, lie about it to everyone while running for president and then decline to acknowledge fathering a love child for two years, you've crossed it." Former political consultant Gary Pearce, who helped Edwards win a Senate seat in 1998, said that "I would tell him to disappear and take care of his family. There is arguably no man in public life more despised than he is" (Waggoner & Biesecker, 2012). A CBS/*New York Times* poll conducted in April 2012 found that Edwards was viewed favorably by just 3% of Americans (Harnden, 2012). According to Sahil Patel, a public relations expert and author, "Edwards had an opportunity to take the first steps in repairing his shattered

public image. Unfortunately, his remarks to reporters outside of the courthouse following the May 31 verdict were delivered with the veneer of a seasoned politician making yet another stump speech, and did not go beyond the standard elements of a public apology. […] A lot of work needs to be done to repair John Edwards' personal brand" (Patel, 2012).

DSK's effort at repairing his image on TF1 was deemed unsuccessful, not so much because of the strategies that he chose, but because he was criticized for not appearing sincere during the interview, which seemed recorded. "The interview […] was carefully orchestrated and felt as it had been almost rehearsed" (Erlanger, 2011). The fact that his interviewer, Claire Chazal, was a close friend of his wife did not make it look better, and she was criticized for not being aggressive enough. DSK seemed obviously uncomfortable and distressed, even sounding angry at times. According to psychiatrist Serge Hefez (Serafini, 2011), DSK was not credible: "He began by saying that there had not been violence, constraint or aggression. However, he admitted having committed a moral failure and asked for forgiveness. If there was no constraint, where is the failure? Nobody can believe his apology. Everybody knows that DSK is a seducer who loves women, someone with an intense sexual life that includes extramarital relationships of which his wife knows. Cheating on his wife, in this particular case, is not a failure. […] He should have been more straightforward and assume his reputation as a seducer. It would have been much more credible. French people, unlike Americans, can tolerate someone with an intense sexual life, as long as there is no violence involved." According to Marion Van Renterghem (2011), from *Le Monde,* "he should have adopted a lower profile and appeared more humble." She believed his political comeback was "unlikely,"

although she said his expertise would continue to be valid and that he could "land a job as a consultant." Christophe Barbier, chief editor of *L'Express,* viewed it as "an extremely well-achieved communication exercise, with carefully chosen moments of repentance and emotions" (Erlanger, 2011). Thibault de Montbrial, Diallo's French lawyer, called the DSK interview "a public relations exercise, without any spontaneity, neither in the questions not the replies, scripted down to each gesture" (Erlanger, 2011). Xifra (2012) agreed that the interview "was not spontaneous, but responded to a very well-planned press relations strategy" (p. 3). DSK apparently failed to convince the audience, as, according to a survey conducted after the interview by the company TNS-Sofres, only 4% of respondents thought that his image had improved; 53% said his public image had not changed, and 31% said it was worse (Xifra, 2012).

Cultural Differences between the United States and France

The United States and France score strikingly different in almost every category of Hofstede's model of cultural differences, but particularly as it relates to power distance, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Power distance measures human inequality. It is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Institutions are the basic elements of a society, such as the family, the school, and the community; organizations are the places where people work" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 46). The United States scores low in power distance, with an index of 40 in a scale from 11 to 104, and is ranked 57-59 among 74 countries. France shows a much higher power distance index of 68, and is listed 27-29 in the ranking (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Lower power distance societies are more egalitarian, with fewer differences between social classes. The result is a large middle class. Lower power

distance countries tend to be wealthy. In larger power distance societies, "the powerful are entitled to privileges" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 111). Those in power are usually highly respected and their superiority is not questioned. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) point out that "scandals involving persons in power are expected, and so is the fact that these scandals will be covered up" (p. 60). Small power distance societies, on the other hand, are not so tolerant when it comes to the private lives of their political leaders, who are considered their equals, and "scandals usually mean the end of political careers" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 112).

Masculine societies value assertiveness and toughness, whereas feminine societies are more focused on relationships and the environment. "A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 120). The United States, with a masculinity index of 62 within a range from 5 to 110, is ranked relatively high in the table of masculine countries at 19. France has a much lower masculinity index of 43 and is ranked 47-50 in a list of 74 countries (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 121). Feminine cultures tend to be more permissive with lawbreakers than masculine cultures. Masculine and feminine cultures also differ in their sexual behavior, with sex being considered more of a taboo subject in masculine than in feminine cultures. "In the United States, after a sexual revolution in the 1950s, there has been a considerable moralistic, conservative backlash, and the taboo on discussing sex in public has been lifted much

less than in some European countries in which the sexual revolution came later but with a more lasting impact" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 322). Hofstede (2001) observed that in feminine societies, less sex is found in the media, while on U.S. television, programs and advertising "are often strongly eroticized: The weaker taboo on discussing sex in more feminine countries seems to reduce the attraction of sexual themes in publicity" (p. 326).

The third category of notable differences between the United States and France is their level of tolerance in the face of uncertain, new situations, and how they cope with ambiguity. Uncertainty avoidance is defined as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 167). The future produces anxiety, so, according to Hofstede (1980), societies would try to cope with it "through the domains of technology, law and religion" (p. 153). France shows a high uncertainty avoidance index of 86 within a range from 8 to 112, and is ranked in positions 17-22 out of 74 countries. Mediterranean countries tend to score high both on uncertainty avoidance and power distance, which Hofstede (2001) explains in terms of historical factors inherited from "the centralized, structured Roman Empire" (p. 150). On the other hand, the United States is at the lower end of the table at 62 in the ranking, with an uncertainty avoidance index of 46 (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Weak uncertainty avoidance societies tend to be less expressive and communicative, and "showing of aggressiveness and emotions is not approved of socially" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 183). People from strong uncertainty avoidance countries, on the other hand, are described as "fidgety, emotional and aggressive" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 172).

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) said the need for achievement is strongly correlated with the combination of weak uncertainty avoidance and strong masculinity. Thus, the

need for achievement would be high in the United States. As the authors point out, "the word 'achievement' is difficult to translate in most languages other than English […]. A Frenchman […] would have been unlikely to conceive of a worldwide achievement motive" (p. 188). Hofstede (2001) notes sexual performance can be experienced as achievement by some people, particularly those belonging to weak uncertainty avoidance, masculine countries.

Both the United States and France are individualistic societies, the United States ranked as the most individualistic on a list of 74 countries, with an individualism index of 91, and France ranked 13-14, with an index of 71 (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 78). Individualism is defined as "the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society. It is reflected in the way people live together" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 209). Developed, wealthy societies tend to favor individualism, in the sense that the interest of the individual prevails over that of the group, and no big differences were found between the U.S. and French societies in this particular category. Finally, both the United States and France are short-term orientation societies, with low long-term orientation scores of 29 and 39 respectively, within a range from 0 to 118 (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Short-term orientation societies are characterized by the search for immediate rewards, respect for traditions, concern with personal stability and social status, and concern with "face" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 212). Image and reputation play a particularly important role in short-term orientation societies.

Media Variables: Differences between the U.S. and French Models

The state has played an important role in the development of the press and broadcasting systems in Southern Europe, owning media enterprises, news agencies and

broadcasting, and subsidizing the press. The result is a strongly politicized media, with public broadcasters clearly associated with the political party in power and newspapers identifying themselves with different political tendencies. These are evident in France, where *Le Monde* represents the center-left, *Libération* takes a leftist stance, and *Le Figaro* and *France Soir* identify with the right-center. Unlike the liberal tradition, newspapers give precedence to commentary over reporting. The percentage of content devoted to reporting would amount to 76.6% in *Le Monde,* 70% in *Le Figaro*, but as much as 90.3% in *The New York Times.* The percentages pertaining to interpretation and opinion would be as high as 17.1% and 6.6%, respectively, in *Le Monde,* 13.4% and 5.2% in *Le Figaro,* but only 4.8% and 0.4% in the case of *The New York Times* (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 99). Newspaper circulation in Mediterranean countries is the lowest in Europe, although in France it is somewhat higher: 190 per 1,000 people in 2000, compared to only 82.7 in Portugal and 77.5 in Greece. In the United States, on the other hand, newspaper sales were as high as 263.6 per 1,000 adult population in 2000 (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 23). However, while party-politicized newspapers are the norm in Mediterranean countries, "tabloid or sensationalist newspapers are virtually absent" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 97), so the focus on scandal is not as strong as in the United States. The forceful control exerted by the state, with explicit privacy laws protecting the individual, has also acted as an inhibitor on investigative reporting and diverted the attention on political scandals. "The financial dependence of media on the state, and the persistence of restrictive rules on privacy and on the publication of official information have combined with the intertwining of media and political elites and – especially in the French case – with a highly centralized state not prone to 'leaks' of information to

produce a journalistic culture cautious about reporting information that would be embarrassing to state officials" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 122).

In the United States, newspapers flourished along with industrial capitalism. The state played no significant role in the development of the press, so the media were highly independent and political neutrality tended to be strong. Limitations to the role of the state were built into the U.S. Constitution through the First Amendment, which protects freedom of expression and freedom of the press, something that did not occur in Europe. There is, however, a strong dependency on market forces, since, in the absence of state subsidies, advertising is the main source of revenue. Information prevails over commentary and opinion, and the media are expected to act as a "watchdog" of government. "An adversary attitude toward state officials is certainly part of the culture of journalism in the Anglo-American countries. It is manifest among other things in the strong development of techniques of investigative reporting and the strong emphasis on scandal that have been legendary since Watergate" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 233).

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study reveals that the image restoration efforts by John Edwards and Dominique Strauss-Khan were unsuccessful. Even though they were both declared innocent by the U.S. judicial system, they were unable to restore their reputations. Their discourses failed to establish a connection with their respective audiences. This disconnection can be attributed to lack of cultural sensitivity. They failed to take into account the unique cultural characteristics of U.S. and French societies, as well as the *modus operandi* of the media in their respective countries.

Edwards and DSK used similar image restoration strategies – denial at first, mixed with evasion of responsibility and reducing the offensiveness of the event, accomplished mostly by attacking their accusers and resorting to bolstering and transcendence. Ultimately, they both accepted partial responsibility for the acts of which they were accused, and they apologized profusely. However, cultural, political and media variables in their respective countries were neglected, as shows the fact that their strategies were very similar. They also achieved identical results: Neither was able to restore his reputation.

The reasons for these failures may be rooted in important differences in culture, which suggest that political figures must be able to clearly assess their own position vis à vis the publics most important to their success. But publics are not homogeneous. Hall (1977) argued that "the natural act of thinking is greatly modified by culture" (p. 9). Cultural norms affect the way in which publics respond to crises. As a result, the tactics that work in one country do not necessarily do so in another. As García (2011) points out,

"image repair strategies, which in some countries may be considered suicidal, may be acceptable in another country, where culture, politics and the media interact differently" (p. 292). This study demonstrates that image restoration strategies are unique to one's culture and are not transferable. According to Taylor (2000), "cultural variability is a fact of life" (p. 290). In an increasingly globalized world, understanding cultural nuances is vital to succeed in any domain. Public relations is about managing relationships with publics, and culture determines how those publics think.

Edwards relied heavily on denial as his main strategy. This was a poor choice because he lost credibility when facts were discovered and it became evident he had been lying from the beginning. Benoit and McHale (1999) believe that it is important to provide support for denials, something Edwards was unable to do. Virtually none of his allegations was based on evidence. The son of a textile mill worker, Edwards parlayed intelligence, eloquence and handsomeness into a rapid rise in the law, then politics. Ambition may have blinded him to the point of making him believe that he could do as he pleased without being caught. He himself said he had been immersed in a wave of self-focus, adulation and admiration that made him lose touch with reality: "I went from being a senator, a young senator, to being considered for vice president, running for president, being a vice presidential candidate and becoming a national public figure. All of which fed a self-focus, an egotism, a narcissism that leads you to believe that you can do whatever you want. You're invincible. And there will be no consequences" (Goldston, 2008). According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), the need for achievement is characteristic of weak uncertainty avoidance and masculine societies such as the United States.

Benoit insists that, for those guilty of wrongdoing, the best tactic is to come out right away, accept responsibility, apologize and ask for forgiveness. Mortification may be difficult for politicians, but many have been able to survive a scandal and continue in politics by offering an apology. Edwards apologized in his three public statements, in 2008, 2010 and 2012. An apology was appropriate in his case. However, his *mea culpa* came too late. His apologies were not viewed as sincere or credible because he had a history of lying. Public relations experts agree that, had Edwards been honest when he first conceded his mistake and admitted the facts, repented for his mistakes and asked for forgiveness, he may have had a chance at recovery. Most significantly, he seemed to ignore the fact that Americans take a dim view of adultery – let alone adultery affecting a well-known and admired sick wife – and that they can accept sincere repentance. He should have known the media would pursue him until the truth was uncovered. Sabato (1991) describes media coverage of politicians as "a spectacle without equal in modern American politics: the news media go after a wounded politician like sharks in a feeding frenzy" (p. 1). According to Splichal and Garrison (2003), *The Miami Herald*'s revelation of Gary Hart's extramarital affair marked the end of the so-called "gentleman's agreement" (p. 78) that had kept journalists at bay since the days of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, all of whom conducted such affairs – one during World War II as the leader of Allied Forces before later occupying the White House, the others while in the White House. For Sabato (1991), the "seminal event" for U.S. journalists was Ted Kennedy's accident at Chappaquiddick. Media coverage of politicians "has become increasingly negative over the past few decades" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 3). Survey findings indicate a growing belief in the media's

responsibility to cover public figures' private lives. Wojdynski and Riffe (2011) report a trend of "increased salaciousness in news and entertainment media" (p. 218), which they explain in terms of the boom in reality television programming as well as the proliferation of social media networks, creating higher transparency and sometimes spurring exhibitionism. Savigny (2004) and Sabato (1991) agree that media organizations are driven by consumer demand and profit maximization, and scandals attract a wider audience. McNair (2003) attributes this trend to "the collapse of social deference toward elites" (p. 550), which has exposed the political class to new forms of public accountability.

Denial may have worked for DSK, since the victim's version was never proved. The prosecution did not find Diallo to be a credible source of information because she had a history of fabrication. As a result, the charges against DSK were dropped. He was wise to deny the accusations and try to reduce the offensiveness of the event by saying there was no violence involved and the sexual encounter was consensual, since aggression could never be proved. However, his later use of mortification was inappropriate in this case. In France, "sexual infidelity in a politician's private life is not seen as synonymous with untrustworthiness in the public domain" (Kuhn, 2004, p. 37). As French psychiatrist Serge Hefez points out in his interview with Serafini (2011), "French people, unlike Americans, can tolerate someone with an intense sexual life, as long as there is no violence involved." DSK's explanation was contradictory. He had a reputation for being a womanizer, so, if the sexual encounter were consensual, there was no need to apologize. If there were no violence, there would be no "moral failure" (Levard, 2011). Therefore, with his apology, DSK created a precedent: No French politician had ever

apologized for having an extramarital affair. His apology raised further questions in his home country; while it may have played well in the United States, it seemed out of place in France. In the absence of previous examples to draw upon, DSK's communications advisors tried to replicate Clinton's successful image restoration strategy following Monica Lewinsky's scandal, ignoring the differences in their personal circumstances and cultural context. Both Clinton and DSK admitted having had an inappropriate relationship and apologized to their wives, families and public. But Clinton's sexual relationship with Lewinsky was consensual, and there was nothing that implied use of force or violence, nor was he accused of felony. DSK, however, was accused of sexual assault and rape. They also attacked their accusers and resorted to transcendence to take the audience's attention away from the matter at hand. The similarities in both leaders' discourses are striking. However, they had practically contrary effects on their respective audiences, which Xifra (2012) blames on lack of cultural sensitivity. Clinton was able to understand that the U.S. public values a sincere apology. He sounded credible in his repentance and managed to convince the audience, which may also be attributed to his "successful rhetorical dexterity" (Blaney & Benoit, 2001, p. 13). DSK, on the other hand, failed to understand that an apology was out of place in a French context. An apology did not work for Edwards either, in his case because it came too late and did not sound credible. His personal circumstances did not help, as having an affair while his wife was dying of cancer was poorly received by the audience. Being in power may have also played in Clinton's favor. According to Schneider (2001), "once you are in office, people tend to give you the benefit of the doubt. […] But if the scandal breaks before you are

elected, it is tough to survive. That's why Bill Clinton survived and Gary Hart didn't" (p. 2786). This may also explain why Edwards was unable to survive.

Had DSK's scandal happened in France, it may never have become public. In large power distance societies, scandals involving political leaders tend to be silenced. Protected by French privacy laws, the photograph of a handcuffed DSK would not have been published. French society shows high respect for privacy, understood as "rights to one's image, name and reputation" (Whitman, 2004, p. 1155). French media have been constrained from transgressing this boundary by a combination of legal restrictions and journalistic culture (Kuhn, 2004). A 1970 law provides rules on matters such as the publication of photographs without the consent of the interested party. Media outlets that violate the law can be taken to court. In 2000, the "Guigou law" reinforced these provisions, banning the publication of photographs of criminal suspects. Moreover, French journalistic culture does not consider politicians' private lives as fair game for investigation. Quatremer (2012) blames the media for maintaining what he calls a "relationship of connivance" with those in power, which he perceives as "an obstacle to freedom" (p. 118). He attributes such a special relationship to the history of the media in France, where there is nothing similar to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Indeed, the state has traditionally exerted strong control over the media. The result is the absence of investigative journalism that developed in the United States since Watergate. As Kuhn (2004) notes, such deference "is particularly notable in the realm of sexual orientation and behavior where the mainstream media do not indulge in the exposure habits associated with tabloid journalism in other countries" (p. 36). Tabloid or sensationalist newspapers "are virtually absent in the Mediterranean region" (Hallin &

Mancini, 2004, p. 97). Journalists have traditionally tolerated the sexual misconduct of public officials and kept it secret. The fact that French media did not report on President Mitterrand's illegitimate daughter is an example of the media's indulgence in this regard. According to a survey conducted by TNS-Sofres for *Le Figaro* in January 2006, only 17% of French voters would be discouraged to vote for a presidential candidate on the basis of an extramarital affair (Deloire & Dubois, 2006, p. 199).

However, despite this history, the DSK affair seems to have triggered a debate among French journalists. Some are beginning to question the long-established principle of *omertá,* an implied code of silence. Quatremer (2012) calls for a more aggressive journalism, asserting that "a journalist is not there to please those in power, his job is to inform" (p. 106). Others defend *omertá.* Following DSK's arrest, Nicolas Demorand (2011) of *Libération* said that breaching "a fundamental democratic principle" would result in the triumph of "trash" over quality information. Ultimately, as Quatremer (2012) reckons, the DSK affair may mark a point of no return in French journalism, proving that "our media model has failed" (p. 133).

Finally, DSK's reputation as a womanizer hurt his efforts to repair his tarnished image. Coombs (1995) said that "past performance can be an important factor in a crisis. Publics seem more willing to forgive an organization with a positive performance history. […] Images, positive or negative, are hard to change" (p. 460). The same can be said of individuals. Sheldon and Sallot (2009) argue that "politicians' performance history is not as important as the response strategy employed," but reckoned that, in the case of someone with a negative performance history, "the public was less likely to support him or believe his story" (p. 46). Hefez, when interviewed by Serafini (2011), argued that,

should DSK have acknowledged his public image as a seducer, he would have sounded more credible and may have been more effective. Xifra (2012) agreed that DSK failed to take into account his reputation as roué. Edwards, on the other hand, had an impeccable reputation as loving husband and father who had lost his eldest son in a car accident at age 16, and who had worked in favor of the disadvantaged. His positive image should have played in his favor, and it may have done so in the first stages of the scandal. However, as his lies were uncovered, the image disintegrated. Edwards' bad strategy choices apparently outdid his own performance history.

In summary, the fact both leaders failed in restoring their images was related to their discordance with cultural standards. Edwards' apology failed because it came too late. He seemed to forget U.S. media and public interest in the private lives of public people, especially politicians who want to hold public office. According to Kevin Sullivan (Luscombe, 2012), former White House press secretary under George W. Bush and now a public relations consultant, Edwards is "not electable, and no American president is ever going to appoint him to anything." DSK also failed in terms of cultural context. Denial and reducing the offensiveness of the event may have worked in his case, since aggression was never proved and the victim's image had been discredited. He admitted having a sexual encounter but tried to change public perception of the act. However, he failed to understand the breach between French and U.S. culture. In a high power distance, feminine society such as France, those in a position of power are highly respected. Behaving as he pleased in his native France, without being questioned about the rumors of womanizing, he did not bother to change his ways when taking over as managing director of the IMF. At the time, French journalist Jean Quatremer (2011)

warned that his rapport with women, described as too aggressive, might not be well understood in the United States, where those in power do not benefit from special treatment and could even bring him trouble. On CNN, DSK reckoned he had miscalculated, "to believe that you could have a public life […] and that you can have your private life. And my mistake was certainly to believe that you can have these two things together without any connection between. I was wrong. It was wrong because people are not expecting this kind of behavior from somebody having a public responsibility" (Sebastian, 2013). In addition, as discussed earlier, the mortification strategy he applied later in France was out of step with cultural mores and expectations.

These two cases illustrate more than anything that the effectiveness of image restoration discourse must vary across cultures. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) state that "we need to fit in, to behave in ways that are acceptable to the groups we belong to" (p. 13). Messages must be tailored to meet the audience's needs and expectations. Image restoration strategies must always take into account the particularities of the given culture the individual is addressing and adapt to them – otherwise, failure is guaranteed.

Limitations to the Study

Despite the similarities in the political stature of Edwards and DSK, each case is unique, making it difficult to establish a fair comparison. Both men occupied prominent positions when they were hit by scandal. Their status was in fact very similar, since they were both aspiring to win the primaries of their respective parties in order to run for the presidency. However, the fact that DSK was also the head of an international organization made him the focus of global attention. Edwards' case, on the other hand, remained of interest to the U.S. audience only. Besides, the fact that DSK's scandal

happened in a foreign country makes his case particularly complex, since he had to navigate cultural norms in the United States as well as in his native France, and challenging for the study of cross-cultural communication as it applies to image restoration. Asymmetries between cases, on the other hand, represent a common challenge in comparative analysis.

None of the two men embarked in a full-fledged campaign to restore their image. On the contrary, they kept a low profile, making few, largely-isolated public declarations. As a result, the texts to analyze were particularly scarce and distanced in time, and may not supply enough data to identify long-term behavioral trends. Further analysis of the image restoration strategies they used is also lacking, probably because the events are too recent. No author has provided an analysis of Edwards' tactics to date. In the case of DSK, Xifra is the only author who has examined the strategies he used on French public television in 2011. The absence of evidence in the area of image restoration analysis of the strategies used by both men represents an important limitation, while at the same time makes the study more relevant as it fills an existing gap in image restoration research.

There is also a void in the area of cross-cultural analysis applied to image restoration. Most studies to date are highly ethnocentric, assuming that Benoit's typology is universal and will work in every country, regardless of cultural idiosyncrasies. García (2011), Haruta and Kallahan, (2003), Taylor (2000), and Wertz and Kim (2010) warned communication and culture are inextricably connected, and one cannot exist without the other. Culture determines the way publics think, and as such cannot be ignored when planning a crisis management campaign. Few authors have applied Hofstede's model of

cultural differences to Benoit's typology of image restoration strategies. Again, the present study comes to fill in that gap.

Finally, the researcher may be subject to her own cultural upbringing and not be completely objective when conducting thematic analysis. In the absence of similar studies against which findings may be run, cultural bias may have played a role in the conclusions reached by this study.

Implications for Future Research

Understanding cultural nuances is vital to survive in an increasingly globalized world. This principle applies to multinational corporations and public figures alike, which often need to respond to highly heterogeneous publics across cultures. Intercultural communication is an expanding area in the field of public relations. However, there is still a gap in the area of cross-cultural analysis applied to image restoration. This study advocates the role of culture in crisis management and encourages further research across cultures in order to put an end to ethnocentric biases in the area of image restoration.

In an increasingly transparent media environment, hunger for news about the private lives of politicians has been on the rise, fueled by social media and the expansion of the Internet. Future research should further investigate the evolution in media coverage of political figures. Of primary interest is the influence social media and new technologies may play on the perception of political figures and on media coverage of their electoral campaigns and private lives. In France, the DSK affair has triggered a debate concerning the well-established principle of *omertá*, which restrains journalists from airing details belonging to politicians' private lives. It would be interesting to learn whether this exercise of introspection on the part of the French media will bring about a more

profound transformation, one that would question the respect for privacy that dominates French journalism and would spark a revolution that would bring the French and Anglo-Saxon journalistic cultures closer together. French society has been equally oblivious of their politicians' private lives, which have never constituted a decisive electoral criterion. Future research should explore whether the DSK affair has prompted a more drastic transformation in this regard, and whether Europeans will become more wary about their public officials' private behavior, to the point that it may influence electoral results the way it does in the United States.

Future research may also explore the reasons that determine why some politicians succeed in their efforts at image repair while others are never able to recover. Schneider (2001) maintains that being in power constitutes a determinant for success. It may be worth exploring whether publics are in fact more willing to forgive those who already occupy positions of power at the time the scandal hits, whereas for aspiring candidates scandal usually represents the end of their political career.

A final question remains that should be considered by future research: the political future of Edwards and DSK. It would be interesting to know whether they will launch a full-fledged image restoration campaign in the future, and whether they will be able to rebuild their reputations and eventually revive their political careers and run for a public position.

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