Crisis of Faith: Same-Sex Sex Scandals, Evangelicalism, and Crisis Management

Cylor A. Spaulding

University of Miami, cylor.spaulding@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations

Recommended Citation
https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/1094

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
CRISIS OF FAITH: SAME-SEX SEX SCANDALS, EVANGELICALISM AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

By

Cylor A. Spaulding

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

December 2013
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

CRISIS OF FAITH: SAME-SEX SEX SCANDALS, EVANGELICALISM AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Cylor A. Spaulding

Approved:

Shannon B. Campbell, Ph.D. Thomas M. Steinfatt, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Communication Professor of Communication

Donn J. Tilson, Ph.D. M. Brian Blake, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Communication Dean of the Graduate School

Richard Godbeer, Ph.D.
Professor of History
This research examines the crisis responses of six evangelical leaders (Paul Crouch, Ted Haggard, Lonnie Latham, Eddie Long, Jonathan Merritt, and George Rekers) involved in same-sex sex scandals. These cases provide unique opportunities for evaluating crisis communication strategies utilized by influential leaders in the evangelical Christian community. Using the modes of apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973) and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) as a standard to evaluate the leaders’ crisis responses, this qualitative research found that the evangelical pastors generally adhered to the recommended strategies of the SCCT and complementary modes of apologia. However, this paper also recommends the inclusion of an additional SCCT category for situations where a crisis inflicts spiritual or emotional harm. The pastors’ reaction statements were subjected to a textual analysis, and then their overall crisis responses were analyzed for effectiveness using a content analysis from a sample of media outlets, including each pastor’s local daily newspaper and the top four Christian media websites (Alexa, n.d.), as well as a determination as to whether their marriages had remained intact and they had retained their official positions with their churches/organizations. Latham, Rekers, and Haggard were determined to be relatively ineffective in their responses, largely due to their inconsistent response strategy.
Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the members of his committee, Shannon Campbell, Donn Tilson, Thomas Steinfatt, and Richard Godbeer, for their tireless efforts in reviewing early drafts of this dissertation and their advice as this piece progressed into a finished paper. Additional thanks go to the graduate school and the dissertation editors at the University of Miami. Lastly, the author would like to thank his parents, John and Anne, and partner, Yoandry, for being a sounding board for ideas and allowing him the opportunity to vent his frustrations.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY ................................................................. 1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................. 15
3. RESEARCH METHOD ................................................................................. 56
4. RESULTS .................................................................................................. 69
5. CONCLUSION ............................................................................................ 143

## References ............................................................................................ 150

## Appendix

A. REACTION STATEMENT CODEBOOK ......................................................... 171
B. CODING SHEET FOR REACTION STATEMENT ......................................... 177
C. ARTICLES CODEBOOK ............................................................................. 179
D. ARTICLES CODING SHEET ....................................................................... 182
E. REACTION STATEMENTS ........................................................................... 183
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Recently, there has been increasing media coverage devoted to religious leaders in the U.S. embroiled in same-sex sex scandals. Though the sex abuse scandals of the Catholic Church are likely top-of-mind for many people, as they have dragged on for the better part of the 2000s, several prominent evangelical Christian pastors were also covered extensively for their own sex scandals. The media attention given to these leaders in crisis, such as Ted Haggard and Eddie Long, can be attributed to a confluence of several key factors in the U.S.: the rising prominence of the evangelical movement over the latter part of the 20th Century, culminating in the Bush (2000-2008) presidential administration’s close relationship with evangelical leaders; the evangelical movement’s avid use of media to promote its concerns and proselytize; and the evangelical movement’s direct conflict with the equally vocal gay rights movement over the last several decades. Since all the evangelical pastors included in this research had national visibility both within and outside of the evangelical Christian community, and they were known to be unsupportive of gay rights, their scandals’ high visibility was prolonged by extensive attention from the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) media—particularly bloggers. Despite the high visibility of many evangelical pastors and their affiliated churches and organizations, only limited research has been conducted on how they manage crises and none has examined same-sex sex scandals. Thus, this research aims to contribute to the scholarship of crisis communication, particularly as it relates to religious entities and individuals. To ground this research, the crisis communications campaigns of the evangelical leaders involved in same-sex sex scandals (Paul Crouch, Ted Haggard, Lonnie Latham, Eddie Long, Jonathan Merritt, and George Rekers) were
examined against the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and modes of apologia to
determine if they utilized recommended crisis communication methods and measure the
effectiveness of their recovery strategies.

To gain perspective on the evangelical movement and this research it is important
to understand the religious landscape of the United States. Though the U.S. can be
considered a culturally diverse society, populated by immigrants and their descendants, it
is harder to see it as a religiously diverse nation. As of 2010, 78.3 percent of Americans
considered themselves Christian, whereas less than one percent claimed to be Muslim or
Hindu, slightly more than one percent were Buddhist, almost two percent considered
themselves Jewish, and more than 16 percent claimed to be unaffiliated with any religion
(The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012a). Though there are prominent
communities of people throughout the country who follow all of the major religions,
Christianity still leads the way in terms of the number of adherents within the U.S.,
followed by those who profess no adherence to any faith. Of those who consider
themselves Christian, more than 48 percent are Protestant (The Pew Forum on Religion
and Public Life, 2012b). Evangelicals make up the largest portion of Protestants,
representing 19 percent of Americans (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life,
2012b). One caveat to these findings is that belief can be detached from action, since
other studies (Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1998; U.S. membership report: Religious
traditions, 2010; Brenner, 2011) have determined that American church attendance is
over-reported and individuals claiming to believe in a particular denomination may not in
fact attend services often, if ever. Regardless of whether people attend services, the fact
that they identify themselves with a particular denomination means that they are likely to adhere to a significant portion of its ideals.

But why are these statistics important? The more prominent and pervasive a religion is, the higher the likelihood it will influence the legislative agenda of lawmakers either in an explicit or implicit way. Within the 112th U.S. Congress (2011-2012) there were 299 Protestant members and 163 Catholics, who accounted for 86.7 percent of Congress, while other legislators professing adherence to other religions, including Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and other non-Christian faiths, numbered only 39 or 7.4 percent (Miller, 2013). The percentage of members of Congress adhering to a particular faith generally equates to the percent of the general American population holding those beliefs with one exception: making up six percent of Congress, the number of Jewish legislators equals three times the Jewish population in the U.S. (Miller, 2013). Since the composition of Congress so closely mirrors the religious makeup of the country, it is clear that Protestant Christians have the single largest influence in politics on a national level. As a sizable population within Protestantism in the U.S., evangelical Christians represent a significant voting block for conservative politicians who typically target them on the basis of values. Evangelicals in the U.S. lean heavily Republican, with 70 percent saying they are registered with or favor the GOP and only 24 percent expressing favor or registration with the Democratic Party (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012c). Evangelicals are one of the few religious groups whose membership has actually increased over the last few decades and so their identification with a particular party can significantly swell the party ranks and provide it with a larger voter base. In the 2004 presidential election, 78 percent of evangelicals voted for George W. Bush and were
crucial to his win; for example, he won the evangelical stronghold state of Ohio by only 120,000 votes (Williams, 2010), lending credence to the belief that evangelicals were key to Bush’s election. The realization of the power of the Christian Right led both parties to make overtures to that voting bloc in recent years. Though the Democrats made some small overtures to evangelicals in the past, the 2008 election saw them make even more significant attempts to win their vote by having candidate Barack Obama meet with influential evangelical leaders like Rick Warren to discuss his faith and standing on moral issues (Williams, 2010). Democratic leaders have been careful about courting the Christian Right vote, however, as some stances of many evangelicals, such as their opposition to gay marriage and abortion, stand in direct opposition to existing key constituency groups of the party.

Though there are still a majority of Americans professing to be Protestant, that majority is slim and faces an increasing threat from those who acknowledge no adherence to any faith. According to a recent Pew study (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012b), the “nones,” representing atheists, agnostics and those who have no particular faith represent almost 20 percent of U.S. adults. Though some of the “nones” may express a belief in a higher power, they are not looking to affiliate themselves with any religion and largely say this is because they think religious organizations are “…too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics” (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012b, p. 10). What is particularly noteworthy about these statistics is the fact that almost 30 percent of the “nones” are under 30, which could be indicative of waning membership and influence for religious organizations in the years to come, especially since the survey indicated a five
percent increase in unaffiliated adults in the last five years (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012b). As the evangelical voting bloc continues to rise and be consistently Republican, the “nones” are also rising and becoming increasingly affiliated with the Democratic Party. Currently, 63 percent of the religiously unaffiliated lean toward or are members of the Democratic Party, and 26 percent identify with the GOP (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012b). The statistics on the “nones” illustrate an almost exact contrast to the political party breakdown of the evangelicals, and with both groups increasing steadily over the last few decades, neither can be ignored by politicians. Similarly, both groups’ positions on social issues reflect alignments with both parties, with the religiously unaffiliated overwhelmingly supporting issues like gay marriage and abortion rights, while the majority of evangelicals express disapproval on both issues.

As the power of the evangelicals rises, the prominence and influence of evangelical leaders increases as well. Pastors can be extremely influential within their congregations and local community, and some use their influence to advocate for a particular political candidate, despite the danger this places on their church’s tax-exempt status. Many pastors, however, view political activism in the pulpit as inappropriate and only 10 percent of Protestant pastors approve of endorsing candidates in the pulpit, while 14 percent of evangelical pastors approve of this practice (Pipes, 2012). Although many pastors refuse to involve themselves in politics, others (televangelists and those leading mega-churches, for example) are not always so reticent. Though some pastors waded into politics unsuccessfully in the early 20th Century, significant involvement of evangelical pastors in politics began with Billy Graham and his involvement with the
1952 presidential campaign of Dwight Eisenhower, though he did not officially issue a straightforward endorsement of a presidential candidate until Richard Nixon (Williams, 2010). Many prominent pastors have since used their influence to promote candidates they see as aligned with their social agenda. Notably, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell rose to be leaders of their own congregations and influence world opinion through other means, such as Robertson’s *The 700 Club*, a syndicated Christian news/talk show, and Falwell’s Moral Majority, a conservative Christian lobbying organization.

Reports differ about the actual audience for the televangelists, since their programs are often distributed worldwide. There is no argument that networks like the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) do have a sizable audience, but the true power of the evangelists lies in the broad spectrum of avenues they have to proselytize, lobby government officials, and train the next generation of evangelical leaders. For example, Robertson’s enterprises are comprised of CBN, Regent University, and CBN Publishing, allowing him to reach influencers on multiple levels by owning the delivery systems for the products he creates (Frankl, 1998), while Falwell’s influence can still be seen both through Liberty University and the Moral Majority, despite his death in 2007. Additionally, even those evangelical pastors who do not preside over media empires or think tanks, still hold considerable sway within their congregations and communities. As of 2011, Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas boasts more than 40,000 members, and the second largest evangelical church in the U.S., North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia, has more than 25,000 members (Outreach Magazine, 2011). The combined size of these two churches is larger than some small American cities, and even excludes the audience the pastors
reach through broadcasts of their services, books they publish, and other media outreach they undertake.

Given the amount of influence evangelical pastors have with their parishioners, the community, and a broader worldwide audience, they can be influential and powerful; however, the more prominent they are, the more dramatic it is when they become embroiled in scandal. Though many of the scandals the evangelists experience are tied to money--Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker are two prominent examples of this--, others involve heterosexual extramarital affairs as was the case with noted evangelist Marcus Lamb (Shan, 2010). Both are sins in the eyes of the church. In theory, evangelicals believe that no sin is worse than another; however, pastors involved in gay sex scandals may fare worse than those involved other types of scandals.

It is only relatively recently that Christianity has begun to identify homosexuality specifically as a sin. In the early years of the Christian Church, homosexuality was not particularly singled out as being more sinful than other non-procreative sex; thus, masturbation, bestiality, sodomy, and recreational heterosexual sex were all encompassed in this concept (Sands, 2007; Boswell, 1979). Up until the 12th Century there was general acceptance of same-sex love, and some prominent religious figures like St. Aelred even advocated in favor of monks following the examples of Jesus and St. John and loving one another passionately, and there were popular poems and songs that similarly spoke openly of same-sex attraction (Boswell, 1979; Crompton, 2003). Beginning in the 13th Century, sex between members of the same gender began to be condemned as one of the worst sins—more as a result of popular opinion than biblical
teachings--, though the actual term “homosexual” was not in common use until the late 19th Century (Boswell, 1979).

It is from these roots that evangelical Christianity’s stance on homosexuality has evolved. Many evangelical pastors take definitive stances against homosexuality, typically using the Bible verse in Leviticus that admonishes a man not to lie with another man as with a woman (Hartman, 1996), leading their congregants to the conclusion that homosexuality is to be frowned upon, while emphasizing that homosexuality is a sexual choice like watching pornography or having an extramarital affair (Chavez, 2004). Romans 1:26-28 is also often used to condemn homosexuality, and it is the only passage in the Bible that references lesbianism as well (Blount, 1996). The evangelical interpretation of these Bible verses assumes both that homosexuality is freely chosen and that the purpose of sex is procreative, so any other type of sex is unnatural (Blount, 1996). As such, it is important to understand that conservative Christians do not view homosexuality as an identity; rather they view it as a voluntary, sinful behavior that undermines society (Sands, 2007). The National Association of Evangelicals’ (NAE) position on homosexuality is relatively consistent with the majority of evangelical churches in the U.S. The platform the NAE adopted in 2004 states that:

We believe that homosexuality is not an inherited condition in the same category as race, gender, or national origin, all of which are free from moral implication...While homosexuals as individuals are entitled to civil rights, including equal protection of the law, the NAE opposes legislation which would extend special consideration to such individuals based on their “sexual orientation”...We should accept them into fellowship upon confession of faith and repentance, as we would any other forgiven sinner (I Corinthians 6:11). We further call upon pastors and theologians, along with medical and sociological specialists with the Christian community to expand research on the factors which give rise to homosexuality and to develop therapy, pastoral care and congregational support leading to
Many evangelical churches hold the same view as the NAE with regard to homosexuality—essentially denying the idea that homosexuality is both inherent and a legitimate identity. Instead, the NAE and similar groups view homosexuality as a sinful behavior and, as such, it can be changed, which also indicates that the term homosexual in an evangelical context refers to the actions of the person rather than an identity. For this reason, many evangelicals seek the conversion of homosexuals to heterosexuals or request celibacy of them, which would allow them to be “forgiven” by God.

Additionally, the view of homosexuality as a behavior instead of a genetic predisposition enables evangelicals to declare that no additional rights should be granted to the LGBT community. Despite this rejection of the LGBT community as legitimate, many evangelical denominations strongly condemn violence against the homosexuals; for example, a resolution of the Southern Baptist Convention with regard to homosexuality states that while the denomination condemns homosexual behavior, it also deplores any violence against anyone relating to the issue of homosexuality (Southern Baptist Convention, 2010). Some evangelicals do take a more active approach to lobbying against it. Groups like the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family actively campaign against legislation supporting gay rights, while others may protest outside of gay pride festivals or establish reparative therapy clinics to attempt to counsel homosexuals away from their lifestyle. This type of activity may seem somewhat counterintuitive for organizations that enjoy freedom of religion and expression, but, as was cited earlier by Sands (2007), evangelicals view homosexuality as sinful to both individuals engaged in the sexual acts as well as the larger community. Additionally,
some evangelicals feel their faith and values are being threatened by the LGBT movement (Cheng, 2010). These two factors enable some evangelicals to rationalize protesting homosexuality and attempting to convert some gays and lesbians—they are operating under the notion that they are saving the homosexuals from harming themselves and society through their “sin,” while also saving their own lifestyle from the threat of same-sex marriage.

These positions against homosexuality have also become less strident and biblically focused since the 1960s, and many of the evangelical elites now appeal to science, medicine and the pathological/dysfunctional nature of homosexuality when arguing against it (Thomas & Olson, 2012). Though these arguments take a slightly different tack than the recitation of Bible passages, the arguments still maintain that homosexuality is abnormal, unnatural, and against nature. Even these arguments from a scientific angle, however, are consistent with the evangelical idea that homosexuality is a learned behavior, and therefore it is completely voluntary and can be changed (Johnston, n.d.). Thus, though the evangelicals’ arguments against homosexuality have evolved to include a scientific angle, what is particularly highlighted by the evangelical elites is the idea that science cannot yet explain the origin of homosexuality, so it must be a learned not innate behavior. These teachings lay the foundation of the evangelical congregations’ views toward homosexuality and help to form their reaction to a pastor who might be involved in a gay sex scandal.

Evangelical Christians are not unique in having a position against homosexuality. Conservative branches of many of the world’s major religions have admonitions against homosexual activities. Orthodox Judaism condemns homosexuality using many of the
same arguments Christianity uses, including citing Leviticus 18:22 in the Torah, but some Jewish scholars and rabbis argue that the Torah only prohibits intercourse between people of the same sex, and does not condemn the people or the thoughts unless they act upon them (Moss & Ulmer, 2008). Regardless of whether homosexual thoughts are considered a sin, within the Orthodox community there is little argument that same-sex intercourse is immoral, but this stance differs from that of the Conservative and Reform Judaism movements, both of which ordain homosexuals as rabbis and have some rabbis who agree to perform same-sex weddings (Shapiro, 2013). Islam’s edicts against homosexuality are derived from similar sources as Christianity’s and Judaism’s, including the story about Sodom and Gomorrah and its immoral inhabitants, but these strictures are further reinforced for conservative Muslims by admonitions from the Prophet Muhamad that men and women should not sleep under one cover or look at the private parts of those of the same sex (Beckers, 2009). These strictures enable modern, conservative Muslims to declare homosexuals to be sinners, mainly because homosexuality is thought to undermine society and alienate an individual from God; however, historically, Islam was not as rigid in its punishments of homosexuality as Judaism and Christianity, and it was often only punished if it became a “public nuisance” (Beckers, 2009; Bereket & Adam, 2008). Hinduism has a mixed attitude toward homosexuality. It was known to medieval Indian societies and is even documented in some Hindu texts like the Kama Sutra. Additionally, Hinduism contains instances of androgyny on the part of the deities, and the Hijra and the Sakhibhava sects include gender reversal and homosexual prostitution as part of their sacred practices. Since the British colonization of India, however, homophobia has also become part of the Indian and Hindu culture through public taboos
against discussion of homosexuality and claims from Hindu nationalists in India that the British brought homosexuality to India and it represents the corruption of society (Dynes & Donaldson, 1992; Bacchetta, 1999). Though Buddhism is generally thought to be the most tolerant of the major religions toward homosexuality, some conservative Buddhists utilize Buddhist texts to denounce it, since it is condemned in the vinaya code (the disciplinary code for monks) and the Buddha forbade ordaining men who lack conventional qualities of maleness (Numrich, 2009). These admonitions against particular types of men or homosexual activity are directed toward monks, and Buddhist lay people are only generally warned against sexual misconduct. In addition, the law of karma does not punish homosexual acts of misconduct more severely than heterosexual ones, which helps to explain why some American Buddhist ministers began performing same-sex marriages in the 1970s (Numrich, 2009; Wilson, 2012).

Many Christian denominations have stances against homosexuality, but few are as firm about that position as those churches that identify as evangelical. A recent survey indicated that 64 percent of evangelicals thought homosexuality should be discouraged by society, compared to 40 percent of Americans nationwide—only Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses expressed more anti-gay sentiments than evangelicals (The Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, 2008). Though very few evangelicals consider themselves diametrically opposed to the anti-homosexuality stance of the faith, some have muted their stance into one of welcoming gay parishioners but not approving of their lifestyle, while some gay evangelicals have started organizations like Soulforce to combat the idea that homosexuals are sinners and to fight for them to remain a part of the evangelical community (Banerjee, 2006). Despite the select few in the evangelical
community who take a more tolerant stance, the overall implications for those leaders implicated in same-sex sex scandals can be severe, including excommunication, loss of position and employment, and loss of social network and other dire consequences. Whether or not the allegations against the pastors are true matter little for the impact on their reputation amongst their parishioners and in the public arena.

As thought leaders for the evangelical communities, the pastors have reinforced the foundations of their parishioners’ beliefs on moral issues, including those relating to sexual morality. Thus, the cases of same-sex sex scandals amongst evangelical pastors provide a unique opportunity for evaluating crisis communication strategies utilized by influential leaders in which they must reconcile their actions with the teachings they advocated and by which their followers are judging them. Similarly, the aspect of religion and the unique characteristics of managing the crisis with audiences who implicitly trust the person implicated in the scandal introduce unique factors into the crisis communication literature and studies of apologia. Thus, this study seeks to examine the socio political implications of evangelical leaders caught engaging in same-sex acts and the strategies they use to recover from the scandal. The author uses the established crisis communication studies of apologia to examine the spoken rhetoric of the evangelical leaders in response to the crisis and the framework of the SCCT to understand and evaluate the framing devices the church and the pastor utilized to manage the scandal. Additionally, since religion incorporates a unique factor into understanding crisis communication in these cases, the foundational elements of evangelicalism and the gay rights movement are explored to create an overall understanding of the crisis management techniques utilized by the personalities and the organizations they represent.
with regard to these specific cases. This paper examines several instances of pastors involved in same-sex sex scandals, the tones and messages in their sermons, their methods of apology, what the outcome of the scandal was (to understand if recovery from such a crisis is possible), and what strategies they employed and why.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Thought leadership**

Thought leaders in the U.S. have long been important in leading and affecting change. In the traditionally accepted definition, a thought leader is a person or an entity that is recognized as a foremost authority on an issue, resulting in the leader becoming a go-to source for information relating to the topic. As a subfield of study within the public relations discipline, thought leadership is often also thought of in combination with opinion leadership. This type of thinking is evident in articles in the industry trade magazines like PR Week (LaMotta, 2006; Littleton, 2006), which refer to thought leaders in terms of authorities on a subject who can share views and educated opinions with journalists and others in their respective industry. Outside of public relations, the study of opinion leadership stands apart from the study of thought leadership, but within the public relations industry, it informs the concept of a thought leader.

One of the earliest opinion leadership theories, the two-step flow of communication, postulated that there are a small group of influential opinion leaders who disseminate information from the media to the general public, thus becoming influencers (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This two-step theory countered the earlier hypodermic needle model of communication, which had proposed that media directly “shot” information into the minds of the audience (Bineham, 1988). The two-step flow idea of opinion leaders as gateways of information to the public was progressed further with its inclusion into the research surrounding the “diffusion of innovations” (Watts & Dodds, 2007). The diffusion of innovations theory explicates how the spread of new concepts or practices
occur within a society and from community to community, with the idea that interpersonal communication is the driving force in their adoption (Valente & Davis, 1999). Rogers (2003) popularized the theory, and both his research and other diffusion scholars (Valente & Davis, 1999) have indicated that encouraging role models (opinion leaders) within each society to adopt ideas or practices is a key factor to achieving community-wide behavior change or acceptance.

In business, thought leaders significantly benefit financially from their roles and can be paid even more for information and work, since they are deemed experts in their field (Prince & Rogers, 2012). Within a company, thought leaders can also arise, however, they are more concerned with the championing of new ideas within the company in order to position it advantageously within its sector to capitalize on a new industry need (McCrimmon, 2005). Similarly, academics and scientists can become leaders in their fields through extensive publication of papers in peer-reviewed journals, and a large number of publications can indicate their role as a “discovery leader” in that field through their contribution to the progression of knowledge in that field (Klavans & Boyack, 2008). Both thought leaders from business and academia can parlay their status into high profile roles within government, either as elected officials or within various government agencies that relate to their field.

Elmo Roper’s Concentric Circle Theory (as cited in Robertson, 1967) illustrates this concept of thought leadership as it explains how ideas can spread from thought leaders to other segments, or circles, of the population. In Roper’s theory, he suggests that ideas disseminate slowly throughout society before they are adopted by the general public (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2002). These ideas slowly permeate through various groups
as they flow outward until they reach the majority of the public (70%) who reside in the outermost circle and are labeled the “Politically Inert” (Robertson, 1967). The circular, outward flow of ideas originates from the core group to each subsequent group in the following fashion: “Great Thinkers” to “Great Disciples” to “Great Disseminators” to “Lesser Disseminators” to “Politically Active,” and finally to “Politically Inert” (Tilson, 2006). Each of these “circles” is influenced by the one before it, and they then influence their peers within the same group and those in the next connecting circle. Those who would be considered a “Great Thinker” would depend on the group being analyzed, but in the context of evangelical Christians, this group would likely include Jesus and his disciples, while, depending on the influence of the pastors, they could be considered to be either “Great Thinkers” or “Great Disciples.” Some of the more influential pastors with exceptionally devoted parishioners could be considered to be “Great Thinkers” within their spheres of influence, since they set the modes of thinking for their followers.

Even outside of their congregations, religious leaders have long fulfilled the role of thought leaders in American society. In the latter part of the 20th Century, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. became the symbol of the Civil Rights Movement and Billy Graham shared confidences with virtually all the U.S. presidents from Dwight Eisenhower through George W. Bush and managed to hold conferences/revivals that filled Madison Square Garden to capacity. Recently, other clergy like Rick Warren have participated in the inauguration of President Obama and contributed to the national debate on abortion, birth control and gay marriage. Pastors can play a large role in shaping national opinions by first helping their congregations form attitudes and opinions on given issues. Particularly in evangelical churches, the lack of adherence to procedural
rules by the congregation, the disdain for dissent, and the apathy of membership allow for the role of democracy to be usurped by the pastor, who is then held in high regard by the members (Ingram, 1981). Though Protestant Christianity is supposed to adhere to democratic principles and deny any special status to the clergy (Harvey, 1970), the congregation often does convey this status upon the clergy. As a result, the clergy are largely able to maintain their authority and role as the thought leaders for their congregation unless the members become disillusioned with them and something mars the idea that a pastor is religiously superior or that he/she is following exemplary ethics (Ingram, 1981).

With the support of their congregation, pastors can take on an increasingly powerful leadership role on the national stage. Additionally, with the advent of Christian media, many religious thought leaders like Pat Robertson can consider their congregation to be in the hundreds of thousands, though many of them will not be in the same geographic area as the televangelist. These national congregations have increased the importance of the ministers in politics and as go-to individuals to gain a religious stamp of approval for candidates. According to Jelen (1994), evangelical pastors see their role as one of representing Christ to their congregation and the larger world and reinforcing the importance of Christ in individuals’ lives to prevent moral decline. Just as Billy Graham was hesitant to endorse a political candidate (Williams, 2010), many evangelical pastors also try to refrain from political endorsements, but they will provide cues to congregants and speak about moral issues (e.g. abortion) that are at play in a campaign (Jelen, 1994). Graham’s hesitancy to endorse a candidate spawned from his desire to bring the political parties together and be able to counsel presidents and members of
either side of the political spectrum (Gibbs & Duffy, 2007); however, other pastors in the U.S. are reluctant to endorse candidates for fear of the potential ramifications for their church through revocation of its non-profit status by the Internal Revenue Service (Samansky, 2007). By discussing which candidate has which stance on moral issues relevant to evangelicals, the pastors can effect an endorsement of a candidate without explicitly endorsing them; thus, high profile pastors can rationalize a political endorsement as an attempt to follow God’s will. Clergy are most likely to address the issues of homosexuality/gay rights and school prayer, though they may be apt to discuss other moral issues with their individual congregations (Uecker & Lucke, 2011). Willingness to speak publicly about these moral issues makes it understandable why the media often use prominent clergy as a conservative counterpoint for a discussion on a moral issue and gives credence to the idea that they are thought leaders for some of the American public.

The Evangelical and Religious Right Movement

The evolution of evangelical clergy to the thought leaders many people consider them today was not sudden, and their role in this capacity has been carefully crafted since the evangelical movement began. In order to understand the status evangelical leaders have and how they achieved it, the history of the movement must be explored in some depth.

The modern evangelical movement has its roots in the fundamentalist movement of the late 1910s and early 1920s, which adhered to what its members considered fundamental principles of the Bible like biblical inerrancy and the Virgin Birth
Williams, 2010). Arising out of its adherents’ desire to preserve decency in American society, the fundamentalist ideology maintained a literal belief of everything in the Bible, which was thought to provide followers with the strict rules for living a moralistic life. The term “fundamentalist” is derived from series of articles by religious leaders published between 1910 and 1915 called *The Fundamentals*; these articles laid out doctrines the leaders considered essential to following Christianity (Carpenter, 1980). Modern evangelicalism originated from the precepts of fundamentalism, but it is identified today by its adherents’ belief in the truth of everything in the Bible with the caveat that some of it may be symbolic and metaphorical and may need to be interpreted (Harris, 1998). The fundamentalists of the 1920s dabbled in politics with limited success, since various fundamentalists backed different political parties, none of which were responsive to the fundamentalist demands (Williams, 2010). Ultimately, the repeal of Prohibition, the resulting tumult around the Scopes Trial, and internal struggles over Biblical reinterpretation in Protestant churches caused fundamentalists to retreat from politics for a time and become somewhat isolationist by concentrating on forming independent fundamentalist churches separate from the Protestant mainstream (Martin, 1996; Williams, 2010). Though fundamentalism retreated from politics, it did not disappear from the public sphere, and its pastors continued to increase their influence through a successful utilization of radio. The highest profile show, Charles Fuller’s *Old-Fashioned Revival Hour*, was broadcast on 152 stations and was heard by ten million listeners in 1939 (Martin, 1996). Since radio had proved so successful for the fundamentalist preachers, it was no surprise that it also proved to be the catalyst for their reemergence in politics in the form of a battle with networks who were restricting their
purchase of airtime. This battle resulted in the fundamentalists lobbying the Federal Communications Commission for protection of preachers’ broadcasting rights (Williams, 2010). Around this same time, a group of reformers within the fundamentalist churches, rejecting the isolationism fundamentalists endorsed, coordinated the organization of a network of Protestant churches apart from the secular world that adhered to a similarly strict fundamentalist theology, forming the first incarnation of the NAE (Fetner, 2008).

Unlike the more prominent fundamentalists of the 1920s, the leaders of the NAE did not shy away from politics. Almost immediately, the organization created the National Religious Broadcasters Association, which was successful in gaining federal protection for evangelical preachers’ broadcasting rights, and, ultimately, in convincing the FCC to allow broadcasters’ to count paid religious broadcasts as public service time, which laid the groundwork for the Christian media empires that still exist today (Williams, 2010). The NAE also fought other battles on various fronts like restricting liquor advertising, but it was not able to integrate itself firmly into politics until it took up the government’s cause of fighting against communism in the 1940 and 1950s. From shortly after its formation in 1943, the NAE began making its anti-communism stance known by declaring that its rival organization, the Federal Council of Churches, was ignoring the threat of communism (Williams, 2010). The anti-communist stance of the evangelicals was reinforced by their adherence to the concept of prophetic dualism, which views the world as divided into two sides, and is articulated as the following:

One side acts in accord with all that is good, decent, and at one with God’s will. The other acts in direct opposition. Conflict between them is resolved only through the total victory of one side over the other. Since no guarantee exists that good will triumph, there is no middle ground (Wander, 1984, p. 342).
With this concept in mind, evangelicals felt they had no choice but to combat communism, and they saw missionary activity and the spreading of the Gospel of Christianity as the first line of defense against it (Wald, 1994). With these ideas backing their actions, the NAE and other evangelicals joined in the fight against communism. Though the evangelicals initially aligned themselves with both Democrats and Republicans, by the 1950s President Truman’s unwillingness to involve the U.S. in aiding the Nationalist government in China against Mao Zedong’s Communist takeover, and the resulting expulsion of Christian missionaries there caused the NAE to throw its support behind stridently anti-communist Republicans like Joseph McCarthy and largely forego working with the Democrats (Williams, 2010).

Around this same time, evangelicals began building their own media networks, as Fetner (2008) puts it, because of their “…distrust of corrupting secular influences” (p. 5). These radio stations and shows complemented other infrastructures that evangelicals had built in the form of missionary organizations and seminaries like the Moody Bible Institute. From 1920s to the 1960s, radio was the backbone of Christian media, and it was largely dominated by evangelical preachers. Many mainstream Protestant denominations relied on free broadcast time donated by the stations rather than using donations from members to pay for airtime (Schultze, 1988); however, once the NAE convinced the FCC to allow paid religious broadcasts in lieu of public service time in 1960, the evangelicals strengthened their grip on religious broadcasting significantly, since they were willing to pay for airtime and the stations were eager to accept payment for public service time. The advent of television also provided an opportunity for evangelical broadcasters, since it reduced the demand for advertising on radio networks,
leaving the networks with revenue holes to fill (Schultze, 1988). As a result, preachers like Fuller were able to gain syndication for their radio shows and reach an increasingly large regional and national audience.

Universities and colleges were also a cornerstone of the evangelical infrastructure, because they provided coordinating centers for the regional movements, produced missionaries to evangelize, and owned and operating significant media operations that promoted the evangelical cause (Dochuk, 2011). Southern California became the hub for many important evangelical schools, thanks, in part, to successful business moguls in the area who helped these operations, as George Pepperdine did for Pepperdine College (now university) (Dochuk, 2011). Many of the higher educational institutions in Southern California and elsewhere throughout the country became key components for expanding the media presence of the evangelical movement through media that they owned. Radio stations like KJS, which was owned by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA), also spread the evangelical message to the region, and they had sole control over the programming, which was an important factor, since sometimes commercially owned stations would reject evangelical programs (Carpenter, 1980). Simultaneously, colleges and universities helped evangelical organizations expand their presence in print media. These educational institutions ran both publishing and distributing organizations like the BIOLA Bookroom and magazines, such as Moody Bible Institute’s *The Moody Monthly*, which also served the dual purpose of promoting the schools to likely attendees (Carpenter, 1980).

All of the infrastructure built by evangelicals in the form of institutions of higher education, media outlets, and missionary organizations served them well in the coming
decades of the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s by raising the profile of the movement and ensuring its self-reliance in the face of any difficulties the movement would face. As the movement’s influence grew, so too did the prominence of its leaders. Though some of its leaders like Fuller experienced high visibility, Billy Graham represented the true power of the movement. In the 1950s, Graham’s influence could be seen through his TV shows and ability to hold events that would pack even Madison Square Garden, but his true influence could be seen in his close relationship with U.S. leaders. Thanks, in part, to William Randolph Hearst’s promotion of Graham in his publications, Graham became the darling of the NAE and evangelical movement, and he exerted a considerable amount of influence with U.S. presidents beginning with Dwight Eisenhower, and most of them turned to him for spiritual advice and thoughts on appealing to the evangelical constituency (Williams, 2010). Unlike many of his contemporaries, Graham was also a supporter of civil rights and even outreached to Martin Luther King, Jr. to try to establish a supportive relationship with the civil rights leader (Williams, 2010).

Graham, however, encountered resistance from many evangelical leaders on the issue of civil rights and desegregation. Many evangelicals were opposed to civil rights for several reasons: they opposed the civil rights leaders’ method of attempting to instigate social change on a systemic level rather than focusing on personal regeneration; they thought that taking a public stance on civil rights distracted from the Christian mission of preaching the gospel; and they believed in evangelicals’ concept of individualism (the idea that causes for social problems reside in individuals) (Evans, 2009). The issue of civil rights and racial integration was key to the continued involvement of evangelicals in politics through the 1950s and ‘60s, even as it threatened
to divide the movement. While Graham became an advisor and friend to President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon and spoke out in favor of civil rights, other prominent preachers like Jerry Falwell spoke about racial desegregation as a tool of the communists. By 1965, the issue of civil rights caused Graham to support cooperating with more liberal pastors who did not believe in the tenets of fundamentalism, while others like Falwell and John R. Rice disagreed with Graham’s practice of compromise; this disagreement caused yet another split between evangelical groups, with those allying themselves with Graham completely dropping the term “fundamentalist” from use, while Falwell and others embraced it (Moore, 1990; Williams, 2010). The split between the fundamentalists and evangelicals could truly be seen by their stances on social issues. Both sides’ stances on abortion was particularly illustrative of this as fundamentalists generally disapproved of abortion in all cases, while evangelicals were more likely to allow “therapeutic abortions” if the mother’s life was in danger and in instances of rape and incest—though they still generally condemned the idea of abortion (Wilcox, 1986; Williams, 2010).

Though the 1960s evangelical movement continued to be dominated by debate over the Civil Rights Movement and how African-Americans should approach the issue, if at all, the Vietnam War gave evangelicals another issue on which to focus their attention. Both the fundamentalists and the moderate evangelicals supported an escalation in the war effort on the part of the U.S. to prevent communism from spreading. During the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, Graham again found himself a confidant of the president, when his personal friend Richard Nixon was elected to the office. Because of Graham’s international reputation, Nixon found him particularly useful as an unofficial diplomat.
when an official ambassador may have not been successful (Martin, 1996). However, the Watergate scandal in 1972 soured their relationship significantly, as Graham first publicly stood by Nixon and affirmed he could not have been involved, before reluctantly admitting Nixon was involved and his disappointment in the president; this experience dampened Graham’s enthusiasm for working with politicians, and he did little other than maintain a friendly dialogue with subsequent presidents (Martin, 1996).

The 1970s led the evangelicals and their fundamentalist counterparts on a collision course with the feminist and gay rights movements, and a variety of conservative Christian organizations, including the John Birch Society, Tim LaHaye’s California League Enlisting Action Now (CLEAN), and Billy James Hargis’ Christian Crusade, all began campaigns to combat pornography and sex education in schools (Dochuk, 2011; Williams, 2010). Sex education in schools was a particularly important issue for fundamentalists, since they viewed it as a further assault on their values in the public school arena by the government, and they felt that this, coupled with the previous banning of prayer in schools, was leading to the country’s increasing secularization. As a result of all these factors, evangelicals and fundamentalists continued to involve themselves with politics and government, despite Graham’s warnings to the contrary, and many leaders like Falwell still idolized Nixon for the role he played in bringing together evangelicals and fundamentalists in a Christian Right voting bloc (Williams, 2010). The catalyst for the increasingly outspoken type of activism found in the Christian Right of the 1980s and beyond truly began in 1975 with the battle against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Though half of evangelical women supported ERA and only one-third opposed it (Wilcox, 1989), the anti-ERA group was consistently visible in the media
and within evangelical circles. Led by Catholic activist Phyllis Schafly and her anti-
feminist organization, the Eagle Forum, the anti-ERA movement united conservative
activists of various faiths to successfully defeat the amendment (Fetner, 2008).
Following the template utilized by Schafly, Anita Bryant took up the cause of repealing
the anti-discrimination ordinance for gays and lesbians in Miami-Dade County in 1977,
and what was initially designed as a local campaign by Bryant’s organization became a
national issue when LGBT activists decided to use the campaign as a rallying point for
gay rights activists around the country (Fetner, 2001).

Based on the victories of the anti-feminist and anti-gay movements of the late
1970s, the Christian Right was able to mobilize itself into even more powerful activist
movements. Mega-churches sprang into being in the beginning of the ‘80s, and with
their sizable congregations came influential pastors to lead them. Similarly, Christian
media had experienced an explosion throughout the ‘70s. Some of these Christian books,
such as The Late, Great Planet Earth by Hal Lindsey, even crossed into mainstream and
Tim LaHaye and other pastors had bestselling books published, Christian rock became a
sizable subgenre in the music industry, and three national television evangelical-owned
networks broadcast to more than 20 million American viewers (Williams, 2010). This
“parallel institutionalism” was unique in the fact that the Christian Right had effectively
created an industry that mimicked the mainstream media and entertainment industries but
reflected its own values and culture (Johnson E., 1998). Though the Christian Right saw
the Christian media as a way to preserve its moral and cultural values, they also saw it as
their duty to utilize this tool as a means of proselytizing and reaching across different
cultures (Schultze, 1987). The rise of Christian media and mega-churches also gave rise
to televangelism. While some pastors like Robert Schuller broadcast directly from their churches, others like Pat Robertson created shows to discuss topics and relate their views. Robertson’s *700 Club* was indicative of the latter format and discussed news topics from a conservative Christian viewpoint. Throughout the ‘80s, televangelists experienced a growing audience and influence, but the industry was rocked by the 1987 Jim Bakker embezzlement scandal and the 1988 Jimmy Swaggart sex scandal. As a result of the scandals, other major televangelists reduced their airtime buys on other networks and downsized their operations and subsequently experienced a more than 25 percent drop in donations (Frankl, 1998).

Aside from an increased Christian media presence, the late 1970s and 1980s also saw the formation and flourishing of a number of conservative Christian advocacy groups in what is called the New Christian Right movement. In creating these groups, “…the aim from the beginning was to mobilize a group of people (evangelicals and fundamentalists) who had traditionally avoided politics because they saw it as dirty, corrupt business” (Zwier, 1982, p. 9). One of the most high profile groups was Christian Voice. Created by Robert Grant in 1979, Christian Voice was a collaboration of several other Christian organizations and sought to fight gay rights, abortion and other issues evangelicals saw as anti-family values; the group also boasted a membership that included both evangelical leaders and conservative legislators, and actively promoted particularly candidates (Williams, 2010). The Moral Majority, founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979, had a similar purpose to Christian Voice, but while Christian Voice focused on lobbying, the Moral Majority focused on both a grassroots approach and advocating for certain sides of a political issue by conducting voter registration drives of evangelical
voters and speaking out on various issues to the public and legislators (Williams, 2010). Toward the end of the 1980s another crop of politically oriented Christian groups sprang up, of which the Christian Coalition was the best-known. The Christian Coalition was a collaboration between Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed and focused on both grassroots strategies for educating potential voters and backing and training candidates (Guth, Green, Kellstedt, & Smidt, 1996). The Coalition fulfilled the same roles as the Christian Voice and the Moral Majority and was incredibly successful at both. James Dobson’s Focus on the Family was slightly different from these other organizations in that the organization was a Christian media company that also actively engaged in political activities and generated its own studies to back up its political stances. The organization had a radio program that broadcast on 1,800 stations in the U.S., published several magazines, offered political training seminars for its subscribers and affiliates itself with research divisions focused on family policy and also had a lobbying division in Washington, D.C., which is now an independent lobbying group called the Family Research Council (Guth, Green, Kellstedt, & Smidt, 1996). With the exception of the Moral Majority, all of the aforementioned organizations are still operating today, and continue to exert influence with evangelicals and members of the New Christian Right. The president of the Family Research Council, Tony Perkins, is often called on by the media to discuss the issue of same-sex marriage.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the power of the evangelical Christians in the form of the New Christian Right has continued to rise. In 1997, Congressional Republicans attributed such power to James Dobson that 25 Representatives from Congress met with him privately when he accused them of failing to deliver on
promoting socially conservative legislation, and, as a result, they scheduled votes on
issues like a school prayer and partial birth abortions (Williams, 2010). The Christian
Right’s push into Congress continued with House Republicans creating the “Values
Action Team” in 1998 to push the Christian agenda, and the election of George W. Bush
to the presidency in 2000 further cemented the influence of evangelicals in government.
As a self-described “born-again” Christian, Bush helped embed the Christian Right even
further within the Republican Party and government through a variety of means, which
included hiring former Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed as a top
official on his 2004 reelection campaign, issuing an executive order that created faith-
based offices in ten federal agencies to make it easier for religious organizations to gain
access to federal funds, and refusing to allow continued federal funding for embryonic
stem cell research (Gilgoff, 2008). Bush’s appeal to the evangelical voting bloc was not
as uniform as it seemed, though, since the devout and less devout evangelicals had
markedly different priorities when voting.

Churchgoing evangelicals’ support is based substantially on conservative
moral values and cultural attitudes, as well as conservative attitudes on
social welfare and some foreign policy issues. The support of the less-
devout group is based more on social welfare conservatism, patriotism,
and hawkish attitudes on defense and foreign policy issues (Layman &
Hussey, 2005, p. 23)

Thus, even though evangelicals are considered a voting bloc in national elections,
appealing to them is complicated, which may be the reason that President Barack Obama
courted them in his 2008 presidential campaign as well. Obama’s appearance with his
Republican opponent, Sen. John McCain at a forum hosted by evangelical mega-church
pastor Rick Warren was an effort by both candidates to appeal to the evangelical
audience, as was Obama’s consequent inclusion of Warren in his inauguration ceremony (Blake, 2012; Ritchie, 2012).

Based on the results of the 2012 U.S. presidential election, many journalists (Gibson, 2012; Goodstein, 2012; McHaney, 2012) have speculated that the political power of the Christian Right appears to be waning, particularly on the issue of gay rights, as they lost the fight against the legalization of same-sex marriage in four states in 2012. The increasing proportion of “nones” in the population also indicate a shift away from evangelical influence, as one-fifth of adults in the U.S. now consider themselves religiously unaffiliated (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012b). Despite this recent data, evangelicals still represent the largest single Protestant voting bloc in the U.S., so they will be difficult for any national political campaign to ignore in the near future.

**Gay Rights Movement**

Just as the evangelical movement evolved over decades to become a powerful, influential, and vocal group, the LGBT rights movement in the U.S. began with only a few outspoken individuals facing intense societal pressure to adhere to the heterosexual norms of the time to the high-profile advocacy groups of today that have the ear of members of Congress and President Obama. Though this research concerns itself with evangelical pastors who have had same-sex sex scandals, it is crucial to understand the gay rights movement as well, since the conflict between the evangelical and gay rights movements is a driving force behind the media coverage and public awareness of the pastors’ same-sex sex scandals.
The LGBT rights movement is a relatively young movement in terms of its existence in the American public’s consciousness; however, there have been individualized struggles for acceptance by members of the community throughout documented civilization from ancient Greece to through the Enlightenment (Crompton, 2003). Though some experiences of individuals who engaged in same-sex relationships in Rome and Greece, for example, were somewhat more positive in terms of society’s treatment of them, the experience of Americans who had same-sex relationships from colonial times through the 20th Century, though it was sometimes tolerated, was not typically as positive an experience. The instance of Nicholas Sension in 1677 is a good example of a colonial man whose sexuality was questionable but tolerated by the community due to his status (Godbeer, 1995). According to Godbeer (1995), Sension’s sexual proclivities were known to his neighbors, and he had been informally reprimanded by the town elders in the 1640s and 1660s, but was given no further punishment until his trial in 1677, when he was found guilty of attempted sodomy and his estate was placed in bond to ensure his continued good behavior. Sension was able to avoid the death penalty, since only one person had accused him of the actual act of sodomy, and the law required at least two witnesses (Godbeer, 1995). Though Sension’s case ended relatively well for him, others ended with the death of the person in question. In another case, William Plaine of Connecticut was executed in 1646 for sodomy and corrupting youth (Rupp, 1999). Rupp (1999) suggests that the differences in punishment between individuals accused of sodomy is related to the individual’s circumstances and their ‘trade,’ and she notes another example discussed by Godbeer (1995) of the Baptist minister, Stephen Gorton, who was accused of sodomy in 1757 but was eventually reinstated as minister of
his church after confessing his sins. These instances illustrate that while people who engaged in same-sex relationships in American history were not embraced, they were tolerated in some instances when the person’s role was seen as beneficial to the community, as was the case with a landholder of Sension’s stature and a minister of Gorton’s.

Even into the 1800s, examples can be seen of toleration of those with same-sex attraction, so long as the behavior was not flaunted, and the modern reader can recognize many coded terms in discussions of friendships between women (Freeman, 2002; Larrison, 2002) that likely indicated a lesbian relationship of some sort. Often those who felt same-sex attraction during this time would end up in a heterosexual marriage, though this did not necessarily dampen their feelings for members of the same sex. Smith-Rosenberg (2002) cites the example of Sarah Wister and Jeannie Musgrove and that of Helena and Molly, as two pairs of women in the mid-19th Century, who, despite marrying men, still found themselves emotionally, if not physically, involved with each other. Similarly, Hansen (2002) discusses the case of Addie Brown and Rebecca Brown, both African-American women, in the 1850s and 1860s as both an example of the concept that lesbian relationships did exist in other racial communities and to point out that their relationship was highly visible in the community. Though both women eventually married men, the fact that the community and their families did not condemn them for their interest in one another displays a degree of tolerance that was not necessarily pervasive for lesbians and gays in the 1800s.

Men during this time experienced similar situations, although reactions to male same-sex attraction may have been more disapproving. The journal of Navy seaman
Philip C. Van Buskirk (2002) in the 1850s shows that even though many sailors engaged in sex with one another, many still condemned the practice. On the other hand, society was generally accepting of close male relationships, provided there was not a sexual aspect to them. Daniel Webster and his friend James Hervey Bingham experienced such a relationship and often engaged in some physical though non-sexual affection and spoke of growing old together in their letters to one another (Rotundo, 1989; Godbeer, 2009). Similarly, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s journals from his time as a college student detail his strong “friendship” with another student with whom he had barely spoken, and who is spoken of in such a way that is was clear that he had a crush on the other man (Rotundo, 1989). Since homosexuality was a stigma for men, it is likely they thought of their attraction to other men simply as strong friendships, since those were acceptable between men. With some notable exceptions like Walt Whitman, many of these men married women, so it is difficult to determine the degree to which their same-sex attraction permeated their lives. Toward the end of the 19th Century, a clear subculture of “colonies of male sexual perverts” came to exist in every major city in the U.S., and many scholars and medical doctors undertook observations of these groups (Rupp, 1999). These subcultures largely catered to men, because the circumstances of women did not lend them as much personal freedom. Despite this increasing communalization of LGBT individuals, many still chose not to be open in their daily lives and were classified by medical professionals and society with derogatory terms, such as “invert” and “fairy” (Rupp, 1999).

LGBT people are certainly not an invention of the 20th Century; however, the concerns of the community in the previous centuries have tended more toward avoiding
severe punishments, including death, and, for the most part, remaining hidden from the public for fear of reprisals. It is only in the mid-20th Century that an organized movement has emerged to gain greater acceptance for the LGBT community and work toward the decriminalization of homosexual acts. Popular culture often points to the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York as the beginning of the modern gay rights movement, but this event would not have been able to serve as a catalyst for a civil rights movement without an extensive amount of foundational building for the movement in the preceding decades (Poindexter, 1997). In fact, the first U.S. gay rights group, the Society for Human Rights, was founded in 1924 in Chicago; however, its existence was short-lived, and it was only able to publish two issues of its magazine, *Friendship and Freedom*, before members of the group were arrested by the police (Cain, 1993). A key factor in the steps toward the mainstreaming of gays and lesbians was the publication of the Kinsey Report on male sexuality, which indicated as of 1948 that four percent of American men were exclusively homosexual and 37 percent had had at least one gay experience (the report on female sexuality followed a few years later) (Johnson D. K., 2004). These reports provided the impetus the gay rights pioneers needed to begin organizing, since they now saw that there was actually a substantial block of gays and lesbians to be mobilized. In the following years, the homophile movement, which was the label attached to the less directly confrontational gay rights organizations of the 1950s and 1960s, began to take shape with the founding of the Mattachine Society in 1950, ONE, Inc. (founded by former members of the Mattachine Society) in 1953 and the Daughters of Bilitis in 1955, along with the publication of gay-oriented publications like the magazines *Vice-Versa, One, The Ladder*, and books in the vein of *The Homosexual in America*. These new gay rights groups
sprang up as a result of the increasing persecution of the gay community and were founded on the homophile concept of social change, a central tenet of which was the idea that through education the American public could remove its prejudices towards gay people (Ridinger, 1996). These groups attempted to directly combat the messages being portrayed by media and government officials that equated gays to both communists and child molesters. Not only did these organizations attempt to educate the media and the general public about gays and lesbians, but they also undertook the task of educating gays and lesbians about themselves, and attempted to show them how normal being gay could be, while also combating anti-sodomy and obscenity legislation (Ridinger, 1996). These pioneering organizations met with some success and expanded into national networks, while their publications like *The Mattachine Review* and *The Ladder* carried thoughtful commentary pieces about legal and social issues affecting the gay population to a national audience (Gallo, 2007).

The early years of the homophile movement were particularly characterized by the organizations’ approach toward the promotion of gay rights. Three founding members of the Mattachine Society (Harry Hay, Chuck Rowland, and Bob Hull) were all former Communist Party members, leading the Mattachine Society to have similarities to both the Communist Party and the Freemasons, particularly in the secretive membership structure it adopted—so secretive that most early members of the organization had no idea who was running it (Charles, 2010). In 1953, newer members of the Mattachine Society, who desired the organization to shake off its Communist Party roots and take a more public role in advocating for gay rights, staged a coup and took over the leadership positions of the organization; this led the organization to begin taking a more
integrationist stance (Charles, 2010). The integrationist stance was typical of homophile organizations, and it sought to convey that homosexuals are just like heterosexuals in every way, except for their choice of partner, which meant that members sought to ally themselves with professionals, dress and act according to societal norms, and distance themselves from others who may conform to stereotypes of homosexuals (e.g. working-class “butch” lesbians) (Esterberg, 1994). According to Esterberg (1994), the Daughters of Bilitis adopted a similarly integrationist tone towards its membership and its activities from its founding until the early 1960s. Additionally, since homosexuals at the time were actively discriminated against, a top priority for these groups, particularly the Daughters of Bilitis, was maintaining the safety of their members and other gays and lesbians, so they requested that their members actively encourage any heterosexuals to join the groups and give them subscriptions to their publications (Esterberg, 1994).

The major catalyst for homophile organizations to adopt an integrationist stance was the fear of persecution by federal and local authorities. In the year following the founding of ONE, Inc., both that organization and the Mattachine Society became the focus of investigations by the FBI to ascertain whether they were led by Communists or had been infiltrated by them (Charles, 2010). Despite the fact that the Mattachine Society was indeed founded by former Communists, the FBI never brought charges against the groups or their leaders (Charles, 2010). In 1956, the FBI again began investigations into both groups after ONE, Inc. publicly criticized the agency and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, but this time the FBI investigated the organizations on the basis of violations of obscenity laws, since both ONE, Inc. and the Mattachine Society published their own magazines (Charles, 2010). The publication of gay-oriented magazines and newspapers
was a major catalyst for the gay rights movement, but they also became a lightning rod that helped incite the government to persecute members of the movement involved in their production. Simultaneously to the persecution homosexuals were enduring by law enforcement organizations, they were also experiencing discrimination at the hands of media organizations. Though media entities are in theory “…seemingly neutral and objective bodies that routinely filter content…” (Glazer, 2008, p. 1383), the press at the time “…demonstrated a systematic bias against the expression of homosexuality” (Glazer, 2008, p. 1383) in the material they chose to publish and what they omitted from their coverage. The homophile organizations sought to address this media bias through the publication of their own magazines and newspapers that portrayed homosexuality in a more favorable light. Through the use of obscenity laws, which were originally meant to suppress pornography, the government was able to target this aspect of the movement and often attempted to suppress much of the publication and distribution of gay-oriented publications up through the 1960s. ONE, Inc. became a particularly obvious target for government persecution, since its primary publication, ONE magazine, had thousands of subscribers and was sold on the streets of Los Angeles, and the organization had also begun producing other pro-homosexuality publications like the ONE Institute Quarterly and the International Gay and Lesbian Review (Devor & Matte, 2004). The October 1954 issue of ONE was confiscated and the U.S. Postal Service refused to mail the issue on the basis that it was obscene, which some historians have speculated came as a direct result of the prior issue of the magazine questioning the sexuality of then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover (Cain, 1993). In response, the magazine later brought a successful lawsuit against the government for a violation of First Amendment rights (among other claims),
which led to a series of other legal lawsuits that ultimately resulted in the decision that obscenity charges where First Amendment rights were concerned should have an independent review by appellate courts, lending more objectivity to these types of cases and granting more freedom and rights for gay publishers (Cain, 1993).

Though gays and lesbians were under attack on multiple fronts throughout the 20th Century, the targeting of gay publications (and sometimes individuals) for obscenity came as a direct result of the subjective interpretation and enforcement of obscenity doctrine, even after the 1973 instatement of the Miller Test (which is ambiguously worded to apply the average person’s “contemporary community standards” to the idea of what is obscene, meaning that gays and lesbians were often a target of the laws) (Glazer, 2008). The obscenity laws did have an important impact on the gay rights movement in the sense that they allowed the burgeoning homophile movement to have a platform to challenge the legality of some of the government persecution that organizations One, Inc. and the Mattachine Society were experiencing. The aforementioned case that One, Inc. filed against the government labeling its publications as obscene resulted in the undercutting of the FBI’s strategies for muzzling the homophile groups, while allowing the continued dissemination of materials supporting the cause of gay rights (Charles, 2010). Thus, the persecution against the homophile groups for obscenity resulted in their actually gaining more publicity for the gay rights movement and the removal of a law enforcement tool against them.

On another front, the Kinsey Reports also helped spur increased persecution of the community by the U.S. and state governments, which they now saw as a sizable threat to morality. With increased rhetoric on state and federal government levels about the
increasing danger of “sex crimes” and the comparisons of homosexuality with pedophilia and moral degeneracy, the public also began to experience moral panic about the issue. In 1948, U.S. Attorney George Morris Fay alleged that sexually aberrant men had become a problem in the Washington, D.C. area, and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover stated that the social upheavals of World War II had led to a decline of morals in young people, leading to an increase in sex crimes (Johnson D. K., 2004). Similar expressions of fear about the decline of sexual morality and the dangers of homosexuality could be heard by officials across the nation, leading to an increase in persecutions. Gay and lesbian establishments were raided with increasing regularity, despite their efforts to maintain a low visibility. In one of the few victories for the LGBT community at the time, the revocation of the liquor license of the Black Cat bar in San Francisco led to a court battle which the California Supreme Court decided in 1951 in favor of the bar based on First Amendment grounds (Gallo, 2007). This ruling provided a respite from attacks on California’s gay bars until 1955 when a statute was enacted to allow the revocation of liquor licenses for establishments catering to “sex perverts” (Gallo, 2007). At the same time, other efforts across the country were targeting gays and lesbians in an effort to weed the “morally deficient” out of society.

Sen. Joseph McCarthy’s (R-WI) name is synonymous with the Red Scare and his witch-hunt for communists in America, but in 1950 he and his staff also began tracking down homosexuals in government employment. Publicly, McCarthy declared homosexuals to be security risks to the U.S. government, since they could be blackmailed into working for the Soviets, who would threaten to expose their “deviant” lifestyle or, as the State Department concluded later, people who embodied such a weakness of
character that they could easily be convinced to join a subversive group (Johnson D. K., 2004). There was no public outcry against the firing of federal employees on the basis of sexual perversity, rather out of the 25,000 letters McCarthy received more than 75 percent of them expressed concern about sexual depravity in the government (Shibusawa, 2012). The coupling of communism and homosexuality in many of these charges by McCarthy had the effect of associating the two terms, lending a fearful quality to the term homosexuality in the American public’s eyes (Johnson D. K., 2004). The pairing of these terms allowed for justifiable firing of these employees and McCarthy’s continued description of his enemies as intellectual, feminine pansies (and related terms), while also positioning himself and his party as strident, anti-Communist “do-ers” (Cuordileone, 2000). Additionally, Shibusawa (2012) notes that several politicians like Assistant Secretary of State Humelsine indicated that homosexuality led to the downfall of many previous world powers throughout history, lending even more weight to their claims against gays and lesbians. Ironically, McCarthy’s own downfall is owed in part to his pursuit of gays and lesbians, as his close association with his assistant, Roy Cohn, who was implicated as a homosexual, was the source of gossip for many reporters and Washington, D.C., and became one more claim against his supposed “decency” (Friedman, 2005). McCarthy’s witch-hunts for communists and homosexuals lasted from about 1950 to 1955, resulting in the firing of thousands of employees, and his charges helped spur related purges around the country. Additionally, in 1953, during the height of the McCarthy era, President Eisenhower signed issued Executive Order 10450, which barred gays and lesbians from being employed by the federal government (Graves, 2009).
This executive order from the president further reinforced the idea that homosexuals should be purged from societies around the country.

The Lavender Scare inspired many persecutions of gays and lesbians around the country in the 1950s and early 1960s, but these were largely small scale gay bar raids by policemen, or sting operations designed to catch men looking for sex in parks. However, Florida’s Johns Committee (also known as the Florida Legislative Investigative Committee), a commission set up by state Senators Charley Johns, Dewey Johnson, and John Rawls, represented persecution on an entirely different scale. Originally formed in 1956 to combat desegregation in Florida schools and take on the NAACP, by 1959 the committee found its position untenable since it was having difficulty winning any victories against the NAACP (Graves, 2009). Fearing that the committee would be dissolved, members of the committee began highlighting the incidental uncovering of homosexuals at the state universities in its annual report (Graves, 2009). As a result, the state legislature renewed the charter for the committee, and it switched its focus to hunting down gays and lesbians in the state education system. The investigation team for the Johns Committee, headed up by R.J. Strickland, took the blueprint for their tactics from other campaigns like McCarthy’s, and according to Schnur (1997), it:

…intimidated the faculty members it interrogated. Strickland hired student informants with (Johns Committee) funds, used highway patrolmen to remove professors from the classroom, and telephoned some instructors late at night, demanding that they provide testimony in Strickland's motel room at his convenience. He also prohibited the accused from confronting their complainants, seldom informed subjects of their legal or constitutional rights, and rarely offered them sufficient time to secure an attorney or to prepare their defense. (p. 136)

The investigations included all public school teachers from college to elementary school. The purge of teachers lasted from 1957 to 1963, and resulted in the revocation of
71 teachers’ certificates, the firing of 39 college professors and deans, and the investigation of hundreds of others throughout Florida (Graves, 2009). Additionally, at the college level the investigators interrogated students, and if they were found guilty of homosexual activity, they were required to submit to psychiatric treatments for the remainder of their time at the university (Schnur, 1997). Even being called before the committee carried a stigma for those being interrogated, and they then felt weight of societal disapproval. Those whose teaching certificates were revoked had difficulty finding work elsewhere, as other states were often hesitant to issue teaching certificates to individuals who had had theirs revoked by another state. Though the Lavender Scare and the Johns Committee were by no means the only persecutions that the LGBT community faced in the decades leading up to the Stonewall Riots, they were two of the most prominent and concerted efforts undertaken by the government.

The homophile method worked as an initial approach to gaining gay rights, but failed to effect mass change at the time, and gays and lesbians continued to feel persecuted through continued police sting operations and bar raids and discrimination. As such, in the mid-1960s, the tactics of the gay rights movement began to shift and some groups began to effect noticeable protests. Notably, the Mattachine Society’s Washington, D.C., chapter began to protest outside of the White House and used the example of the gay detention camps in Cuba as a way to draw attention to the issue in the U.S. (Kameny, 2012). This movement was emboldened by the burgeoning “Sexual Revolution” in America during the 1960s. The initial catalyst for the revolution was the invention and widespread use of the birth control pill, which allowed women increasing freedom and control over their own sexuality (Allyn, 2001). An analysis of public
opinion from the 1960s to 1980s, shows that public approval of premarital sex began rising in the 1960s before leveling off in the early 1980s, while approval for making birth control information available to adults steadily rose from the late 1950s through the early 1980s (Smith, 1990). This liberalization of outlooks indicated an attitudinal shift in morality, which was caused by a confluence of social factors: “the relaxation of obscenity laws, policies and attitudes, in conjunction with a period of relative post-war affluence, had produced a flourishing commercial market of sex” (Angelides, 2012, p. 833). Additionally, teens and college-aged individuals during the 1960s grew up having greater income, autonomy and more free time than their parents’ generation had experienced, which allowed them to pursue more personal pleasure (Angelides, 2012). Though they did not necessarily reflect the majority opinions of the youth of the 1960s, some of the counterculture leaders even attempted to inspire both sexual and racial liberation against the confines of their parents’ culture through advocating against the traditional heteronormative status that marriage and sex within marriage stood for; however, this stance was also criticized by the burgeoning women’s movement that conversely claimed that “freedom from sex” would be more revolutionary than advocating free sex with any partner outside of marriage (Medovoi, 1999).

The counterculture movement did not speak for all Americans. Despite the fact that its members generally had a very open attitude toward issues of sexuality, others, including legislators, during the 1960s worried about the implications of pre-marital sex on heterosexual marriages and families. Additionally, the mainstream media during the time focused on attempting to discredit the growing gay rights movement. The media’s stance on homosexuality did reflect public opinion, which indicated a high disapproval of
homosexuality from the 1950s to 1980s until 1989 when a reversal of the trend began to appear (Smith, 1990). An increasing number of articles and reports in mainstream media outlets attempted to display the seedy underbelly of the gay community in places like San Francisco and to show how unhappy homosexuals were, resulting in increased hostility towards them (Allyn, 2001). These stories also encouraged gays and lesbians from other parts of the country to move to these locations in droves and to increase their own activism against the misconceptions the media was feeding the public (Allyn, 2001).

Though the gay rights movement and the Sexual Revolution were not one and the same—many proponents of the Sexual Revolution focused on the liberalization of heterosexual sex and discussed homosexuality in negative terms—the Sexual Revolution did aid the gay rights movement. As Allyn (2001) notes, “…without the climate of activism generated by the student movement, the public furor aroused by the pill, and the…decline of censorship, gay liberation would never have exploded onto the scene when it did…” (p. 161) during the Stonewall Riots.

Additionally, the increasing persecution gays were experiencing in the form of bar raids and sting operations and frustration at the slow progress of gay rights, served to increase the militancy of the gay rights movement, and ultimately led to the Stonewall Riots on June 28, 1969. Whereas the earlier homophile movement had focused on depicting gays and lesbians as being “normal,” the new gay militants rejected these policies as “assimilationist,” and they sought to embrace their differences from mainstream society (Ridinger, 1996). Chief among the concerns of these new militants was convincing the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association to declassify homosexuality as a mental illness and getting anti-gay laws off
the books, many of which were based on the Biblical passage in the Book of Leviticus barring a man from laying with another man as with a woman (Ridinger, 1996). By succeeding in removing the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness, the gay rights movement was able more credibly to declare homosexuality as a personal identity, which then allowed it to present its “…constituents not simply as people who freely commit homoerotic acts, but as members of an identity group entitled to equal protection under the law” (Sands, 2007, p. 11). These battles, however, led gay rights groups into direct opposition with the burgeoning Religious Right movement and incited a decades-long battle over the morality of homosexuality.

The Convergence of the Gay Rights and Evangelical Movements

The assault by gay rights groups on the existing laws against sodomy and demands for inclusion in anti-discrimination laws led directly to a clash with the emerging Religious Right movement. Though the two movements had both been steadily gaining prominence and power since the 1950s, the two had had very few direct legal battles. There had been some overlap of the two movements in the battle over the Equal Rights Amendment, in which prominent conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly had fought against its passage and had thus encountered some lesbian opposition; however, Anita Bryant’s 1977 campaign in Miami-Dade County against legislation to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination can be pointed to as the first true intersection of the evangelical and gay rights movements. Scholars (Zald & Useem, 1987; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996) have indicated that the point where two movements became oppositional represents a turning point for both movements, and they then began to
inspire and encourage one another as they strove to refute one another’s arguments and
gain more mindshare with the public, ultimately resulting in increased prominence for
both movements. Fetner (2008) postulates that the battle between the gay rights and
evangelical movements is precisely the reason the issue of gay rights has continued to be
such a prominent issue in America, and she also notes that without the opposition of the
Religious Right, the gay rights movement would not have seen such dramatic growth
since the 1970s.

Despite the modern inclusion of scientific arguments in the religious debate over
homosexuality, many of the laws against homosexuality had a solely biblical basis. Due
to this biblical basis and the Christian faith of many legislators and government officials,
religious authorities in the early part of the 20th Century did not see any need to actively
interact much with the functioning of government, particularly on the issue of
homosexuality. Since legal foundations against homosexual activity were based on
biblical mandates and the majority of public opinion was against gays and lesbians, there
was little need for religious activists to interject themselves into the debate. However, as
the gay rights movement began to gain momentum in the 1970s, evangelicals realized
that public support for gay rights was steadily increasing and that gay rights activists had
succeeded in getting legislation considered that would penalize discrimination against
members of the LGBT community. The building tension between the two movements
came to a head in 1977 in Miami, Florida. Anita Bryant, a well-known singer,
spokesperson for Florida orange juice, and beauty queen, was asked by her pastor to use
her status to help defeat a bill the Dade County commissioners were considering that
would protect LGBT community members from discrimination (Fetner, 2008). The
commissioners signed the bill, but Bryant created the organization Save Our Children, Inc. (later renamed to Protect America’s Children), and began an ultimately successful campaign to put a repeal initiative on the ballot during the next election (Fejes, 2008). As Fetner (2008) notes, this represented a milestone in the evangelical movement, as Save Our Children was the first formal anti-gay organization. Bryant’s national celebrity helped gain her appearances on national religious shows like the 700 Club, and caused the national mainstream media to take notice of the campaign in Miami. The gay rights activists were not as organized as Bryant’s campaign and the gay camp was fragmented between two organizations both attempting to speak positively on behalf of the ordinance, leading to confusion in the media (Fejes, 2008). Though Bryant was not as good a debater as the pro-gay rights advocates, Save Our Children’s messages about the threats homosexuality posed to children resonated with voters (Fejes, 2008).

What made the defeat of the ordinance in Miami even more ominous for the gay rights movement was the fact that now other anti-discrimination ordinances around the country were clearly susceptible to being repealed or stopped from being enacted altogether. Following the success of the Miami repeal, Bryant said that she would fight against laws that would condone “…a lifestyle that is both pervasive and dangerous to the sanctity of the family, dangerous to our children, dangerous to our freedom of religion and freedom of choice…” (as cited in Associated Press, 1977). True to her word, Bryant and her contemporaries led a successful fight against similar ordinances in St. Paul, Minnesota; Eugene, Oregon; and Wichita, Kansas in the months following the Miami repeal (Newton, 2009). However, another prominent anti-gay campaign in California, the Briggs Initiative, or Proposition 6, failed to pass with a majority vote in 1978.
Conjuring echoes of the Johns Committee, the initiative, proposed by Republican state lawmaker and son of an evangelical pastor John Briggs, required the firing of any teacher found to be advocating or encouraging homosexuality in public or private (Newton, 2009). Briggs took his inspiration directly from Bryant, having flown to Miami to observe her campaign, but the California campaign ultimately failed at the polls (Dochuk, 2011). Although evangelical leaders had been promoting their support of the Briggs Initiative to their followers, the alignment of both Democrats and moderate Republicans like Ronald Reagan speaking out against the proposition was too difficult of a hurdle for supporters to overcome.

Though Briggs and Bryant never again experienced the success/prominence they had in the late 1970s, their role in the evangelical movement’s initial involvement in the issue of gay rights had a lasting impact. The Religious Right has continued to combat the issue of gay rights, but in recent years it has focused more on combating same-sex marriage versus the earlier issue of preventing legislation that banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The 2012 Republican National Platform states “…we believe that marriage, the union of one man and one woman must be upheld as the national standard, a goal to stand for, encourage, and promote through laws governing marriage” (Republican National Committee, 2012, p. 31). Through this position on gay rights and other social positions of the party, evangelical influence can clearly be felt in the modern-day GOP.

This conflict between evangelicals and LGBT groups is key to understanding how the evangelical pastors in the same-sex scandal were exposed and why their scandals were prolonged in the public eye. For example, Ted Haggard’s accuser said he felt
compelled to come forward after seeing Haggard speaking out against gay marriage, while George Rekers’s scandal was prolonged by gay bloggers like Joe.My.God interviewing Rekers and then pointing out holes in his story, which the mainstream media consequently picked up in their own stories. Without the conflict between these two movements, there is a chance that the sexual activities of the pastors would remain undiscovered or would be quickly hushed up by their respective churches and organizations.

**Crisis Communication**

Based on the conflict between the evangelical and gay rights movements and the evangelicals’ beliefs regarding homosexuality, there is little doubt that a pastor involved in any sort of same-sex relationship would find himself or herself faced with a crisis. There has been a significant amount of study with regard to crisis communication on behalf of organizations and individuals, though little of the literature discusses the role of religion in crisis communication, with some notable exceptions, including Courtright and Hearit (2002), Kauffman (2008), Legg (2008), and Maier (2005). Of those articles that do discuss religion and crisis communications, even fewer focus on pastors within the American evangelical community; thus, understanding how personalities within the community have used crisis communication techniques to repair a crisis that involves a moral leader who committed a grievous sin necessitates study.

Within public relations, having knowledge of the subfield of crisis communication has become paramount to becoming an effective practitioner, since anyone working in communication may be faced with a crisis at their organization.
Several accepted theories have been used to analyze crises and apply the results to predict and prevent future crises. As outlined by Fearn-Banks (2007), some of the most recognizable theories are: Image Restoration Theory, Decision Theory, Diffusion Theory, Excellence Theory, Apologia Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory.

Image Restoration Theory, as proposed by Benoit (1995), builds on Ware and Linkugel’s (1973) Apologia Theory, Scott and Lyman’s (1968) concept of accounts of self-presentation to explain unexpected behavior and on Burke’s (1970) notions of communication and guilt redemption. Using these ideas as foundations, the Image Restoration Theory recommends that organizations search for what is causing the damage to their image and reputation and determine what audiences know about the crisis and where they stand before they attempt to address the crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2007).

Decision Theory is largely a business management theory, and focuses on helping management determine what the most effective and beneficial decision is for the business in a given crisis situation. This theory relates specifically to economics (Biswas, 1997), but it can be translated to communication and public relations by considering how beneficial each option available to a company is when compared to others and then selecting the one that provides the largest benefit rather than just choosing one which will satisfy the situation’s minimum requirements (Fearn-Banks, 2007).

Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 2003) attempts to explain how people are made aware of a new product or idea and then adopt and accept or reject it, and outlines the process of innovation adoption as awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. This process can be adopted as a part of crisis communication by seeing the crisis recovery strategy
outcome as a new innovation that the organization must make its audience aware of and encourage its adoption of the new goal in place of the old one that caused the initial crisis.

Excellence Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Grunig, 1992) is concerned with understanding the most effective and desirable forms of public relations. Using four models (Press Agentry, Public Information, Two-Way Asymmetric, and Two-Way Symmetric) to demonstrate different types of public relations activities, this theory posits the most effective model as being two-way symmetric communication, meaning that the practitioner both disseminates and receives information from his or her audience (Fearn-Banks, 2007). This original Theory of Excellence was further developed with crisis communications implications in mind, and Marra (1992) notes that organizations following the Excellence Theory should be able to identify and adjust variables in communication plans before a crisis happens in order that the practitioner will know how to mitigate the crisis with little risk.

Though Image Restoration Theory, Decision Theory, Diffusion Theory, and Excellence Theory all have useful components for examining crisis communications, this examination of evangelical pastors and same-sex sex scandals utilizes Apologia Theory and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as the most effective means for evaluating success. By using both of these strategies, the rhetoric of the pastors can be examined and the complex situation of homosexuality, religion, and status of the pastors can be considered.

Apologia is a standard means of examining the verbal dimensions of recovering from a crisis, and it is necessitated by an attack on an individual’s character in a public
sphere, which will then require a defense of some form (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay, & Johansen, 2010). Ware and Linkugel (1973) crystallized this means of examining the rhetoric of crises by using Robert P. Abelson’s theory for resolving brief dilemmas and its four “modes of resolution” as a tool of recovering from a crisis. The modes are denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence.

Both denial and bolstering are considered reformative strategies, since neither requires the creation of a new identity for the accused (Ware & Linkugel, 1973); they simply reinterpret the existing identity the audience has given to them in a way that ideally will mitigate reputation damage and encourage image repair. Additionally, these strategies must be based in reality and an understanding of the particular situation and the audience’s attitudes and beliefs (Legg, 2008). Denying all or part of what one is accused of can be effective provided “…that such negations do not constitute a known distortion of reality or to the point that they conflict with other beliefs held by the audience” (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 275). A more complex denial strategy comes in the form of a “disclaimer of intent” (p. 276), which may cause people to view the accused differently if the action was not intentional. This strategy in many ways adopts the argument that the accused is not responsible for his or her actions, since they did not realize what the outcome would be or they had no choice in the matter. Bolstering involves the accused associating him or herself with something the audience may view in a favorable light, but this is limited by the audience’s perception of reality (Ware & Linkugel, 1973).

In contrast, both differentiation and transcendence seek to transform the accused’s image. Differentiation involves the speaker separating a particular fact, object or similar item from the context in which the audience currently understands that feature (Ware &
Linkugel, 1973). The differentiation strategy requires the audience’s suspension of judgment as the speaker tries to place his or her actions in a different context; for example, a jury may be asked to view a defendant’s actions as self-defense, as opposed to a maliciously plotted crime. In a related vein, the use of the transcendence mode means that the speaker will try to join a fact, sentiment or object to a larger context that the attribute is not currently connected with in the audience’s view (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). By linking their particular case with a larger issue, speakers can “…psychologically move the audience away from the particulars of the charge at hand in a direction toward some more abstract, general view of his character” (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 280).

Thus, both differentiation and transcendence can be used to different effect than denial and bolstering, since they seek to transform the attitudes of the audience. These modes are not mutually exclusive, however, and are often coupled together as part of a more comprehensive rhetorical defense strategy.

Another means of analyzing crisis communication that is useful when examining pastors is the SCCT (Situational Crisis Communication Theory), which provides a set of best practices for managing a crisis based on experimental methods and empirical data as opposed to case studies (Coombs, 2007). In the SCCT, the chances of crisis management success are determined by the frame the organization adopts to convey the crisis, and this can take the form of victimization, accidental, or intentional (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Depending on which frame the organization uses or is perceived to use, the response of the audience will differ and then the strategy employed to manage the crisis will differ. Coombs (2006b) indicates that primary crisis response strategies typically fall into three categories: denying a crisis exists, minimizing attributions of the crisis so it appears less
severe, or protecting and rebuilding the reputation of the organization; all of these strategies can be employed with success if done correctly and in the correct situation. In applying the SCCT guidelines Coombs (2007) recommends that in cases where rumors have caused the crisis, denial strategies are most effective, whereas rebuilding strategies are most effective with preventable crises (where the crisis was initiated by some evidence versus just rumors). According to the SCCT then, denial and rebuilding strategies are the most effective ones for managing a sex scandal, since some are solely based on rumors, while others with some more substantial evidence behind them can be considered preventable.
Chapter 3: Research Method

Overview

This examination of evangelical leaders’ crisis communication utilizes a qualitative approach. In addition to examining a wide variety of news coverage of each scandal to determine its details and understand the pastors’ responses to it, the author used the results from a textual analysis of the leaders’ reaction statements and a content analysis of print media coverage of each of the scandals in order to determine the effectiveness of the evangelical leaders’ crisis management strategies. The leaders’ crisis recovery strategies were judged to be either effective or ineffective based on the following factors:

1. Whether or not the leader retained their position with their church or organization
2. If their marriage remained intact
3. Whether the media coverage of each leader in the month following the scandal trended toward a favorable, neutral, or critical tone.

These effectiveness identifiers are geared primarily toward understanding the impact of the leaders’ crisis communication strategies from the perspective of the leaders’ primary target audiences: followers and other evangelical Christians. Effective crisis communication will result in the followers refraining from denouncing the leader and calling for his resignation, and they will not renounce their membership and go elsewhere in a mass exodus, which would likely result in the closing of the church or organization. Thus, a leader who remained in his position indicates the continued success of the

---

1 Jonathan Merritt is the sole leader in the study who was not married prior to the scandal, so his relationship with his girlfriend was used instead.
organization and a constituency that had faith in him. Similarly, while outsiders have no idea what the dynamics of each pastor’s marriage was and whether it was a happy marriage, the fact that their marriages remained intact is important to their followers and members of the evangelical community. A divorce would indicate to other evangelicals that the pastors’ wives could not forgive their husbands sin or believed that he had committed the sin of which he was accused. Thus, an intact marriage is itself suggestive to the evangelical community of an effectively managed crisis. The tone of media coverage toward the pastors is also an important factor to consider in determining strategy effectiveness. Though the pastors may not consider the press as a primary target audience, the fact that many evangelicals and the local community used media to keep up-to-date on the crisis meant that their view of the crisis response was heavily influenced by the press and the tone of its coverage about the leader.

This research is guided by the hypothesis that employing the correct crisis response strategies (according to the SCCT and concept of apologia), may not result in an effective recovery when the crisis occurs in an evangelical Christian setting and involves homosexuality. Since the evangelical leader is looked up to by his followers and provides behavior cues to them (Welch, Leege, Wald, & Kellstedt, 1993), and the evangelical community encourages discrimination, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, against homosexuals (Mutz, 2006), the hypothesis assumes that a sin, especially one involving homosexuality, on the leader’s part is very difficult for the congregation to forgive, especially since evangelicals typically think of homosexuality as a choice to commit a sin.
Operating under the aforementioned hypothesis and using the SCCT and apologia approaches, the researcher seeks to answer the following research questions:

**R1:** Do these evangelical leaders follow appropriate strategies for crisis recovery based on the SCCT and concept of apologia?

**R2:** How effective was their strategy for managing the crisis? In other words, is there a clear shift to a more positive tone in the media stories being examined, did the leader’s wife/girlfriend remain with them, did they retain their position with their church/organization? Additionally, does this indicate the SCCT strategies are appropriate for the evangelical Christian community?

The evangelical leaders being examined in this research project were selected based on religious affiliation with an evangelical Christian denomination/church and residence in the U.S. when the scandal was revealed. Additionally, the number of cases was narrowed down based on the availability of information about the scandal—access to information about some leaders who were involved in same-sex sex scandals is severely scarce due to their limited sphere of influence. Those pastors who led congregations of fewer than 500 and/or did not have a national platform (e.g. a syndicated column or television show) did not have enough media coverage or information made available by their churches to merit inclusion in this study. As such, this dissertation examines the following leaders: Paul Crouch, Ted Haggard, Lonnie Latham, Eddie Long, Jonathan Merritt, and George Alan Rekers. All of the men selected for the study have experienced media exposure on a national level and are well-known in evangelical circles. The sample for this paper only includes religious leaders whose scandals occurred from 2000-2012. The reasons for selecting this timeframe are twofold: firstly, the availability of
information on the leaders prior to 2000 is much more limited, and, secondly, the American public’s views on gay rights issues have shifted significantly in recent decades, so comparing more recent scandals to those even in the 1990s would yield different results. Additionally, in order to ensure a consistent evaluation of effectiveness, the leaders included in the study were all based in the U.S. when the scandal broke.

Another important point to acknowledge is the use of only males in this study. Though there are several prominent female evangelical leaders who were involved in fraud and embezzlement scandals, the researcher was unable to find a high-profile female evangelical leader who was involved in a same-sex sex scandal. This study also excludes any pastors accused of having same-sex relationships with minors under the age of 16 (the age of consent in some U.S. states), since the recovery from a scandal involving pedophilia would necessitate the use of different forms of crisis recovery strategies.

For the purposes of this paper, the researcher utilized Harris’s (1998) definition of typical evangelicals: they are identified by the belief of the truth of everything in the Bible, but acknowledge that though some of it may be symbolic and metaphorical, everything in it should still be interpreted and followed. Though evangelicals do support academic study of the Bible and acknowledge there could be some reinterpretations of biblical scripture, the degree to which they believe in scriptural reinterpretation depends on the individual congregations (Harris, 1998). As a result, the leaders examined in this study have either self-identified as evangelical or are interpreted as evangelical based on their scriptural beliefs. Several of the leaders examined in this study are affiliated with conservative denominations like Pentecostal and Southern Baptist, while others are unaffiliated and non-denominational.
Analysis of Reaction Statements and Articles

To analyze the crisis communication techniques used by the evangelical leaders, the SCCT (Coombs, 2007) was used as a barometer to determine if the strategies used by the leaders followed the best practices of crisis communication. This study includes a textual analysis of the reaction statements\(^2\) the evangelical leaders issued (or their organizations issued on their behalf) in response to the scandal, as well as a qualitative content analysis of news articles that reference it. The content analysis serves to determine the tonality and overall direction of the articles, while the textual analysis examines the actual text and specific details the author used to convey his or her position and approach to the crisis event.

As Krippendorff (2013) notes, a content analysis allows the researcher to analyze data “...in view of its meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play in the lives of the data's sources” (p. 49). In other words, the ability to recognize a meaning beyond the physicality of a document is the primary driving force behind conducting a content analysis—the analyst must be able to recognize that communicants’ are responding to what a message means to them, not just what appears directly in the text (Krippendorff, 2013). An effective content analysis then will be able to get at the meaning a document has for the person decoding the text. Then, the true value of content analysis can be seen in its ability to code and categorize the text being analyzed based on the interpreted meaning it has for its audience, and thus pull together a group of words with similar connotations to create an idea of overall patterns in a document or documents (Stemler, 2001; Weber, 1990). This overall pattern

---

\(^2\) See Appendix E for all of the pastors’ reaction statements
can then be interpreted based on the attitudes of the intended recipients—in the case of this project, the results of the content analysis are codified and categorized into tonality categories that would make sense to the evangelical Christian community that comprises the pastors’ intended audience.

In a complementary fashion, textual analysis allows the researcher to focus on a particular piece of text in a document (a recorded message) in order to understand its characteristics and place it in a category with like texts to compare the documents (Morris, 2004). Using textual cues, textual analysis attempts to understand the motivations of the author/creator and, simultaneously, the ways the audience could interpret the message. Though his model has been criticized for oversimplifying the communication process, Hall’s (1996) Encoding/Decoding Model of Communication presents several effective ways for understanding the results of a textual analysis by recommending the researcher attempt to place him/herself in the role the decoder would adopt when viewing the document: dominant, negotiated or oppositional. Reading the text from a dominant perspective means the audience interprets it the way it was intended by the encoder; the negotiated position means the audience understands the original intent of the encoder but reinterprets the message based on local conditions; and interpreting text in an oppositional position signifies that the reader understands the intended meaning of the text but chooses to reinterpret the meaning in a way contrary to the intended meaning (Hall S., 1996). By understanding the intent of the encoder of the message and the likely interpretation of the decoder, textual analysis can provide some insights into a particular culture. Through conducting the analysis, the researcher is really
concerned with understanding the meaning of a particular culture’s value judgments, reasoning and thinking, and the way they see things (McKee, 2003).

As such, this research method is highly appropriate for evaluating reaction statements from religious leaders, since they are often laden with symbolism and may contain deeper religious meanings. The reaction statements analyzed include all that were issued by the pastor and their organization within the month after the same-sex scandal was made public. This means that seven of the statements were issued directly by the pastors, whereas the remaining four statements were issued by their affiliated organizations/churches. In the case of Crouch, he issued no statement, but his organization did, and in the case of both Merritt and Long, they issued statements, but their organizations did not. In all other instances, both the pastors and their organizations issued statements in response to the scandals. The statements of the organizations were analyzed as well to help obtain a picture of the overall response to the scandal, particularly since the organizations were so closely tied to the pastors. The statements were examined based on the four modes (denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence) of apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973) to determine which method was used in each instance. These categories were operationalized based on Ware & Linkugel’s (1973) definitions of each category and examples of each are included in the codebook for the reaction statements.³ If it is determined that the statement falls into the category of bolstering, differentiation, or transcendence, the researcher then explained how the pastor’s statement utilizes those methods of apology. Understanding which category of apologia was used aided in determining which SCCT strategy the pastor used overall, and helped determine the overall effectiveness of the campaign.

³ See Appendix A for reaction statements codebook and Appendix B for reaction statements coding sheet
Additionally, several reaction statements from the leaders were examined as a pre-test, and from that categories for other coding questions were determined, including whether the speaker or their church issued the statement, medium of delivery to audience, implicit versus explicit apology, and who/what was blamed for the scandal. All of these coding categories were important for both understanding the overall strategy of leaders’ crisis communication, as well as aiding in the apologia categorization of each statement. Particularly, understanding who issued the statement and the method used to disseminate it helped determine its intended audience. Whether or not the pastor used an implicit versus explicit apology within the statement was also important to determine within the statements, since some statements in the pre-test discussed the scandal without ever actually apologizing or explicitly referring to it. If there was an explicit apology, then the researcher identified the words used, since that reinforced the mode of apologia selected for each particular statement.

Though reaction statements are critically important to managing a crisis, they alone cannot determine the effectiveness of a crisis management strategy; thus, following the textual analysis of the reaction statements, a content analysis of newspaper and online articles about each leader was conducted to help ascertain the effectiveness of each leader’s strategy. Positive media coverage or a shift in tone from negative to neutral or neutral to positive of a scandal-plagued individual or organization can be an important indicator of the success of a campaign, since reporters and editors are a key audience and can help frame and drive the national dialogue about the crisis. This concept of news framing is defined as being a way the media organizes a story around a particular idea or story, which means the frame suggests what the issue is about (Gamson & Modigliani,
1989). Or as De Vreese (2005) states, “…a frame is an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic” (p. 53), which then allows the media to determine what is important for the public to know. Similarly, the tone of the media stories can influence the public’s perception of a person or issue; for example, differing positive and negative tones in stories about a leader will cause fluctuating public opinion about the leader (Kepplinger, Donsbach, Brosius, & Staab, 1989). The tone of news coverage has been directly linked to effects like political participation and trust in the government amongst the audience of the coverage (Dunaway, 2013). The public readily absorb the reporter’s tone as part of a news story, and if the media report positively on a politician or business over a period of time, this will likely result in a preference for a candidate or a business over its competitor (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Iyengar & Simon, 1997). The application of that research to this paper is relatively straightforward, as it indicates that media reporting on the pastor in a positive tone may cause public opinion amongst the media outlet’s audience to shift more favorably toward the pastor; thus, a shift in media tone can be a key indicator of the effectiveness of the evangelical leader’s crisis recovery strategy.

The 143 articles used for the content analysis were selected based on which outlets the pastors’ target audience was most likely to have viewed and includes both online and print sources. The sample of articles was taken from the top five U.S. Christian media websites and the top Christian newswire service (by number of unique monthly visitors) and their print counterparts and the largest daily paper in the pastor’s community and its online counterpart. According to Alexa.com (Alexa, n.d.), the top five U.S. Christian media websites are ChristianPost.com, ChristianityToday.com, CharismaNews.com, Guideposts.com, and WorldMag.com, and all of them have print
editions as well. Similarly, the Religion News Service website is the most visited Christian wire service website, and print versions of its articles appear in a variety of different publications, including mainstream consumer media outlets. These Christian media outlets were used because their audience is also a target audience for the evangelical pastors, so they represent the key constituency the pastors are trying to reach with their crisis management techniques. Additionally, the major mainstream daily paper of the city in which the pastor was based at the time of the crisis was also used. This mainstream media outlet was included, since the local community also represents a key audience the pastors tried to reach with their messages. As leaders within their community, the pastors may be influential among community members, even if they do not attend the pastors’ church, as they may also have friends or relatives who attend that particular church.

Articles were obtained searching both the media outlets’ archives on their websites and the ProQuest Newsstand database and coded by the researcher. From each media outlet, articles about the pastor were found by using the pastor’s name as the search term, and then the following criteria were used for obtaining relevant articles: the article must include the pastor’s full name, reference the scandal, and have appeared within a four-week timeframe after the scandal was first reported. The four-week timeframe was utilized, since that allowed the researcher the best chance to capture articles both before and after a reaction statement was issued from the pastor, and it also allowed the researcher to capture the immediate response of the media to the statements issued by the pastors and their attempts to manage the crisis. Examining articles beyond a month would allow for the effect of the reaction statement to be diluted and other
factors to play a larger role in the media coverage of the scandal. The articles were analyzed for two purposes: to provide details of activities conducted by the leader and their organization in response to the crisis and to determine the effectiveness of the crisis strategies employed. To determine the effectiveness of the leaders’ crisis management strategies, the articles were evaluated for a positive, neutral or negative tone toward the evangelical leader, with positive, and sometimes neutral, tones indicative of a successful crisis management strategy. In order to determine the tone, the researcher identified each article’s sources, references to the leader’s reaction statement, sources that were included in the article, and tones of the article toward both the evangelical leader and his accuser(s). Additionally, in order to help identify rationales for the tonality results, the researcher identified the format of the article, the affiliation of the author(s) of the article, and the sources utilized in each article. All of the evaluative dimensions of the article are operationalized in the codebook.

Once the articles were obtained and coded, the results were entered into SPSS and crosstabs were run to provide specific numbers on how many total positive, neutral or negative stories appeared about each pastor. After this, additional crosstabs were run to determine the tone of the stories before the leader issued their reaction statement and then again to see the tone of those that came out after the statement was issued. Then, crosstabs were run again to see which of the articles that came out after the statement issuance referenced it and what their tone was toward the leader involved in the scandal. From these results, the researcher was able to determine percentages of tone and references to the each pastor’s reaction statement(s), and, since the article sample sizes

---

4 See Appendix C for the codebook for print articles and Appendix D for the coding sheet for evaluating the tone of the articles
were not the same for each leader, these percentages were used as comparison figures for the effectiveness of each pastor’s crisis response strategy. The articles were also secondarily analyzed for a description of each pastor’s activities in response to the crisis to help determine what strategies and tactics the leader undertook to affect a crisis recovery strategy. This method of determining crisis response activities was necessitated by the evangelical leaders’ and their organizations’ reluctance to speak with the researcher regarding the scandal.

**Applying the Results of the Content Analyses**

Once the statements and articles were analyzed and the strategy of the evangelical leaders determined, each leader’s strategy was placed in a category defined by the SCCT. Since the SCCT includes the concepts of apologia as a foundational tenet, the categorization of the reaction statements’ use of apologia was also considered. A key component of the SCCT is its ability to match a crisis situation with recommended crisis response strategies. In cases where rumors are the crisis, denial strategies are most effective, while rebuilding strategies are most effective with preventable crises (Coombs, 2007). Both of these situations are applicable to the sex scandals in this examination; thus, if the crisis was determined to be based on rumors, the researcher decided whether denial strategies were employed for ultimate effectiveness. Similarly, if the crisis was based on more than just rumors (having hard evidence or corroboration from witnesses), then the crisis was judged to fall into the preventable crisis situation, since the pastor could have prevented the crisis in multiple ways, such as not engaging in homosexual activity or admitting the scandal to his congregation before he was outed. Once the
situation is determined, then the SCCT divides crisis communication response strategies into three categories: establish no crisis exists, alter attributions of a crisis to make it appear less negative, or alter how stakeholders perceive the organization; these three categories are known more simplistically at deny, diminish, and deal (Coombs, 2006b). Within these response/strategy categories there are more detailed subcategories. Under the “Deny” response, the organization can attack the accuser, deny the crisis exists, or create a scapegoat; under the “Diminish” response, the organization can excuse itself from responsibility or justify the crisis by minimizing the damage of the crisis; under the “Deal” response, the organization can ingratiate itself by praising stakeholders or reminding them of its good works, express concern for victims, act compassionately toward the victims by offering money or items to them, demonstrate regret for the crisis, or apologize and take full responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 2006b).

Since the SCCT theorizes which recovery strategies for these situations are most effective, the results of the analysis of the evangelical leaders’ strategies were compared against the ideal situational response to determine whether an appropriate strategy was utilized and if it was effective. Using the aforementioned measures of effectiveness (whether the leader retained his position with the church or religious organization, whether or not the pastor’s marriage remained intact, and whether the tone of media coverage of each leader in the two weeks following the scandal became more positive or remained positive over the two week period beginning with the scandal), the strategy of the leaders was then judged as either ineffective or effective.
Chapter 4: Results

Background of Pastors and Scandals

Paul Crouch

Along with his wife, Jan Crouch, Paul Crouch is the founder of the largest Christian television network in the world. Founded in 1973, the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), and its shows are currently broadcast on more than 5,000 television stations and 70 satellites, and its programming can be streamed live over the Internet (About us: The TBN story, n.d.). TBN produces a wide variety of Christian-oriented content, including talk shows, gospel concerts, original films, and the flagship “Praise the Lord” program, which Crouch co-hosts with his wife (About us: The TBN story, n.d.).

Crouch was born in 1934 to Pentecostal missionaries and holds a degree in Theology from the Central Bible Institute and Seminary, along with honorary doctorates from the California Graduate School of Theology, the American Christian Theological Seminary, and Oral Roberts University (Background, n.d.). While studying at the Central Bible Institute and Seminary, Crouch began working at a local educational radio station, KCBI, and after graduating in 1955, he began working at a radio station, KRSD, in Rapid City, South Dakota, working his way up to managing both the station and its affiliated television station (Background, n.d.). In 1961, Crouch began operating the General Council of the Assemblies of God’s Department of Television and Film Production in California, and in 1965 he moved on to become the general manager of a religious radio station, KREL, which was followed by a stint as the general manager of the KHOF radio and TV station in San Bernardino, California (Background, n.d.). Crouch then left KHOF in 1973 to found TBN with his wife, and has since maintained an active role with
the network both in front of and behind the cameras, as well as authoring or co-authoring seven books.

As the figurehead of the largest Christian broadcasting network, Crouch was involved in several scandals, including numerous accusations that TBN and its executives illegally funneled assets into its board members pockets and violated IRS tax codes, and accusations by an employee that he was wrongly terminated after he and Crouch had sex (Olsen, 2004; Sforza, 2012). The allegations of financial impropriety within the company originated from Crouch’s granddaughter, who was fired from the company and accused of stealing from the network (Eckholm, 2012). She alleged the company had no accountability for its spending and avoided paying taxes through creative accounting practices like listing houses for Crouch family members as “parsonages” (Eckholm, 2012).

The sexual accusations against Crouch were first disclosed by the *Los Angeles Times* in a September 12, 2004 article. The allegations originated from a former TBN employee, Enoch Lonnie Ford, who threatened to sue the network in 1998, claiming he was unjustly fired from his job. Crouch settled with Ford for $425,000, and Ford agreed not to discuss several things, including his allegations that he and Crouch had a sexual encounter; however, in 2004, Ford threatened to publicize his allegations and wrote a manuscript for a book about his story (Lobdell, 2004a). Ford’s attorney then told Crouch that he could suppress the publication of the book for $10 million, resulting in Crouch suing Ford to enforce the 1998 settlement and obtaining a restraining order to prevent publication of the book (Lobdell, 2004a). According to reporter William Lobdell (2004a), both Ford and Crouch agreed to settle the matter in private arbitration, and the
arbitrator ruled in favor of Crouch and indicated that publishing the manuscript would result in Ford having to pay Crouch monetary damages. Most documents from the case were sealed, but correspondence between TBN’s lawyers indicated that they expected some details of the case to go public and that Crouch’s son reportedly said he was “…confronted with having to face the fact that my father is a homosexual” (Lobdell, 2004, para. 18).

Though the details of the case were sealed, the *Los Angeles Times* was able to interview people familiar with the case and obtain correspondence between parties in the case, and, as a result, the newspaper published a detailed account of the case on the front page of its September 12, 2004 issue, giving rise to a public relations crisis for TBN and Crouch. TBN responded publicly on Crouch’s behalf by issuing a press release on the wire service BusinessWire later in the day on September 12. The press release attempted to discredit Ford and accused him of violating the earlier agreement he had with Crouch. The press release was the only instance of Crouch or TBN addressing the issuing publicly.

**Ted Haggard**

Prior to his scandal, Ted Haggard was one of the most influential and recognizable faces of evangelical Christianity in America, and he was even listed in *Time* magazine’s ‘25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America.’ Haggard was born in Indiana in 1956 and graduated from Oral Roberts University in 1978 (Auge, 2006; Goodstein & Banerjee, 2006). While at Oral Roberts, Haggard met and married his wife, Gayle, with whom he now has five children (Roose, 2011). Prior to founding New Life Church in
Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1985, Haggard served as the American vice-president of World Missions for Jesus and as an associate pastor at Bethany World Prayer Center in Lousiana (Goodstein & Banerjee, 2006). From 1985 to 2006, New Life grew to be a 14,000-member church, and Haggard’s profile continued to rise when he was elected president of the National Association of Evangelicals in 2003 and began acting as an evangelical Christian ambassador to President Bush through his participation in weekly conference calls between the president and leading evangelicals (Goodstein & Banerjee, 2006).

As one of the most recognizable faces of the evangelical Christian movement, Haggard’s sexual scandal was covered extensively by media around the world. On November 2, 2006, a Denver-based male escort named Mike Jones came forward and claimed to have had sexual encounters with Haggard, which frequently included regular drug use, over a three-year period (Zoll, 2006). Jones claimed Haggard went by the name “Art” and was from Kansas City (Roose, 2011). Haggard initially denied that he had ever met Jones, but later admitted that there was some sexual contact between the two of them and that he did purchase drugs from Jones, though he denied the pair actually had intercourse (Roose, 2011). Several days after his initial denials, Haggard issued a statement taking responsibility for the scandal and stating that he was a “liar,” and, following his admission, he entered a New Life-coordinated therapy program (Roose, 2011). Although Haggard had resigned from the NAE several days after news of the scandal broke, according to the church, Haggard did not entirely resign from New Life until he decided to remove himself from the church-imposed therapy to turn him heterosexual again (Gilgoff, 2009). As a result, the church said it provided him with a
severance package around $300,000 in both salary and benefits (he disputes both claims by the church and says he did not quit therapy and they provided less as a severance package), and was initially asked by the church to leave Colorado altogether—though it has since rescinded that request (Gilgoff, 2009). Though both New Life and the NAE issued press releases concerning Haggard, the NAE release was excluded from this paper, since it was issued directly in response to Haggard proactively resigning his position from the organization, not in response to the allegations of sexual misconduct.

In 2009, Haggard was again accused of sexual impropriety by a former New Life volunteer, Grant Haas, who claimed that Haggard had offered him drugs and masturbated in front of him on a church trip three years earlier; however, Haas also claimed that New Life paid him more than $100,000 to not state the allegations publicly (Roose, 2011). Haggard denied these allegations completely and has now started a new church in Colorado Springs with his wife called St. James Church. As a result of the scandal Haggard has admitted his stance on gay marriage has softened to the point that he agrees civil unions for gay couples may be acceptable, and he has stated that "I think that probably, if I were 21 in this society, I would identify myself as a bisexual" (Roose, 2011, para. 87).

Lonnie Latham

Lonnie Latham was a prominent member of the Southern Baptist community in Oklahoma and gained minor recognition on a national level during the 1990s and early 2000s. Latham was the executive director of the Tulsa Metro Baptist Association from 2000 to 2002 before being named senior pastor of South Tulsa Baptist Church in Tulsa,
Oklahoma in 2002, and under his leadership, the church grew from about 995 members in 2002 to 1,571 members in 2004 (Hall W., 2006; Tulsa World, 2004). He also played an important role within the Southern Baptist denomination, and beginning in 2000 he served as the as the recording secretary for the General Convention of Oklahoma and as a member of the state convention’s executive board, which included 1,700 churches (Hall W., 2006; Sherman, 2007). In 2004, he was selected as one of four representatives from Oklahoma on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, which consisted of 42,000 member churches (Hall W., 2006; Sherman, 2007). As a high-profile pastor, Latham spoke against a variety of moral issues during his career, including the legalization of gambling on Native American reservations and gay rights.

As an outspoken advocate against same-sex marriage, Latham’s 2006 same-sex sex scandal received a moderate amount of attention in both LGBT media outlets and in Baptist periodicals. Latham was arrested on the night of January 3, 2006 in an area of Oklahoma City known to be frequented by men looking for sex with other men when he allegedly propositioned an undercover male police officer; the officer stated that Latham invited him to go back to a local hotel to have sex, resulting in his arrest on the charge of “offering to engage in a lewd act” (Hall W., 2006; Sherman, 2007). As he was leaving jail on the following day, Latham stated to several television reporters that he was only in the area to pastor to the police that were on-duty in that area, but he subsequently resigned his positions with the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma within days of his arrest, citing personal reasons (Hall W., 2006). Latham also resigned from his position as pastor at South Tulsa Baptist Church at the same time by submitting a letter to the church’s
minister of administration, and it was then read to the congregation during the following Sunday service (Hall W., 2006).

On February 22, 2007, Latham was acquitted of offering to engage in a lewd act—a charge which his attorney had argued should be unconstitutional, since the U.S. Supreme Court had previously legalized sex between men (Sherman, 2007). Latham’s stance against same-sex relationships is well-documented, particularly his support for a Southern Baptist Convention directive that urged members to befriend members of the LGBT community in an effort to try to convince them to become heterosexual (Associated Press, 2006). Despite his stances against homosexuality, his case drew support from the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed a friend of the court brief on his behalf, and some national gay rights groups, who maintained that extending an invitation for sex (as long as money is not exchanged) is not a crime, so Latham should never have been arrested (Sherman, 2007). Since his trial, Latham has largely stayed out of the public eye, and has not taken up any high-profile pastoral positions.

**Eddie Long**

Eddie Long is the bishop and senior pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia, which at its height had 25,000 members (Bishop Eddie Long, n.d.). He also tapes his own television program, *Taking Authority*, for TBN and has written more than eight books (Bishop Eddie Long, n.d.). Originally from North Carolina, Long holds an undergraduate degree in Business Administration from North Carolina Central University, a Master of Divinity degree from the Interdenominational Theological Center, and a Ph.D. in Pastoral Ministry from the International College of
Excellence (Bishop Eddie Long, n.d.). In between attending North Carolina Central University and going to graduate school, Long worked at Ford Motor Company, but was fired for discrepancies in his expense accounts, leading him to move to Atlanta to pursue his graduate degree and also become pastor of a church in Jonesboro, Georgia (Brown & McKinley, 2010). Following his tenure in Jonesboro, Long became pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, which only had 300 members when Long took over the role of pastor in 1987 (Brown & McKinley, 2010). Through combining the practices of charismatic and evangelical churches, his use of cable TV, and his adoption of “muscular Christianity” (view that emphasizes that the man must be warriorlike and serve as a spiritual authority and protector for his family), Long was able to grow the church rapidly (Brown & McKinley, 2010). In 1994, the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship, a movement within African-American churches that encourages embracing Pentecostal beliefs, named Long a bishop, which both implied that he oversaw pastors and meant that Long would no longer have to answer to the church’s board of deacons (Blake, 2002). Though Long severed ties with the Full Baptist Church Fellowship, he has retained the title and currently remains the bishop of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church.

Throughout his career, Long has been embroiled in several controversies and scandals, the first being accusations of abuse from his first wife. The couple was married in 1981 and divorce papers filed by Dabara S. Houston claimed Long was physically abusive and that he beat her when she was pregnant with the couple’s child; however, no criminal charges were ever filed (Boone & Tagami, 2010). In 2005, Long was accused of receiving excessive compensation (about $3 million from 1997-2000) from his charity, Bishop Eddie Long Ministries Inc., and the charitable gifts from the organizations were
said to equal Long’s compensation during those years, which would be a violation of IRS tax codes (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2010). Long defended his compensation by saying that the charity did not solicit donations during that time and that the salary and benefits he received were the result of royalties from his books and speaking fees, and he also stated that his congregation likes to see him doing well, since it inspires them (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2010). An ensuing three-year U.S. Senate investigation of spending by televangelists, however, failed to find definitive evidence of wrongdoing on the part of the pastors (Zoll, 2011).

Following the accusations of financial impropriety, on September 21, 2010, Long found himself the subject of lawsuits by two young men, who were former members of New Birth, claiming that Long had coerced them into having sexual contact with him when he took them on overnight trips (CNN Wire Staff, 2010). These two lawsuits were followed by an additional accuser coming forward a day later, and on September 24, a fourth accuser (a former member of Long’s satellite church, New Birth Charlotte, in North Carolina) filed a lawsuit alleging the bishop had coerced him into intimate sexual conduct during overseas trips (Schneider & Poole, 2010). All four of the men alleged that Long had coerced them into sexual contact, beginning when they were 16 or 17, and then lavished them with expensive gifts like trips, cars, and paying tuition for their school, while he also justified the sexual activity in scriptural terms, including holding a “covenant” ceremony where they would exchange jewelry and Biblical quotes (Boone & Matteucci, 2010). Compromising the men’s credibility somewhat was the fact that two of the accusers were caught on surveillance video robbing Long’s office three months prior to their public allegations against the bishop; however, the charges against
the pair were dropped when Long intervened and asked that the charges be dropped (Boone, 2010).

The accusations of Long’s same-sex sexual indiscretions were compounded by his well-known anti-gay stance, which included a march he led in 2009 in Atlanta in support of a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2010). Long denied all the accusations brought against him, and in a conference call he held with his supporters the day the fourth accuser came forward, Long claimed he was under attack and moving forward but he refrained from addressing the allegations directly (Boone, 2010). Long also cancelled interviews had scheduled when the fourth allegation broke, and had a spokesperson for the church and his attorney speak on his behalf to the media. In a sermon Long gave to his congregation on September 27, 2010—almost a week after the allegations surfaced—Long again avoided addressing the allegations directly, and instead said he was going to fight this “thing,” mentioning that everyone goes through painful times; the press were allowed to listen to this statement, but were banned from remaining in the church following it (Associated Press, 2010). In May 2011, the lawsuits were settled out of court for undisclosed terms and may have included a fifth accuser who did not come forward publicly (Tenety, 2011).

Jonathan Merritt

Known mainly as a Christian faith and culture writer and speaker, Jonathan Merritt has written articles for many mainstream publications, including USA Today and The Atlantic, as well as Christian publications like Christianity Today; he has also regularly appeared on television outlets like CNN and Fox News, where he provided
commentary on topics relating to faith, Christianity and environmentalism (Merritt, n.d.). Merritt originally became well-known in evangelical circles for authoring the book *Green Like God*, which covers environmentalism in relation to Christianity (Merritt, n.d.). Merritt also held several high-level positions within the evangelical Christian community, sitting on the board of directors of Bethany Christian Services, an adoption agency, and on the advisory board of the Religion News Service (Banks, 2012; Merritt, n.d.). The son of a former Southern Baptist Convention president and current pastor of the megachurch Crosse Pointe Church in Atlanta, Georgia, where Merritt was also the creative director, he earned a Master of Divinity degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Master of Theology degree from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University (Allen, 2012; Merritt, n.d.).

On July 23, 2012, blogger Azariah Southworth posted on his blog that Merritt was gay and encouraged him to come out of the closet, and though he stated that he would not provide the details of their relationship or proof of Merritt’s homosexuality on the blog, he could provide proof, if required (Southworth, 2012a). In a subsequent interview with the Lifeway Research Blog on July 26, Merritt did reveal some details about his relationship with Southworth, including the fact that he and Southworth began corresponding in 2009 after the blogger read an article of his, which led to meeting and, ultimately, physical contact (Stetzer, 2012). Merritt also noted that the contact only happened once, and he never saw Southworth again; he also stated that he does not identify as gay and was overcome with guilt and even saw a Christian counselor after the experience (Stetzer, 2012). Southworth did indicate, however, that Merritt sent him a
text message the night he posted the outing to his blog asking him to call him, but the two had no further contact after that (A. Southworth, personal communication, May 2, 2013).

The interview with the Lifeway Research Blog was the only statement of any sort that Merritt gave regarding the accusations. Southworth, himself an ex-evangelical Christian, said that he felt conflicted about outing Merritt and apologized for any pain caused by it, but also reaffirmed his desire for transparency and honesty in leaders, particularly when they take a public stance on an issue at odds with their actions, which Merritt had done when stating his support for Chick-Fil-A and its opposition to gay marriage (Southworth, 2012b). In the time since the scandal, Merritt continued to write articles for many of the same outlets he did before the scandal, and he published a book, *A Faith of Our Own*, which discusses the culture wars and how many younger people are dissatisfied with the close association of politics and Christianity in America, however, he is no longer listed as a member of the Crosse Pointe Church staff.

**George Alan Rekers**

George Alan Rekers is a well-known figure in the Christian, anti-gay movement for both his political and academic contributions to the effort. Though he is known primarily for his academic and psychological research, Rekers is also an ordained minister in the Southern Baptist Convention (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004). He holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles and has numerous psychological certifications and more than 120 books and scholarly articles to his name (Rekers, 2010a). Much of his academic research has been the subject of criticism by other psychologists and gay rights activists for its promotion of “conversion
therapy” to make gays and lesbians heterosexual and its findings that gays and lesbians are unfit parents as a result of the alleged danger in which they put children (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004). Rekers also has a distinguished academic resume, serving as a research fellow at Harvard University from 1972 to 1973 before taking positions at the University of California at Los Angeles as an assistant research psychologist, the University of Florida as an associate professor of psychiatry, Kansas State University as the head of the Family and Child Development Department, and, currently, as distinguished professor emiritus of Neuropsychiatry and Behavioral Science at the University of South Carolina (Bullock & Thorp, 2010a; Rekers, 2010a).

Though Rekers’ research is frequently cited by conservative, anti-gay groups, his contributions to the anti-gay movement consist of more than just academic papers. In 1983, along with James Dobson, Rekers was a member of the founding board of the Family Research Council, which hosts events like the Values Summit that are geared toward the right wing of the Republican Party (Bullock & Thorp, 2010a). He was also a board member of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), which espouses conversion therapy for treating homosexuality, and is a member of the American College of Pediatricians, a socially conservative association founded primarily in response to the American Academy of Pediatrics support for adoptions by gay couples (Anton, 2010; Bullock & Thorp, 2010a). Additionally, Rekers has worked as a consultant for the U.S. House of Representatives, the White House, the Department of Health and Human Services, and he was hired by the Florida attorney general to serve as an expert witness in defense of the state’s ban on gay adoptions (Rekers, 2010a).
Rekers became embroiled in a sex scandal when the *Miami New Times* published a story on May 4, 2010 claiming that Rekers had hired a male escort, or “rent boy,” to accompany him on a 10-day trip to Europe; the article also included pictures of the pair arriving home to the Miami airport together and a detailed description of the online Rentboy.com profile of the escort, Lucien (Bullock & Thorp, 2010a). Rekers initially told the reporters that he had recently had surgery and had hired Lucien to help him with luggage, and though he did not deny hiring him through the Rentboy.com website, he claimed to have only learned that Lucien was an escort mid-way through their trip (Bullock & Thorp, 2010a). He further refuted the accusations in a statement posted to his now-defunct website, ProfessorGeorge.com, calling the charges in the article “slanderous” and restating that his relationship with Lucien was not inappropriate, and in his response to a blogger, he stated that he spent much of the trip convincing Lucien to give up homosexuality (BBC News, 2010). In Lucien’s first interview on May 6, 2010, however, he told a detailed account of providing massages and other services to Rekers, and claimed that the leader was indeed a homosexual (Bullock & Thorp, 2010b). A second escort in Chicago came forward on May 8, 2010, and claimed that Rekers had also hired him to provide sexual services, but those charges were not taken seriously and he had little proof to back them up (Raymond, 2010).

In addition to Rekers’s response, on May 7, 2010 NARTH also issued a statement stating that it would not allow a personal issue to take away from its mission, but it took the allegations very seriously, which led Rekers to resign from NARTH several days later (BBC News, 2010; Bailey, 2010a). Additionally, the Family Research Council president said he had no knowledge of Rekers and the organization had had no contact with him in
more than a decade (Bailey, 2010a). In an email sent to Christianity Today on May 12, Rekers continued to deny the allegations by simply saying he confessed to God that it was unwise and wrong to hire Lucien without knowing him and said that his wife or sons would be accompanying him on trips going forward (Bailey, 2010a). The email to Christianity Today was the final communication from Rekers on the scandal, and all other interviews and communication were declined on the advice from his attorney.

Understanding the Evangelical Leaders’ Responses in Terms of Form

Following the approach Coombs (2006a) lays out in evaluating crisis responses, there are three basic tenets that all good crisis communicators adhere to under what he terms the “form”5 of a crisis response and which aid in a successfully crisis recovery: speed, consistency, and openness. These tenets are based on repeated advice from practitioners’ observations and their experiences as crisis communicators, but scholarly research about these tenets is lacking. Despite the lack of research, understanding the form of a crisis communication campaign is important for evaluating it and comparing it against widely accepted best practices approaches to crises.

Speed of Crisis Response

Of these three tenets, the speed of an organization’s response is often cited by experts as the most important factor to consider when faced with a crisis (Darling, 1994; Kempner, 1995). In other words, the faster the organization publicly responds to a crisis, the more likely an effective recovery can be achieved. While this is not always the case,

5 The form of a crisis response refers to the overall activity and strategy behind the response, as opposed to the content of the crisis response, which refers to specific words and meaning of individual passages within the response.
since a company can craft an inappropriate or insensitive response, but still distribute it quickly, it is a good initial recommendation for a crisis response. By responding swiftly to the crisis—within the day, if not sooner—the organization can fill an information vacuum, and inform its stakeholders, who would otherwise be left to speculate or find other sources of information about the crisis that may be inaccurate or attack the organization-in-crisis (Coombs, 2006a). Additionally, stakeholders may perceive a swift response as an indication that the organization has things well in hand, and that the crisis will not result in the dissolution of the organization, thus maintaining stakeholder confidence (Lukaszewski, 1997).

Of the six evangelical leaders examined in this study, only two issued any sort of response to the crisis on the same day. TBN issued a response on Paul Crouch’s behalf via press release the same day as the *Los Angeles Times* article. The press release was posted to BusinessWire and, presumably, sent out to key reporters by TBN’s publicist. Considering the *Los Angeles Times* article was part of a series of investigative pieces by reporter William Lobdell and that he interviewed people involved with both TBN and Crouch during his investigations, it is likely that the organization and Crouch were aware that some harmful stories were likely to be published, allowing them to create a crisis plan and have a prepared statement ready to be distributed the day the article was released. This strategy of having a prepared statement and releasing it on BusinessWire represents a proactive approach to managing the crisis and trying to speak to the largest audience possible. As some public relations experts have noted, being proactive with the information during a crisis allows the organization to control the message, even to the point of getting ahead of the crisis by releasing information about it before anyone is
even aware of it (Coombs, 2006a; Fearn-Banks, 2007). Though Crouch was exceptionally timely in releasing his statement, he did not release it before the news article came out announcing the crisis, and he did not acknowledge the earlier crisis and settlement with Ford until the 2004 crisis, which had the potential to harm the effectiveness of his response to Ford’s second round of accusations in 2004.

George Rekers also released a statement the same day the article about his trip with an escort ran in the *Miami New Times*. His approach to the statement differed from Crouch’s, however, in that it was reactive rather than proactive. While Crouch’s statement was issued before anyone even contacted him regarding Ford’s accusations, Rekers’s initial response to the scandal came both in the form of a phone call with a Miami New Times reporter (of which only a few comments were published publicly) and a response to a blogger’s request for Rekers to explain his reasons for taking a trip with the escort. Though Rekers’s response to the blogger, Joe, was swift and thorough, it was clearly reactionary as Joe runs a well-known blog for the LGBT community called Joe.My.God, and has previously written negative articles about the research Rekers has conducted on homosexuality. As such, Rekers’s response, though carefully worded, is denigrated by comments from the blogger, who says at the end of his post about Rekers’s response (emphasis is the blogger’s): “Oh, well that explains EVERYTHING! Dr. George Rekers is curing homosexuals ONE BY ONE by hiring them on MALE PROSTITUTION websites! Glory! Praise His Name!” (Rekers, 2010b, para. 4). Though Rekers response was swift in this case, it was reactionary and defensive, and the choice of medium was not suitable for Rekers’s purposes, since it did not speak to his target audiences. Generally, Joe.My.God and his audience are friendly to the LGBT cause, whereas Rekers’s typical audience is opposed to the LGBT community and view homosexuality as a sin, and Rekers’s
response reinforces that, particularly when he mentions he spent a significant amount of time convincing Lucien to abandon “homosexual sins” and “homosexual intercourse.” In addition to failing to understand the audience of the outlet he was speaking with, Rekers also failed to understand communication in the Internet age. Bloggers have become the new investigative reporters, but they do not adher to the same rigid professional standards as traditional journalists—little is off the record with bloggers and the crisis does not die off as quickly once it becomes widely discussed online in social media forums (Bridgeman, 2008). Despite, or perhaps because of this misstep in his communication strategy, Rekers did post a statement on his own personal website the following day, but that statement was not an exhaustive explanation, and he simply stated he had hired a travel assistant because of a medical condition and that he had no knowledge of Lucien’s career as an escort (Rekers, n.d.). This statement was followed up by a brief statement on the NARTH website, an organization in which he had played a vital role, which said little more beyond the fact that it was investigating the allegations against Rekers, but that “…personal controversies do not change the scientific data, nor do they detract from the important work of NARTH” (NARTH, 2010, para. 3).

Aside from Crouch and Rekers, none of the pastors issued a statement of any sort to their followers or the media within a 24-hour period after the scandal broke. Ted Haggard did speak several times to the media in the two days following the scandal, but these were brief moments where reporters caught him in his car or walking in or out of a building, not official statements. Neither New Life Church nor Haggard issued a statement until two days after the accusations and that statement came in the form of a press release distributed directly to media outlets informing them that the Overseer Board of New Life Church had found Haggard guilty of “sexually immoral conduct,” and that
he was being dismissed from his position at the church (New Life Church, 2006). The press release went on to say that Haggard would read “a letter of explanation and apology” at the church service the next day (New Life Church, 2006). The release from the church explained little about the situation other than to say Haggard was being fired, and the length of time it took before an official statement was put out allowed the media, public, and comedians like Stephen Colbert to speculate and mock Haggard for his purported sexual activities and use of methamphetamines. Despite the relatively lengthy time between the onset of the scandal and the issuance of Haggard’s official statement and his earlier misstatements, his official statement to the congregation admitted his mistakes, though it still did not clarify exactly which activities he had committed.

Both Latham and Merritt waited even longer to address their respective scandals, with a period of three days elapsing before any sort of statement from either leader or their organizations was forthcoming. Latham’s only comment before both his and his church’s official statements, was on his way out of jail after he posted bail, and he said that he had been set up and he was just in the area to minister to the police that were there (Associated Press, 2006). This comment led to mocking speculation, particularly in the LGBT media and amongst commenters, about the type of ministering he had been doing, and the evangelical LGBT organization, Soulforce, even took his arrest as an opportunity to put out a press release about the negative impact of the Southern Baptist Convention’s teachings on homosexuality (Soulforce, 2006). While Latham made one comment prior to his official statement, Merritt did not speak publicly in from the time the scandal broke until his interview with the Christian blogger, Ed Stetzer, at which point he admitted his relationship with Southworth and said he had received counseling for it. Though Merritt
refrained from making any contradictory statements publicly and Latham only made a single one, the time gap between the scandals and the statements allowed for much speculation on the part of the media and public. This was particularly true of the LGBT media, who took the opportunity to speculate about the reasons Latham was in a park in the middle of the night and seek out Merritt’s accuser for commentary.

Long had the lengthiest gap between the onset of his scandal and the issuance of an official statement regarding it. Five days elapsed between the accusations against him being made public on September 21, 2010 and Long’s formal response to it. The day after the accusations surfaced, Long’s attorneys informed the press that Long wished to speak with them and clear his name of the allegations, but they had advised him against doing so (Poole, 2010). Long had initially announced that he would hold a press conference and have an on-air radio interview on the nationally syndicated “Tom Joyner Morning Show” on September 23, 2010, but after a third man filed a lawsuit on September 22, 2010 Long’s attorney appeared on the show instead and stated that there had been a miscommunication about the press conference, and it would not be taking place (Boone & Matteucci, 2010). As a consequence, Long’s official response came in the form of a sermon he gave to his church members—and some members of the media who attended—on September 27, 2010, the first Sunday after the accusations surfaced. Following the church service, Long made a brief statement to the media saying that he wanted his guilt to be determined by a court not by public opinion, and he refused to take any questions (McClish, 2010). So, despite earlier brief communications through his attorneys to convey that he wished to speak but could not, nothing substantive was said by Long or his team prior to his sermon and statement to the press on September 26,
2010. It could be argued too that these cancelled attempts to speak with the public via press conferences and a radio interview created an even worse situation for Long than no communication would have, since it allowed the media to write even more stories about the fact that he cancelled the appearances and speculate as to why.

**Consistency of Crisis Response**

During a crisis, consistency is another key tenet that crisis communicators indicate will lead to a successful campaign. Though an organization may have multiple spokespeople during crisis, ensuring that they each convey consistent messages is a key component of a successfully managed crisis communications campaign (Lukaszewski, 1997). If the speakers are delivering inconsistent messages from one another, then their believability and role as a source of information is undermined (Clampitt, 1991). Additionally, the messages must not contradict each other, and should appear to speak as if with one voice (Carney & Jorden, 1993; Coombs, 2006a). Key to the idea of consistency is the underlying rule that an organization should not confuse either the media or its target audiences, since this will result in prolonging the crisis and continuing to undermine the credibility of the organization’s efforts to rehabilitate its image.

Haggard is the perfect example of a pastor who offered contradictory comments to the media. His early off-the-cuff comments to media denying his involvement with Jones before he or his church offered an official statement confused the public and media about the circumstances of the crisis. Initially, Haggard denied knowing Jones, but then he revised that to admit that he had received massages from him but did not do any drugs or engaging in anything sexual with Jones (Banerjee & Goodstein, 2006). Following
these comments, Haggard further demonstrated incongruence between his statements and actions when he resigned his position as president of the NAE and as senior pastor of New Life Church within three days of the scandal surfacing, which could have easily been interpreted by many as an admission of guilt, despite his earlier statements. The official statement Haggard issued to his congregation, reflected a markedly different tone than the earlier comments he had made to media, but throughout the statement, Haggard never acknowledged the exact acts he committed, just stating:

> The public person I was wasn’t a lie; it was just incomplete…I did things that were contrary to everything I believe. The accusations that have been leveled against me are not all true, but enough of them are true that I have been appropriately and lovingly removed from ministry (Haggard, 2006, para.7-8).

Though this messaging was vague, it was consistent with the press release from the church, which also did not disclose which specific acts Haggard had committed, saying:

> Our investigation and Pastor Haggard’s public statements have proven without a doubt that he has committed sexually immoral conduct… we have decided that the most positive and productive direction for our church is his dismissal and removal. (New Life Church, 2006, para. 1-3)

So, despite the initial denials and restatements from Haggard as to what did or did not do, he and the church were able to ultimately maintain a consistent message, though not until more than 48 hours after the scandal was initially disclosed.

Lonnie Latham also had an issue with consistency but to a lesser degree than Haggard. His initial comment to media after making bail that he was ministering to police in the park was at odds with the police report, which stated he offered to engage in an act of “lewdness” with an male undercover office (Associated Press, 2006). While it is perhaps not surprising that Latham’s account of the incident differed from the police report, Latham did not clarify his statement any further in the ensuing days, and the
statements from both the pastor and his church did not provide any additional insight into
the situation. Though neither Latham’s nor the church’s statements three days later
addressed the issue directly, they were consistent in their content and language.
Latham’s statement said little more than he was resigning as pastor at the South Tulsa
Baptist Church, and he thanked everyone for their wishes, while the church’s statement
noted Latham had submitted his resignation and who would be filling in for him, while
also thanking the congregation for its support (Latham, 2006; South Tulsa Baptist
Church, 2006). Though these statements are remarkably consistent, neither one addressed
the allegations against Latham in any capacity, leaving the pastor’s and the church’s
audiences to continue to speculate about the veracity of the allegations, and whether what
he had said earlier about ministering to the police was indeed true.

Rekers and Long both spoke with the media in some capacity before their official
statements, but they were remarkably consistent in their messaging. Despite the
canceled press conference and interview on the Tom Joyner radio program, Long’s
representatives simply stated that he wished to speak about the accusations, but he would
not at the request of his attorneys. This sentiment was repeated during his Sunday
sermon and subsequent address to the press after the service, however during these two
statements he also added to his earlier sentiments and mentioned that he would fight the
accusations. Rekers’s statements were consistent in the fact that both his posting on his
website and his response to the blogger Joe.My.God and phone call with the Miami New
Times mentioned the fact that the escort was hired as a travel assistant, but the statement
on his website was considerably shorter. The response Rekers gave to the blogger
discussed in great detail how it is possible to stop homosexual activity and how he does
not hate gay people, but has spent a lot of time “…lovingly caring for people identifying themselves as ‘gay’” (Rekers, 2010b, para. 3). In the statement Rekers posted on his website, he did add one piece of information when he mentioned that he did not find out his travel assistant was an escort until they were already on the trip; however, this information does not necessarily contradict anything he stated earlier—it simply added to it.

Crouch and Merritt were much more consistent in their messaging, however, this was largely a circumstance of the fact they only spoke publicly about their respective incidents once. Crouch did not even speak publicly about the incident but spoke through the press release his publicist issued on his behalf; whereas Merritt only addressed the accusations through an interview with a Christian blogger. Though only addressing the incident once does not allow for there to be any mixed messages from the organization, it also does not allow the public/target audiences a clear picture of the crisis. In a best practices approach, the public should be kept constantly informed as to the situation of the crisis and what the organization (in this case, person) is doing to resolve it, and this constant communication actually has the potential to turn the public into a resource and during a crisis and enable a stronger recovery for the organization (Seeger, 2006).

Though this discussion has largely focused on contradictions specifically in involved in the pastors’ reactions to their respective scandals, on a larger scale, all of the allegations reflect some contradictions, since most of the pastors took positions against homosexuality in the past. The study is mainly focused on the pastors’ reactions to the scandals, but it is important to note that their earlier positions on the issue of homosexuality reflected a dichotomy between their expressed sentiment and their alleged
actions. Even if the pastor did not admit to the homosexual encounter, the accusation coupled with his earlier statements on the issue complicated his recovery from the crisis. All of the pastors, with the exception of Merritt and Crouch, were stridently anti-gay in statements and sermons. Crouch, though believing homosexuality is a sin, has never stridently taken the issue up to any significant degree. Merritt similarly took a more muted stance on homosexuality, and while he indicates it reflects a “brokenness,” he also called for more of a level-headed discussion between supporters of both sides of the issue (Merritt, 2012). Other pastors like Latham, Long, Rekers, and Haggard had taken clearly anti-gay positions; for example, Long held an anti-gay rally, Latham indicated Christians should make friends with gay people in order to make them straight, Haggard appeared in the film “Jesus Camp” and discussed his anti-gay views, and Rekers is noted for all his academic publications declaring that homosexuality is curable. These situations indeed reflected a contradiction that complicated their crisis recovery and allowed the LGBT media to attack them.

**Openness of Crisis Response**

Openness or transparency refers to the availability and willingness of the organization-in-crisis to speak with the media and stakeholders, and it also refers to what degree the organization discloses information (Coombs, 2006a). Organizations that are reluctant or unavailable to discuss the crisis with the media, public, and their target audiences are often looked at suspiciously and negatively from those same audiences, since it is assumed that they are hiding something relating to the crisis (Kaufmann, Kesner, & Hazen, 1994; Coombs, 2006a). There is often an on-going debate between
attorneys and crisis communicators with regard to partial versus full disclosure with the attorneys arguing for a less is more approach with regard to disclosing information during a crisis. In an ideal situation, crisis communicators recommend a full disclosure of information for three major reasons: 1) it will minimize the long-term damage to the organization’s reputation, 2) all information about the crisis will likely come out eventually, so releasing all the information initially will avoid developing adversarial relationships with publics, and 3) during a crisis publics are apt to be more forgiving of organizations that have a history of full disclosure (Kaufmann, Kesner, & Hazen, 1994). But there may be legal ramifications stemming from full disclosure in certain situations; therefore, organizations must themselves determine whether full or partial disclosure is the best option. Similarly, in an effort to shift the debate about the crisis, companies may couple partial disclosure with that of ambiguity (introducing new or highly technical information in an effort to deflect blame or confuse the public) which is not recommended by crisis communication experts, since it may confuse the situation and end up putting the public or stakeholders at risk (Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997). Experts warn that this type of partial disclosure with ambiguity is unacceptable if it places the public at risk, and recommend clear and complete communication between stakeholders and the organization during a crisis (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Renz, 1996; Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997).

The pastors being examined in this study did not put the public at risk in terms of physical harm as a result of their actions, but in the minds of their followers, their actions did put them at spiritual risk. As Sider (2005) indicates, evangelicals believe that individual sin contributes to overall societal corruption and creates unjust systems, and
then those who participate in these systems are sinners; thus, they believe individual sin has the potential to corrupt the community. So, each pastor’s followers will likely see his individual transgression in terms of how it may lead to more overall sin to which their friends and family may also become a party. Thus, the followers fear both the negative reputation the scandal would bring upon their church, as well as a more general fear of how this scandal may impact their community and family.

Since the scandals did not bring physical harm to individuals, it could be argued there is reason for Merritt, Haggard or Rekers to only partially disclose information; however, this is still not an ideal approach and neither is their use of ambiguity in their responses. Lacking hard evidence, there is no definitive way to determine exactly how much of the information the evangelical leaders’ disclosed was accurate, which makes each scandal a case of the leaders’ word against their accusers’ and evaluating what is known of the facts to see if the case the leaders present is believable. In Haggard’s case he changed what he admitted to doing several times, and then in his official statement, he declined to admit to specifics—just saying that not everything he had been accused of was true, but enough of it was (Haggard, 2006). Ultimately, several years after he left New Life Church, Haggard did admit to receiving erotic massages from Jones and purchasing methamphetamines (Forman, 2009), but these admissions did not help to repair his image in the short-term after the crisis. Haggard’s initial denial of the charges, followed by an admission that was unclear on the details of what specifically he was admitting to, reflected some lack of openness on his part. At no point did he ever provide a full disclosure of the information relating to the charges, and his initial denial was followed by only a partial disclosure.
Similarly, Rekers, appears to have provided only a partial disclosure of information surrounding his scandal. His account of the European trip he took with the male escort varies from the escort’s story and some very compelling points some reporters and bloggers have made. Whereas Rekers never denied he took a trip with the escort, Lucien, and he was consistent in his story, his claims that he solely hired Lucien to handle his baggage and that he tried to convince him to abandon homosexuality were at odds with the escort’s claims. Lucien said he was not hired to carry Rekers’s luggage, gave him erotic massages regularly, that Rekers is gay, and that Rekers only spoke about the morality of being gay and Christian once, though he did agree that Rekers did have a physical ailment that made it difficult for him to lift heavy suitcases (Bullock & Thorp, 2010b). Lucien also went on to claim that NARTH and Rekers had sent him a pre-filled out questionnaire with answers to questions about the scandal, which he provided to the Miami New Times, and he allowed the New Times reporters to listen in on a call with Rekers, where the evangelical leader advised Lucien that the best way to make the story go away was to only issue one statement and then stop giving anymore interviews (Bullock & Thorp, 2010c). Thus, while it is clear that Rekers did not deny Lucien was an escort or that he accompanied him on a trip, other circumstances around their association, such as how they met, are somewhat unclear, so it can be assumed that Rekers only disclosed part of information.

Merritt, on the other hand, appears to have fully disclosed all relevant information about his particular crisis. Southworth initially disclosed all the details of their correspondence, how they met, and the fact that they engaged in sexual activity. Merritt only issued one response to the accusations in the form of the interview with the blogger,
Ed Stetzer. Though Merritt did not add any additional details to the accusations, he did not deny them in any capacity and affirmed that:

We corresponded several times by email and text for a couple of weeks, some of them inappropriate. When I was traveling through a city near him, we met for dinner because we'd corresponded so recently. As we were saying goodbye, we had physical contact that went beyond the bounds of friendship (Stetzer, 2012, para. 10)

So, while Merritt clearly did not wish to go into further details about his encounter with Southworth, his affirmation of Southworth’s allegations, did not necessarily require further disclosure. In the same interview with Stetzer (2012), Merritt did supply additional information about his own history and the fact that he was molested when he was younger, but it is not clear if he provided that information as an excuse or rationale for why he engaged in homosexual activity with Southworth or just to provide additional context for the interview. Even though Merritt only spoke publicly once about the scandal, the fact that he did not deny any of Southworth’s accusations and provided additional supplementary information about himself, he is the only one of the leaders being examined in this paper who actually made a full disclosure of information.

Unlike their counterparts from whom a full disclosure of information about the crisis would be expected, Crouch, Latham, and Long could potentially have a rationale for only partially disclosing information, since all three were involved in court cases with their accusers. Latham, in particular, was facing misdemeanor criminal charges for offering to engage in a lewd act that could have resulted in a sentence of $2,500 fine and 40 to 80 hours of community service (Sherman, 2007), whereas both Crouch and Long were involved in civil suits with their accusers. Though the charges against Latham were ultimately dismissed a year after his arrest, they were likely the main reason he was not
more forthcoming or communicative regarding the charges against him. Even Latham’s attorney did not really broach the subject of whether his client actually committed the crime, rather he argued that the lewdness statute Latham had been charged under was unconstitutional because the U.S. Supreme Court had legalized consensual sex between men several years earlier (Sherman, 2007). However, Latham’s only comments to the public following the incident barely even count as a partial disclosure. His first comments as he was leaving the police station that he was actually pastoring to the police when he was arrested (Hall W., 2006) is the only time the public heard directly from the pastor about his version of events. Both the letters released by Latham and his church announcing his resignation do not allude to his guilt or innocence or provide any details about the situations, and they just express thanks to supporters. Even after his initial comment to reporters, when he was reached by The Baptist Press on the phone, Latham refused to comment on the situation on the advice of his attorneys (Hall W., 2006).

Thus, Latham both injected ambiguity into the situation by proposing a different rationale for being in the area when he was arrested and also went against the advice of crisis communicators by saying he had no comment (Fearn-Banks, 2007; Lukaszewski, 1997). Thus, the lack of disclosure on Latham’s part, leave his audience questioning his guilt or innocence, and, if his off-the-cuff comment was true, why he was ministering to police at a park in the middle of the night.

Though Crouch’s situation was different than Latham’s in that Crouch was not facing criminal charges, the fact that he was involved in a civil case with regard to the sex scandal somewhat justifies his reasons for not engaging in a full disclosure of the facts around the case. Though the earlier settlement Crouch/TBN and Ford had reached in
1998 was ostensibly to settle a wrongful termination claim against TBN, part of the settlement was that Ford could not discuss his sexual allegations against Crouch; therefore, when Ford resurfaced with a new manuscript detailing the sexual allegations and offered to withheld it for $10 million, Crouch sued Ford to enforce the earlier agreement and prevent him from publishing his manuscript (Lobdell, 2004a). Indeed, Crouch’s initial and only statement about the incident (in the form of the press release distributed on BusinessWire) focused more on explaining why Crouch had settled the earlier lawsuit and taking down the credibility of the accuser, rather than explaining and refuting the individual charges against him. The press release simply claims that Crouch “refutes” all the “false” claims made against him by the accuser, but provides little detail on the charges except to say that the original charges were wrongful termination and sexual harassment (TBN, 2004). The simple fact that there was an earlier issue with same accuser and that TBN and Crouch settled and did not speak publicly about the accusations/settlement until Ford again resurfaced violated the tenet of openness. Finding out information about a crisis after it happened may lead to stakeholders become angry or disillusioned with an organization, since they feel as if information was withheld from them (Bradford, 1999). In the case of Crouch, he withheld information about the entire crisis until it resurfaced, making it more challenging to recover from this second crisis. Covering-up, or not being completely transparent, during a crisis actually prolongs it, since it allows the media to find new angles to cover about the crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2007). Thus, disclosing all relevant information up front allows for a shortened crisis window, though the negative press may intensify for a short period of time.
Long’s situation was slightly different from both Latham’s and Crouch’s in that his involved four different accusers filing civil suits against him. While Long did not face criminal charges, the lawsuits were still the primary consideration for him as he handled the crisis, since he reiterated several times in his statements to the media that he would like to talk to the media, but his attorneys advised him to try the case in court not in the media. In the month following the initial accusations, Long made no statement to his followers or the media specifically regarding his guilt or innocence. The closest Long ever came to any sort of admission was in his sermon to his followers where he said: “I’ve been accused. I’m under attack. I want you to know, as I said earlier, I am not a perfect man. But this thing I’m gon' fight” (Long, 2010, para. 38). This statement was really not an admission of anything except that he is not a perfect man and can make mistakes, but which mistakes he made is unclear. Despite saying he will fight the charges, Long never specifically mentioned which charges he is referring to, nor does he offer any additional details about the allegations any of the young men made against him. Both of the times he spoke publicly about the charges (in his sermon and the statement to the press following it), Long focused more on touting all the good things he and his church have done, rather than dwelling on the charges. Without discussing any details about the scandal at all, the public was left to make its own decisions about Long’s guilt based on the accounts of the accusers and any reports the media were able to research and put together about the case. This sort of information flow refutes the research of marketing and psychology researchers who note that organizations who engage in two-way communication with their audience that presents both the positive and negative aspects of their organization, product, or cause tend to ultimately end up swaying
audiences in their favor (Eisend, 2007). This reinforces the concept that making no comment with regard to a scandal is an ineffective strategy. Similarly, sharing only one side of a debate or issue to an audience reduces the credibility of the organization in the mind of the public (Eisend, 2007). Thus, Long’s strategy to not speak about the scandal publicly, is not an ideal from a communication perspective, since it reduces the credibility of his image and reputation.

Understanding the Evangelical Leaders’ Responses in Terms of Content

Though there is more research in terms of understanding the content of a crisis response versus the form of one, as Coombs (2006a) notes, there is a disconnect between the theories the research has informed and how to apply the theories in real-world situations, which is the main purpose of the SCCT—to incorporate the theories and provide applied applications for them. The most practical content research comes in the form of several theories, including the rhetorical theories of apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973), which has informed the studies of corporate apologia, particularly those of Ice (1991), who used apologia to categorize and understand Union Carbide’s crisis responses following the Bhopal chemical spill, and Hobbs (1995), who examined Toshiba’s response to being accused of selling technology to the Soviets. Similarly, theoretical concepts around corporate image management theories (Allen & Caillouet, 1994) and image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995) have also helped to inform the SCCT and understand how to evaluate the content of the crisis response effectively. In the case of the pastors, the evaluation of the content will be discussed based on the theories of
apologia they employed and then a discussion of the SCCT as it can be applied to their situations.

**Apologia**

Much of the discussion of apologia in relation to public relations addresses corporate apologia (Ice, 1991; Hobbs, 1995; Hearit, 2009), not that of a religious organization or individual, with the notable exception of Courtright and Hearit (2002). Though there is research about apologia in relation to religious entities, it tends to focus on historical uses of apologia and its evolution as a genre of discourse (Burkholder, 1991; Downey, 1993), so by necessity it includes religious organizations and figures, since they were some of the largest and highest-profile organizations and individuals of their time. By understanding the power and influence of the modern-day religious organizations and pastors, public relations scholars would be remiss not to include them in research about public relations strategies and theories. As such, this section explores the six pastors’ uses of apologia by categorizing their apologies according Ware and Linkugel’s (1973) modes of apology: denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence. Table 1 breaks down the apologia responses used by the pastors in a more easy to understand way (the x’s in each column indicates that the particular pastor used that type of response in at least one of the statements they or their organizations issued):
As was mentioned earlier, denial and bolstering are both considered denial strategies, since they attempt to distance the organization or individual from the scandal or crisis (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Of the 11 reaction statements issued by the pastors and their affiliated organizations, six of them include an outright denial of the accusations within the statements, while two of them include a denial of the accusations but with a disclaimer of intent. The outright denials are relatively straightforward. The statement TBN issued on Crouch’s behalf is the best example of this sort of strategy. In the first paragraph of the press release, it states:

In a recent article in the Los Angeles Times reporting a story that Dr. Paul Crouch, the founder and president of Trinity Broadcasting Network, was allegedly involved in a wrongful termination and sexual harassment case in 1997 is deplorable and the scandalous claims leveled against him are false. (TBN, 2004, para 1)

By declaring the claims to be false in the first paragraph of the release, the organization is effectively declaring that to be the most important part of the entire document. Though the remainder of the release discusses why the claims are false and why the accuser is untrustworthy, the initial claim that charges are “false” is as straightforward a denial as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Bolstering</th>
<th>Differentiation</th>
<th>Transcendence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crouch</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merritt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haggard</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rekers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latham</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: The type of apologia each pastor utilized in his is indicated with an X.*
Unlike Crouch, Long used a less straightforward approach to deny the charges against him, but he only appears to partially deny the charges. The sermon Long (2010) gave following the accusations against him focused largely on how the church can continue its work in the face of the charges and move beyond them, but towards the end, he also states:

> There have been allegations and attacks made on me. I have never in my life portrayed myself as a perfect man. But I am not the man that’s being portrayed on the television. That’s not me. That is not me. (para. 36)

Compared to Crouch, who blatantly stated the charges against him were false, this is a partial denial—he did not deny all the charges, rather he just denied that he is the man being “portrayed on television.” This type of denial leaves a lot of room for interpretation and allows him flexibility to ensure he cannot be accused of lying should any of the charges against him be proven in the future. The partial denial, however, is still reflected as a denial on the part of Long, since he denied the allegations, despite not outlining the specific charges being repudiated.

In contrast to the outright denials of Long and Crouch, Rekers denied the allegations leveled against him by the *Miami New Times* by issuing a disclaimer of intent. Though he acknowledged that he did hire Lucien, he denied ever knowing he was an escort or having utilized him for those services; rather, Rekers mentioned that he only hired him to aid him with his bags while on the trip, and that he would not have hired Lucien had he known he was a “rentboy.” Furthermore, in his statement Rekers (n.d.) mentions that he had

> …found his recent travel assistant by interviewing different people who might be able to help, and did not even find out about his travel assistant’s Internet advertisements offering prostitution activity until after the trip was in progress. (para. 1)
Following the revelation that his companion was an escort, Rekers then claimed he spent the remainder of the trip discussing destructive nature of the homosexual lifestyle and trying to convince Lucien to give it up (Rekers, 2010b). Considering the fact that the initial story in the *Miami New Times* about Rekers and Lucien included pictures of the pair at the airport, a complete denial strategy was unavailable to Rekers, but utilizing a disclaimer of intent strategy meant that Rekers could explain his association with Lucien without admitting to any sort of sexual encounter. This strategy was particularly risky for Rekers, however, since the photo accompanying the story showed him pushing his own luggage, and, after speaking with Lucien, the *Miami New Times* reporters noted that Lucien only advertised his services on Rentboy.com, which is not picked up by any search engines (Bullock & Thorp, 2010a). Since Rentboy.com is not picked up by search engines, it would be very difficult for anyone to accidentally happen upon Lucien’s profile. Additionally, Rekers never stated exactly where online he found Lucien, which could undermine the credibility of his claims with some audiences.

Whereas Rekers, Crouch, and Long all used some sort of denial strategy, Merritt and Haggard both ultimately admitted to some of the allegations against them. Haggard’s initial comments to media denied all accusations, but his official statements acknowledged the truth of some of the allegations. Though Haggard did not specifically outline which charges against him were true in his statement of apology, the fact that he acknowledged the truth of some of the allegations and did not use a disclaimer of intent, means that he did not use denial as a strategy of apologia in his reaction statements, though he did initially mention to some reporters that he did not even know his accuser.
Similarly, Merritt did not deny that he met Southworth or had a sexual encounter with him and discussed how he would go about avoiding same-sex encounters in the future.

Latham, however, admitted to nothing, and despite his initial unofficial comment to reporters that he was in the area ministering to police, his official statements made little mention of the allegations against him; instead, both his and his church’s statements simply noted that he was resigning from his position at South Tulsa Baptist Church and thanked the congregation for their support (Latham, 2006; South Tulsa Baptist Church, 2006). Thus, Latham neither admitted his guilt nor denied it—he simply never addressed the issue directly. Though his resignation from the South Tulsa Baptist Church could be interpreted by some as an admission of guilt, others could conceivably interpret that action as a desire on Latham’s part to avoid embroiling the church in the controversy surrounding him.

Hobbs (1995) found that strategies of apologia are not mutually exclusive and that organizations may employ multiple response categories as they address different stakeholders and try to rebuild their reputations; this was the case with some of the pastors and their organizations. The bolstering strategy, in particular, was paired with denial by Crouch and Long and their affiliated organizations in their reaction statements. Since bolstering and denial are both considered reformatory in that they do not attempt to change the audience’s meaning about the issue in question (Ware & Linkugel, 1973) and are thus somewhat complementary, it is unsurprising to find both utilized in some instances. The leader can both deny involvement in a crisis and also use bolstering to attempt to more closely identify himself with something he believes his stakeholders will view in a favorable light.
In the case of Crouch and Long, their apology statements utilized both denial and bolstering as strategies for recovering from the crisis. After the initial denial and dismissal of the credibility of his accuser, Crouch’s statement goes on to attempt to associate the pastor with the qualities of a passionate and good Christian. By highlighting Crouch’s lifelong commitment to ministry and the good work TBN does, the statement attempts to reinforce Crouch’s good qualities, and it says:

The lifelong ministry of Dr. Crouch has been to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world. The good works of TBN are what define Dr. Crouch and it is this work that will continue to define him. As such, Dr. Crouch will continue to respond to God's call on his life as president of TBN, bringing to bear his own personality, integrity, enthusiasm and talent. (TBN, 2004, para. 8)

The statement neglects to cite specific instances of the good works to which it refers, with the exception of the charity Crouch extended to his accuser. As the statement begins to discredit Ford’s history and character, it also mentions that TBN and Crouch helped him recover from his criminal and drug-abusing past by offering him employment, and it particularly highlights that TBN offered “grace” to Ford by keeping him employed and giving him counseling during his relapses. Though these specific instances are clearly meant to show Crouch’s and TBN’s compassion toward the accuser, there are no other specific instances of Crouch’s charity or compassion mentioned within the statement, and the audience is left with broad generalizations of what could be meant by the “good works” Crouch and TBN allegedly performed. If the organization had a history of engaging in socially responsible practices, it would benefit TBN to provide detailed examples of these, since organizations that have a long history of engaging these type of initiatives can more effectively recover from crisis (Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009).
Long also used a bolstering strategy in addition to a denial strategy. Both the sermon to his congregation and the statement he made to the media following the church service utilized bolstering techniques. In the sermon, Long draws parallels between the crisis he is facing and that of David in his battle against Goliath. This comparison with a biblical hero is a specific appeal to the sentiments of his congregants, since they are likely to be both familiar with the story of David defeating his larger and more skilled opponent and there is a high probability they will view a biblical association favorably. In addition to associating his struggle with that of a biblical hero, Long also takes the opportunity to create the acronym POWER (P=prayer, O=outreach, W=worship, E=encouragement, R=resolve), and during his discussion of the components of power he also attempts to play up positive things that he recommends the congregants do. For example, when Long discusses prayer, he takes the opportunity to also encourage his congregation to vote in the upcoming presidential election, saying “Early voting is now. You can go and vote. Because Jesus teaches us that even we have to love our enemies and pray for them, too” (Long, 2010, para. 30). Within the context of the acronym, Long also calls for his followers to minister to those who are “lost,” continue to worship, encourage one another, and rely on the Holy Spirit and persevere. All of these actions he requests of his parishoners would all be considered positive in terms of Christian worship, and he ties them all back to aspects of Christianity; a prime example of which is found under the encouragement portion of the acronym, when he says “We must be there to encourage one another. The Bible says David had to encourage himself” (Long, 2010, para. 33). All of these qualities Long requests his followers to put into action reflect Christian ideals,
and the integration of Bible passages, stories, and people, reflects a concerted use of bolstering to appear in a more positive light to his parishioners.

In his statement to the press following the sermon, Long also devotes a significant portion of the statement to bolstering. The beginning of the statement centers on the reiteration that he will fight the allegations against him in court, not in the media. Following this, Long goes on to discuss all the good things he and his church are doing to help the poor in other countries:

…we're going to continue as a church to do the things that we do to touch the world; hospitals that we built in Nigeria, and in Kenya and uh things that we're doing in Honduras with uh building homes for missionaries even as we support hospice in South Africa as you witnessed even today. (McClish, 2010, para. 12)

He then continues on to explain the charitable works he and the church have done for children and teens:

…I even increased my commitment to working with youth. I've always done that. We've always done that as a church. Uh, we've always helped young men and young ladies and families and to make sure they're able to move forward, and move into college and to do things that make them better and more productive citizens. (McClish, 2010, para. 12)

While these acts would be deemed positive by most people, Long clearly intended the sermon and the statement to the media for different audiences. The lack of biblical references in the statement to the media mark a stark contrast to the sermon, which was rife with references to the Bible and God. While Long’s followers may have found the associations with Christian ideals to be positive, mainstream audiences may not. As such, Long highlights charitable works that would be looked upon favorably by most people. Thus, it is clear that Long utilized bolstering strategically to appeal to different audiences.
Though Latham did not use the denial form of apologia, bolstering was used within his reaction statements. The statement issued by Latham himself did not attempt to use any sort of bolstering and was very straightforward in announcing his resignation. The brief statement issued by Latham’s church, however, did utilize that method of apologia. In the last and second to last paragraphs of the church’s statement it discusses how the church is committed to “…sharing Christ’s message of love and redemption to people from all walks of life through both local and foreign missions” (South Tulsa Baptist Church, 2006, para. 4) and mentions that it will show that commitment to Latham. The statement then goes on to say “our ability to extend Christ’s love has been a hallmark of this church and will continue to be our emphasis as we walk on our journey of faith” (South Tulsa Baptist Church, 2006, para. 5). Though it is clear that these particular passages are related to the crisis with Latham, the reinforcement of the idea of redemption and Christ’s love serves as both a way to connect parishioners with something they may view positively and to avoid prolonging the crisis by urging them forgive Latham for his sins. The clear emphasis in the church’s statement is one of moving forward and “healing,” and there is no mention of Latham’s scandal at all, aside from the fact that he resigned his position as senior pastor, which would likely lead the reader to assume the church has already moved beyond the scandal.

Whereas denial and bolstering strategies are “reformative” in that they do not attempt to change the audience’s meaning about the issue in question, differentiation and transcendence strategies are considered “transformative,” since they do attempt to change the audience’s interpretation of the events in question (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Of the six pastors included in this study, only Rekers clearly used a differentiation strategy,
which he coupled with denial strategy (in the form of a disclaimer of intent), and only Merritt and Haggard utilized a transcendence form of apologia in their reaction statements.

Despite issuing two statements himself and having one issued on his behalf by NARTH, Rekers only utilized the differentiation strategy in his reply to the blogger from Joe.My.God. That statement reflects an extensive exercise in differentiation. The majority of the text is utilized to discuss how Rekers’s activities and beliefs are in-line with those of Jesus and that he ministers to sinners in a similar fashion. Rekers intersperses much of the text of the statement with phrases such as: “My hero is Jesus Christ who loves even the culturally despised people, including sexual sinners and prostitutes. Like Jesus Christ, I deliberately spend time with sinners with the loving goal to try to help them” (Rekers, 2010b, para. 2). In other portions of the statement, Rekers also compares his actions to those of John the Baptist, and reiterates how both he and Jesus ministered to sinners, which Rekers claims is exactly what he was doing on his trip with Lucien and what he has done in the past with other homosexuals. In fact, he even states that he does not hate gay people and has “…a loving Christian ministry to homosexuals and prostitutes in which (he) share(s) the Good News of Jesus Christ with them” (Rekers, 2010b, para. 3). By discussing how Jesus ministered to sinners, Rekers seeks to likewise show that he can be in the company of a gay man, not engage in any sexual acts, and be actively encouraging him to repent. These comparisons have the potential to resonate with Christians, since Rekers does cite Bible verses to illustrate his point about how ministering to sinners is actually a noble Christian act. Thus, Rekers’s
differentiation strategy serves as a reinterpretation of the perceived purpose of his trip with Lucien coupled with a disclaimer of intent.

Unlike the other pastors, both Merritt and Haggard used transcendence in their reaction statements—Merritt used transcendence alone, while Haggard used it in his official reaction statement. Additionally, they were the only two leaders to admit to the acts of which they were accused. In Haggard’s case, his personal statement to his congregation alluded to the fact that his sin and its exposure served a greater purpose in exposing the “darkness” within him. The transcendence technique is particularly evident when Haggard discusses his accuser, saying:

Please forgive my accuser. He is revealing the deception and sensuality that was in my life. Those sins, and others, need to be dealt with harshly. So, forgive him and, actually, thank God for him. I am trusting that his actions will make me, my wife and family, and ultimately all of you stronger. (Haggard, 2006, para. 14)

Although, Haggard admits that his intention was not to get caught, he claims that it is ultimately serving a greater purpose in his life by helping to free him from sin. He does not simply claim that his actions will ultimately help him, he also claims that the negative publicity he has created has “tested and proven” New Life Church’s members’ strength in the face of adversity and will allow the church to demonstrate “…how our sick and wounded can be healed, and how even disappointed and betrayed church bodies can prosper and rejoice” (Haggard, 2006, para. 15). Thus, Haggard includes the congregation in his transcendence strategy and claims that they will also benefit from his sins and be able to tout themselves as models of Christian attributes like forgiveness. Though Haggard’s letter does indicate he resigned from New Life and will be leaving Colorado, his transcendence strategy also appears to be a way to stem the loss of members from the
church, which Haggard may view as his legacy, since he is the founding pastor of New Life.

In contrast, Merritt had no dedicated church congregation, but he did have a broader, more geographically-diverse following with which to concern himself. Though Merritt periodically participated in services at his father’s church, his real following came from the articles he wrote for various media outlets and the books he published. Thus, while Haggard’s transcendence strategy focused largely on how he and his church were served by the commission of his sin, Merritt focuses on how his sin (and his recovery from it) are part of God’s plan and made it clear to him that the Christian Gospel can change his and others’ lives. Specifically, in Merritt’s interview with the Lifeway Research blog, he says:

“It's from my brokenness, that I feel I can now be transparent, honest, and authentic about these accusations…Because it is part of my spiritual journey. And because it underscores the power of the Gospel to transform lives” (Stetzer, 2012, para. 12).

Merritt reiterates these statements in various ways in other portions of the interview, but the sentiments are the same. In one answer to a question during the interview, Merritt states that he is now becoming increasingly sure that Christ is the only one who can reconstruct “broken” people (Stetzer, 2012). This theme of overcoming brokenness and sin recurs throughout the interview, and Merritt reiterates the idea that God places difficult experiences in people’s lives for them to be overcome. Earlier in the interview, Merritt prefaced his answers about his experience with Southworth with the admission that he had been molested as a child and that he decided “God had allowed an experience of brokenness into (his) life even if (he) didn’t fully understand it…And, (he) believe(s) that helped shape (his) worldview that sin can be overcome” (Stetzer, 2012, para. 9). By
sharing his sin publicly, Merritt also indicates he hopes it will help others dealing with similar situations and they will look to God to heal their “brokenness.” Thus, Merritt portrays his experience as a challenge from God to overcome and provide an example for others dealing with similar situations. In this, Merritt’s use of transcendence differs slightly from Haggard, since Haggard placed an emphasis on how his sin served the church, while Merritt took his experience as an opportunity to be a role model for those in similar situations.

Though none of the pastors in this paper used all of the modes of apologia in their reaction statements, several coupled strategies together. Rekers was the only pastor to use both a comprehensive reformational and transformative strategy in his reaction statements; however, he did not include both strategies in all of the reaction statements he issued. Meanwhile, Crouch and Long utilized both types of denial strategies in their statements and admitted no guilt of any sort in relation to their respective scandals. Interestingly, Merritt and Haggard were the only two pastors to utilize solely transformative strategies in their reaction statements (despite Haggard’s initial off-the-cuff denial comments to reporters), and they were also both the only two to admit their guilt relative to their perspective scandals.

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory**

While the examination of the pastors’ use of apologia specifically focused on the reaction statements issued by the leaders or their affiliated organizations on their behalf, that is only one part of the overall crisis response strategy though it is crucial to informing the overall crisis response of the organization or individual. Understanding the
modes of apologia also informs the understanding of the SCCT and if the pastors were able to effectively recover from their scandals by tying their response strategy to the approach of their reaction statements. All of the modes of apologia link to an SCCT response/strategy. Though the choice of which type of apologia to use may differ based on the situation, regardless of which SCCT strategy is being used, there are some probable pairings of SCCT strategies and modes of apologia. If a deny response (or any of its three subcategories) is deemed appropriate under the SCCT, then the reaction statements of the organization will likely adhere to the apologia principles of denial. On the other hand, if the SCCT’s diminish response is used, the appropriate principle of apologia to use would also be denial with a disclaimer of intent, since both reflect the desire of the organization to deflect some blame for the outcome of the crisis without a full denial. The remaining methods of apologia—bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence—would most likely be utilized by organizations using the SCCT’s deal response. Bolstering ties directly to the SCCT’s ingratiation strategy, since it highlights the good works of the organization in an effort to deflect attention from the crisis at hand without an actual denial. Both the apologia responses of differentiation and transcendence may be used in conjunction with any of the deal responses in the SCCT, since none of them deny guilt. Differentiation and transcendence may be used with the diminish responses as well, but using them in this context should be done strategically, since neither differentiation nor transcendence deny guilt, but the diminish responses serve to alleviate some responsibility for the crisis from the organization.

Thus, the previous examination of apologia is important to understanding the pastors’ overall recovery examining and tying it to their use of an SCCT strategy. By
identifying each leader’s crisis recovery strategy and comparing it with the recommended SCCT strategy for each type of crisis situation it can be determined whether the SCCT is effective for religious organizations and individuals involved in same-sex sex scandals.

Coombs (2006b) indicates that four factors dictate how a crisis will impact an organization’s reputation: “…(1) the crisis type, (2) severity of damage, (3) crisis history, and (4) relationship history” (p. 245). The type is first identified within the victim, accidental or preventable clusters, with the preventable cluster indicating the biggest threat to organizational reputation and the victim cluster indicating the least; then the severity and histories are considered in order to determine the levels of responsibilities that will be attributed to the organization in the wake of the crisis (Coombs, 2006b). An appropriate crisis response strategy should be determined by the organization by examining all four factors, so these were also considered in evaluating the evangelical leader’s response to determine if the strategy they pursued matched the recommended strategy of the SCCT.

The SCCT indicates that when organizations face rumors as the crisis, denial strategies should be employed, while in preventable crises, rebuilding strategies are most effective (Coombs, 2007). The general response matching process of the SCCT is based on the responsibility that stakeholders will assign to an organization in each crisis situation. Whereas a crisis initiated by rumors falls under the “victim cluster” (indicating the organization is a victim in the crisis) and causes stakeholders to have weak attributions of organizational responsibility, crises initiated by “organizational misdeeds” fall under the “preventable cluster” and cause stakeholders to have strong attributions of organizational responsibility (Coombs, 2006b). Though in typical crises, organizational
misdeeds often result in stakeholders being placed at risk because of irresponsibility on
the part of the organization, in the case of the evangelical leaders, it can be argued that
the leader’s misdeeds placed the congregation at risk both as a church and in terms of
their ability to attain salvation from a religious perspective. As was mentioned earlier,
for the purposes of analysis, all of the pastors’ recovery strategies have been subdivided
into the broader deny, diminish and deal categories, under which there are subcategories
of strategies as identified by Coombs (2006b). Through an analysis of their reactions
statements and an examination of their activities following the initial reveal of each
individual scandal, a table (see Table 2) was created to indicate which pastors utilized
deny, diminish, and/or deal responses.

Deny strategies include the subcategories “attack the accuser,” where the
organization confronts the accuser, “denial,” which means the organization states no
crisis exists, and “scapegoat,” which indicates that the organization has blamed another
party for the crisis (Coombs, 2006b). Diminish strategies consist of two subcategories:
“excuse,” which indicates an organization denies intent to harm or says they cannot
control the events, and “justification,” meaning the organization minimizes the impact of
the crisis (Coombs, 2006b). Lastly, deal response subcategories are “ingratiation,” in
which the organization thanks stakeholders for their help and mentions good deeds the
organization has done in the past, “concern,” where the organization mentions its worry
about the victims, “compassion,” meaning the organization offers reparations for the
crisis, “regret,” in which the organization expresses remorse over the crisis, and
“apology,” which demonstrates the organization accepts full responsibility for the crisis
(Coombs, 2006b). Table 2 more easily illustrates which SCCT response strategy each pastor utilized:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deny Response</th>
<th>Diminish Response</th>
<th>Deal Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attack Accuser</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Scapegoat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Crouch</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Haggard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonnie Latham</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie Long</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Merritt</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Rekers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**: The SCCT strategy each pastor utilized is identified with an X.

In terms of denial strategies, as was also indicated in the analysis of their modes of apologia utilized in their reaction statements, Haggard, Latham, and Merritt were the only three pastors who refrained from denying blame in relation to their respective scandals. In contrast, Crouch was the only pastor to actively engage in attacking the accuser as a form of denying responsibility for the scandal, and he coupled that response with an adamant denial of all the allegations. In the press release Crouch and TBN distributed to the media, a long list of the crimes Ford allegedly committed is laid out in an effort to discredit him and his claims. After outlining that Ford is a “…convicted felon and longtime drug abuser…who has committed crimes ranging from child sexual molestation to using illegal drugs…” (TBN, 2004, para. 3), the press release goes on to state that Ford initially threatened to sue TBN for denying him employment. Though a subsequent *Los Angeles Times* article confirmed the majority of the claims TBN leveled against Ford (Lobdell, 2004a), the success of this strategy is mitigated by several factors. The *Times* cites witnesses claiming to have overheard other powerful TBN officials
discussing the relationship and also cites court documents which indicated that TBN agreed to continue to provide employment to Ford after his last stint in prison, which it later declined to do, prompting the initial lawsuit by Ford. For his part, Ford acknowledged the truth of the TBN’s allegations about his past, but outlined additional aspects of Crouch’s and TBN’s behavior toward him, such as paying all his debts after his and Crouch’s sexual encounter, as proof of their desire to buy his silence (Lobdell, 2004b). Simultaneously to initiating an attack the accuser approach, Crouch and TBN issued a denial response, in which they said the claims against Crouch were “scandalous” and “false” (TBN, 2004). As the only statement TBN and Crouch gave on the scandal, the press release reflects their entire recovery strategy from a communication perspective. Though this approach is effective in some aspects, since a single statement does not allow for a confusion of messages, it does not allow for additional questions to be answered and put to rest. For example, the fact that Crouch settled with Ford initially and conducted the case and settlement in secret, allowed his motives to be questioned and lends some credence to the thought that the scandal may be based on more than just rumors.

Crouch’s son, Paul Crouch Jr., recognized that possibility and mentioned in an interview after the 2003 settlement that settling with Ford initially had been a mistake and that his father had only agreed to it to avoid the negative publicity since that year was also the TBN’s 25th anniversary (Lobdell, 2004b).

Due to the earlier settlement, Crouch’s efforts to suppress details about the case and settlement, and the series of Los Angeles Times articles that included statements from other TBN officials discussing the settlement and Crouch’s potential culpability, the crisis moved beyond the victim cluster and into the preventable cluster. Within the
statements of witnesses in the *Times* articles and the reveal of the initial settlement over the same issue, the crisis Crouch faced could have moved toward the organizational misdeed with no injuries subcategory of the SCCT in the minds of some stakeholders. Though Crouch did not release any additional statements or engage in any other crisis management activities to respond to this additional crisis cluster, the statement he released also utilized a minimal ingratiation response. Toward the end of the press release, it states:

> The lifelong ministry of Dr. Crouch has been to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world. The good works of TBN are what define Dr. Crouch and it is this work that will continue to define him. As such, Dr. Crouch will continue to respond to God's call on his life as president of TBN, bringing to bear his own personality, integrity, enthusiasm and talent. (TBN, 2004, para. 8)

Though this is not an extensive ingratiation response, it does serve to remind stakeholders that Crouch has done good deeds in the service of Christianity in the past. Without specific accounts of Crouch’s good works included in the response, however, the audience must already be familiar with Crouch’s work. Thus, this response may be beneficial to devout followers of his, but stakeholders who are not as familiar with Crouch’s history may not be swayed much by this appeal.

Both Rekers and Long also used deny strategies as part of their response to their respective crises, albeit in slightly different fashions. As was noted in the discussion of apologia, Rekers utilized a disclaimer of intent to express that he would not have hired Lucien had he known that he was an escort and what the public reaction would be. Similarly, Rekers’s overall recovery strategy adheres to the denial subcategory of the SCCT in that he claims nothing happened that would warrant a crisis response. In the response posted on his website, Rekers said that the *Miami New Times* article exposing
his travel companion gave “false impressions of inappropriate behavior because of its misleading innuendo…” (Rekers, n.d., para. 1) before ending by saying the relationship was not inappropriate and they did not engage in “…any illegal or sexual behavior” (Rekers, n.d., para. 1). Rekers reiterates his position that there was no sexual or illegal contact between himself and Lucien in the interview with Joe.My.God. These statements, though contradictory to those given by Lucien, demonstrate Rekers’s intent to officially deny that a crisis occurred. At one point in his response to Joe.My.God, Rekers even encourages the blogger to contact Lucien to verify their activities during the trip (Rekers, 2010b); however, in subsequent interviews, Lucien does not reinforce Rekers’s accounts and refutes the idea that nothing sexual occurred on their trip and even the way he was contacted initially by the pastor (Rothaus, 2010).

Thus, it is clear that Rekers attempted to pursue a denial strategy as a crisis response, however, since the pictures of Rekers with Lucien were published at the same time as the Miami New Times article about their trip, the crisis clearly moved beyond the rumor stage immediately. Since the crisis resulted from more than just rumors, it could be considered to fall into the preventable cluster with the idea that Rekers’s trip with Lucien could be categorized within the SCCT as an organizational misdeed with no injuries. As such, a denial strategy was inadequate for handling Rekers’s crisis. Rekers seemed to recognize this as the crisis progressed, and though he issued no further official statements, in a follow up email to Christianity Today he elaborated on this by saying his wife would be retiring and would accompany him on all forthcoming trips to assist him with luggage, and he also admitted he had been unwise in hiring Lucien and regretted causing unanticipated harm to his family and affiliated organizations (Bailey, 2010a).
This email indicates that Rekers’s denial strategy was augmented with the inclusion of a regret strategy, where he indicated that he felt bad about causing the crisis and how it impacted his family. Though the regret strategy was not included in his official statements, its inclusion in a Christianity Today article would have allowed it to reach his target audience of evangelical Christians and their leaders for the most part. Based on the SCCT’s recommended response strategies for this type of crisis, the regret strategy should have figured more prominently into Rekers’s recovery response. The initial denial strategy was a mismatched response to his crisis, since there was photographic evidence, and a more comprehensive regret strategy could have aided in managing the crisis immediately.

Long’s recovery strategy was a little more complicated than Crouch’s or Rekers’s. Since there was no proof of the sexual misconduct of which Long was accused, except the young mens’ stories, Long’s situation was more similar to Crouch’s; and his recovery strategy was also very similar. Being based more on rumors than hard evidence, Long’s crisis fell under the victim cluster, enabling denial and attack the accuser responses as possible responses Long could have utilized. However, Long did not use either of these strategies to great effect. Though he did use a quasi-denial response in the sense that he denied that he was the man being portrayed in the media, he stopped short of refuting all the charges against him; therefore, he did not deny that there was a crisis altogether. As for denying that he was the man the media was portraying, that was left open to interpretation, since his audience could not be sure as to which aspect of the media coverage he is actually refuting, since he provided no details in the sermon and never clarified what exactly he was refuting in any other avenue. Additionally, though
Long (2010) did say he was under attack and going to fight this “thing,” at no point did he critique the activities of the accusers or try to tear down their character. In fact, the media even uncovered the fact that two of his accusers were arrested for robbery after breaking into Long’s New Birth office in the summer preceding the scandal, but Long did not press charges or mention it in relation to the sex scandal (Poole, Leslie, & Matteucci, 2010). Thus, though Long did utilize a denial response, he did not employ it in a clearly coherent manner and it is unclear what he was specifically denying.

In an identical strategy to Crouch, Long also coupled his denial response with a deal response in the form of ingratiating. Unlike Crouch, though, media reports did not identify any additional witnesses or church insiders who could have potentially reinforced the stories of Long’s accusers, though the fact that four accusers came forward could have been enough of a corroboration in the minds of some of Long’s stakeholders. So, if the four accusers were viewed in that light, then an ingratiating response would have been appropriate as the scandal would be labeled as an organizational misdeed with no injuries. Though his sermon focused more on denial and fighting accusations, Long did indeed include an ingratiating response in his statement to the media. His mention of the hospitals and homes New Birth helped to build in African countries, as well as his mention that he increased his commitment to mentoring and aiding youth (McClish, 2010) served to remind his stakeholders both that he and the church are connected and that he helps to lead the church community in the good deeds it undertakes. While Long does not give examples of the ways in which he has mentored youth, he does cite the countries in which the church has aided in building the hospitals and homes. While this strategy of ingratiating could have been an effective one for Long to use once the
scandals transcended into the preventable cluster, its inconsistent use in only one of his statements mitigates its potential effectiveness as an all-encompassing crisis response strategy.

Latham took a slightly different tact to managing his response to the crisis, and he was the only pastor to respond in the manner of the SCCT’s diminish strategy. By using a response in the exuse subcategory coupled with a deal response in the form of ingratiation, Latham either intentionally or unintentionally crafted a multi-pronged response. Since he had been arrested and charged with a crime, the crisis immediately fell into the organizational misdeed with no injuries type of crisis. Latham’s official statement indicates no use of the excuse response, but his initial off-the-cuff remark to reporters utilized this approach. As Latham was leaving jail after his arrest, his comments to the gathered media that he was “pastoring to the police” and that the police had set him up (Hall W., 2006) reflected the use of the excuse response, since they indicated that he did not intend to get arrested or have any control over the situation. If the allegations that he had propositioned an undercover officer for sex were indeed true, that would have indicated a situation that Latham had control over, but being set up shows a lack of control. Indeed, pastoring to the police would indicate Latham had a different reason to be in the area and that the arrest had simply been a result of Latham being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Latham’s only other public communication with the media and his followers after his initial comments, though, indicates a shift in crisis response strategy. The statements both Latham and the South Tulsa Baptist Church issued reflect no use of the excuse response, rather they speak little of Latham’s situation other to state that he is resigning
and to thank followers for their support. The church’s statement also indicates a desire to move forward with the new pastor and forget Latham’s crisis. Without the mention of the incident in any way in either statement, the only clearly used SCCT categorical response by both Latham and the church is that of ingratiation. The church devotes a paragraph in its statement to note that it “…appreciate(s) the outpouring of support and prayer from both our church family and the community of believers from all faiths” (South Tulsa Baptist Church, 2006, para. 3) before continuing on to note the history the church has sharing Christianity’s message of love with people of all faiths and that this has become a hallmark of the church (South Tulsa Baptist Church, 2006). By both thanking members and highlighting the good things for which the church has become known, the organization clearly seeks to switch the dialogue about the crisis to one discussing the positive qualities of the church. Latham’s statement echoes the strategy and sentiments used by the church. Though Latham devotes the second paragraph in his statement to thanking everyone for their encouragement and support during the crisis, he makes no mention of either his or the church’s positive qualities; however, the end of his statement cites a Bible verse that indicates his faith that the congregation will continue to do good deeds (Latham, 2006). The use of the Bible quotation serves both to associate himself with something the congregation reveres, and to again praise his followers for their qualities. These statements clearly indicate both Latham and his church sought to overcome the crisis in the same ways, however, the use of the excuse strategy followed by the ingratiation strategy indicate some inconsistency, since the excuses were never revisited or reinforced as a plausible explanation for the crisis.
A crisis strategy consisting mainly of deal responses was utilized by only two of the pastors--Haggard and Merritt--, who were also the only leaders to use a transcendence form of apologia in their reaction statements. In Haggard’s case he used the apology subcategory of a deal response. Though Haggard denied the allegations against him immediately after they surfaced, within two days he changed his position to an admission of guilt, and in his reaction statement he mentioned that he was sorry for the confusion his earlier comments denying the accusations to reporters had caused (Haggard, 2006). Unlike Latham, who never addressed his guilt or innocence again after his initial remarks to reporters, the fact that Haggard revised his position on his guilt allowed for his response strategy to be reconsidered. After the initial denial, Haggard updated his approach to the crisis and shifted his strategy to one that reflected an apology response. This is an appropriate strategy for a crisis that falls under the organizational misdeed with no injuries type of crisis, which Haggard’s case did, since Jones had several voicemails as proof that the two men knew each other. The apology strategy is evident in the beginning of the statement that says he is sorry for disappointing and betraying his followers before asking for forgiveness later in his statement and again toward the middle of it where he says “I created this situation…I am responsible; I alone need to disciplined and corrected” (Haggard, 2006, para. 8). These statements illustrate the two components of an apology response, that of taking full responsibility and asking for forgiveness; however, within the statement, Haggard never identifies exactly to which charges he is admitting, rather he just says not all the charges are true but enough of them are (Haggard, 2006). Even though he does not go into specifics about which charges are
accurate, the fact that he admits to some of them and apologizes unequivocally allows his strategy to qualify as an apology response.

New Life Church’s press release statement reinforces the idea that the overall Haggard response strategy was one of an apology. Though the church’s statement never explicitly apologizes for the scandal, there are several passages that indicate that Haggard is taking full responsibility for the crisis. The church’s statement begins by discussing that its investigation has determined that Haggard is guilty before going on to state that the “…most positive and and productive direction for our church is (Haggard’s) dismissal and removal” (New Life Church, 2006). The statement then confirms that Haggard and his wife agree that he should be dismissed as pastor at the church (New Life Church, 2006, para. 3). Though the church never takes personal responsibility for the scandal, the statement makes it clear that it holds Haggard responsible for the scandal and that he agrees with the church’s decision regarding his position within the ministry; this indicates that the church recognizes the role it plays in both Haggard’s and its own recovery from the crisis.

Though Merritt’s recovery strategy stopped short of the adamant apologies of Haggard, he did utilize the deal subcategory of regret. Since Southworth had evidence in the form of text messages to show that he did indeed carry on a relationship with Merritt, the crisis type immediately surpassed the rumor category and into organizational misdeed with no injuries category. Thus, Merritt’s regret response was appropriate for this type of crisis. Merritt’s only public address of the crisis in the form of the interview with the blogger, Ed Stetzer, certainly reinforced the idea that he was following the SCCT’s regret strategy. Though Merritt indicates in the interview that he is remorseful for what
happened, he stops short of asking for forgiveness for his same-sex encounter. In response to the first question posed by the interviewer, Merritt says that he and Southworth had physical contact that was more than friendly, and then states that he felt guilty and knew he had put himself in an “unwise” situation (Stetzer, 2012). Merritt goes on to say that he has “sin in (his) past…for which (he) accepts responsibility…” (Stetzer, 2012, para. 10) before elaborating that sexual texting and inappropriate sexual actions are never acceptable and reaffirming that he was the only one responsible for committing those actions. These expressions of guilt and regret serve to reinforce his declaration later in the statement that he does not identify himself as gay and he intends to follow the biblical standards for sexuality moving forward (Stetzer, 2012). Though he does admit some responsibility for his actions within the context of the interview, without a request for forgiveness or an apology, Merritt’s approach cannot be categorized as an apology response. Complicating Merritt’s response are his allusions to the experience being beneficial in some sense, since he is now able to understand others facing similar struggles. While this does not quite warrant the classification of his response as a justification or excuse response, it is interesting to note that his regret and acceptance of responsibility is caveated by the idea that his negative experiences could be used for positive effect within the Christian community.

Though the SCCT strives to categorize crises with a recommended recovery response, in the case of the pastors, many of them used more than one response to address their particular crisis. Though some of these were complementary to another, such as using a denial and attack the accuser response, the use of responses from different categories (deal, diminish and deny) reflected a fragmented response strategy or a shift in
the approach to the crisis. With the exception of Crouch and Long, to some degree, virtually all the pastors’ crises fell under the organizational misdeeds with no injury category of crisis. Crouch and Long’s scandals could most appropriately be categorized as crisis caused by rumors; however, the corroboration of accounts by Long’s accusers allows his scandal to straddle the line between the two crisis categories. According to the SCCT, those crises attributed to rumors can be resolved by using a deny response option, while those attributed to organizational misdeeds should be responded to with a strategy from the deal category (Coombs, 2006b). In either case, a diminish response is not as effective for recovering from the crisis; thus, the rationale for Latham’s switch from his initial use of an excuse strategy to one of ingratiation is clear—the excuse strategy did not adequately address the crisis. The remainder of the pastors’ response strategies did indeed follow the recommendations for an appropriate response for each type of crisis.

**Strategy Effectiveness**

Despite the fact that most of the pastors utilized one of the recognized modes of apologia as part of their crisis response and the correct response strategy based on the recommendations of the SCCT, that does not necessarily mean their strategy was effective. Using the criteria outlined earlier, the effectiveness of each pastor’s strategy was determined based on whether or not their girlfriend/wife remained with them, whether or not they retained their positions with their respective churches/affiliated organizations, and the tonality of the coverage from the selected media outlets.

According to the SCCT, reputational threats brought on by crises initiated by rumors can be adequately resolved using one of the deny strategies (Coombs, 2006b).
Such was the case for Crouch, since no proof of sexual impropriety was ever offered by Ford except for his word. However, Crouch also utilized an ingratiation response, which could be argued to be appropriate, since the accuser’s account was corroborated by other witnesses in the *Los Angeles Times* stories. As a reinforcement of the deny and ingratiation responses, Crouch’s reaction statement clearly uses the denial and bolstering form of apologia, which are both reformatory, and reinforce the idea of denying the existence of the crisis and changing the focus of the crisis. Though Crouch’s ability to deny his role in the crisis may have been somewhat undermined by his settlement with Ford 10 years prior regarding the same charges, Crouch survived his scandal relatively intact and retained his leadership role within TBN; however, recently the Crouches have faced a new round of scandals from within their own family as their granddaughter alleged that there had been financial impropriety at the network over the last few years (Strang, 2013). Additionally, Jan, his wife, remained married to him, though there have been rumors over the years that she has been seeing other men (Strang, 2013). These two factors are indicative of a successful recovery from the sex scandal from the perspective of his target audience.

Upon examining the articles from the selected outlets, Crouch had a total of 11 articles written about him with 45% (*n*=5) of those articles coming from his local daily paper (*The Los Angeles Times*), and the remaining six articles originating from the religious outlets included in the sample. Of these 11 articles, 46% (*n*=5) were critical of Crouch, 36% (*n*=4) were neutral and 18% (*n*=2) were favorable (see *Figure 1*).
Crouch’s situation was unique in that he and TBN issued a statement the same day the first *Times* article was published with the initial accusations against him; therefore all the articles examined have the potential to be swayed to a more positive tone by his statement. Despite that fact, only 73% (*n*=8) of the articles referenced the statement Crouch and TBN put out, and, of those, only two (25%) wrote about him favorably.

Crouch’s strategy, following the matching guidelines outlined by the SCCT for crises based on rumors, appears to be modestly effective. Though his marriage remained intact, and he retained his leadership position, the media coverage about him immediately following the scandal was only slightly more favorable and neutral than critical, meaning that his strategy was modestly successful, but considering the high number of negative articles about the scandal, there is certainly significant room for improvement.

Similarly, Long, the other pastor who faced a crisis brought about by rumors, weathered his crisis and came out of it relatively successfully, though his involvement in
the scandal resurfaced again in 2013 with the publishing of an autobiography by one of his accusers (Zaimov, 2013). In the wake of the 2010 scandal, Long neither resigned nor was dismissed from his position with New Birth Missionary Baptist Church and is still featured prominently on its website. Additionally, Long’s wife has remained married to him, though she did file for divorce in 2011 briefly before retracting her decision (Weber K., 2012). Again, the fact that his wife ultimately remained with him, and he retained his position is indicative that his recovery strategy of using both a denial and ingratiating response resonated with some of his key audiences (family and followers). Despite his use of two different strategies to deal with one crisis, it is evident that the modes of apologia he used (denial and bolstering) complemented these response strategies.

From a mass media perspective, Long had 40 articles from the sampled media written about him in the month following scandal. Of these articles, 65% \((n=26)\) were written by the local daily paper (The Atlanta Journal-Constitution) and the remainder appeared in Christian media outlets. Overall, only 5% \((n=2)\) of the articles about Long had a favorable tone toward him—one from the daily paper and one from the Religion News Service--, while 58% \((n=23)\) were neutral, 35% \((n=14)\) were critical, and 3% \((n=1)\) were antagonistic. Long issued both of his official statements on September 26, 2010, and 73% \((n=29)\) of the media reports in the sample were published after the statements came out. Of the 11 articles published before the statement, only one (9%) was favorable, four (36%) were neutral and six (55%) were critical of Long, whereas after the statement was released one (3%) article was favorable, 19 (66%) were neutral, eight (28%) were critical and one (3%) was antagonistic (see Figure 2), which is particularly
interesting since only 13 (45%) of those articles actually referenced his statement in any capacity.

Figure 2: Tone of articles toward Eddie Long after his reaction statement

Despite the fact that Long utilized two different response strategies, with only the deny option being recommended by the SCCT for rumor-initiated crises, from a percentage perspective, Long’s strategy with the media was moderately successful. When the media coverage is compared before and after Long’s statements, there was a shift away from a critical tone in the articles and toward more neutral tone. There was also a slight increase in the comparative percent of antagonistic articles but a decrease in the percent of positive articles. Despite the increase in the antagonistic articles post-statement release, the fact that coverage of Long shifted more neutral from critical does represent a small victory for him in terms of crisis management.

The remaining pastors—Latham, Rekers, Merritt and Haggard—faced crises that would be categorized in the organizational misdeeds with no injuries subcategory of
SCCT crises, since they all had some level of proof that carried them beyond rumors. This type of crisis required some sort of deal response according to the SCCT’s recommendation. In the case of Latham, he utilized both a diminish (in the form of an excuse) and a deal response (in the form of ingratiating). Since he never retracted his initial excuse response, Latham must be considered to have employed both responses; however, his mode of apologia included only the reformative strategy of bolstering, which means he did not include an appropriate mode of apologia for his deal response strategy. In the wake of the crisis, Latham’s wife remained with him, and she was even included in the official statement he released to his congregation (Latham, 2006). Unlike Long and Crouch, however, Latham did not retain his position as senior pastor at South Tulsa Baptist Church nor his leadership positions with the Southern Baptist Convention or the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (Hall W., 2006).

In terms of the media coverage, the sampled media outlets wrote 12 articles about Latham in the month following the scandal. Of these, all but one of the articles came out following Latham’s and his church’s statements to the South Tulsa Baptist Church congregation on January 6, 2006. The only article to come out before Latham’s statement was neutral in tone, and of the 11 articles issued following the statement 27% (n=3) were favorable toward Latham, 55% (n=6) were neutral, and 18% (n=2) were critical (see Figure 3); and, of those, only three (27%) referenced either statement in any way. Thus, the majority of articles both before and after the statements were issued were neutral in tone, but the articles with a favorable tone toward Latham slightly outweighed the negative ones.
Figure 3: Tone of articles toward Lonnie Latham after his reaction statement

Based on the outcome of the scandal for Latham in terms of the fact that he no longer holds positions with any of the organizations with which he was affiliated and that the majority of articles written about it were neutral, Latham’s strategy does not appear to be a resounding success. Though neutral articles alone are not necessarily indicative of a crisis management failure, and may actually indicate success in some cases, the comparably few positive articles coupled with his resignation from his positions show room for improvement in his crisis management strategy. The failure of Latham’s crisis management could likely be because of his use of two of the SCCT’s response strategies simultaneously—one of which (the excuse response) was not recommended by the SCCT for handling a scandal in the preventable cluster of crises.

In a situation similar to Long’s, Rekers faced a situation in the preventable cluster of crises, for which the recommended strategy in the SCCT is the use of a deal response. Rekers, however, initially utilized a deny response before switching to a deal response.
Similarly, the modes of apologia utilized in his statements included both reformative and transformative apologies. As such, Rekers had mixed results in the effectiveness of his strategy. Though Rekers remained married to his wife and even mentioned in an email to *Christianity Today* that he would now be taking trips with her, and she would be able to assist him with his luggage, he did not retain his position as a board member with NARTH (Bailey, 2010a).

From a media perspective, Rekers had 10 articles written about him by the sampled outlets in the month following the scandal, with seven of those stories appearing in Rekers’s local daily paper (*South Florida Sun-Sentinel*). The three statements issued by Rekers and his organizations came out on May 4, 5, and 6, 2010. The interview with Joe.My.God occurred on the 4th, with another statement posted to Rekers blog on the 5th, and the statement from NARTH published on its website on the 6th. All of the articles from the sampled outlets were published after the statements came out, so those reporters should have already been impacted by their dissemination. Of the articles, two (20%) reflected a neutral tone toward Rekers, while the remaining eight (80%) articles held a critical attitude toward the pastor, and none of them mention Rekers favorably (see *Figure 4*). Six (60%) of those articles referenced one of the reaction statements, while the remaining four (40%) made no reference to them at all.
Figure 4: Tone of articles toward George Rekers after his reaction statements

Unlike some of the other pastors, both the tone of the articles and the fact that Rekers did not keep his position with NARTH clearly reflects that Rekers’s strategy was ineffective in managing the crisis in the month following the onset of the scandal. The use of two differing response strategies could be responsible for this, particularly since one—the denial response—was not recommended by the SCCT as an appropriate response for a crisis clearly falling within the preventable cluster. Similarly, Rekers’s use of a second response to the crisis could have both confused his audience and called his credibility about the issue into question.

Both Merritt and Haggard utilized singular responses from the deal category of the SCCT which was recommended approach for their type of crisis. Additionally, both men approached their reaction statements to the crisis through the use of the transcendence mode of apologia, which is transformative in nature and complements the SCCT response they both chose. Merritt’s regret response to his crisis resulted in his
remaining affiliated with the majority of the organizations he worked with, including the media outlets for which he was a commentator and wrote regular columns and articles like the Religion News Service and The Atlantic (Merritt, About, n.d.). Though in the wake of the scandal, Merritt no longer pastored in any official capacity at Cross Pointe Church, where his father was the lead pastor, according to his Facebook page he still occasionally speaks to the congregation there (Merritt, About, n.d.). It is unclear, however, whether Merritt was able to retain his girlfriend in the wake of the scandal. Several blogs pointed out his Twitter references to his girlfriend prior to the crisis (Lumpkins, 2012), but since the crisis he has refrained from mentioning her in any public capacity. Thus, it can be speculated that they have not maintained their relationship.

Of the eight articles published about Merritt in the sampled outlets, two of them were from the Religion News Service, an outlet Merritt writes for, and the remainder were from the other Christian media outlets. The daily paper in Merritt’s area, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, did not cover his scandal at all in the ensuing month. All of the articles were published after he gave his only public statement, in the form of an interview with a blogger, on July 26, 2012; therefore, all the articles can be looked at to determine what impact his statement had on the stories. In total, 25% (n=2) of the articles reflected a favorable tone toward Merritt, whereas 63% (n=5) were neutral toward him, and 13% (n=1) were critical (see Figure 5). Interestingly, both of the articles that reflected a positive tone toward Merritt referenced his reaction statement, while the one critical article did not.
Figure 5: Tone of articles toward Jonathan Merritt after his reaction statement

The fact that Merritt was able to maintain many of his affiliations with his organizations and that the favorable articles outweighed the critical ones, means that his strategy was successful overall. The majority of the articles were neutral, which indicates that Merritt was able to effectively manage the situation but was not successful in shifting the media dialogue to a overwhelmingly favorable tone toward him. Some small improvements in his response strategy could have improved the media response; for example, issuing more than one statement may have attracted more media attention could have benefitted him as long as it maintained the type of response Merritt had chosen to utilize.

Haggard, though employing the same mode of apologia in terms of crafting his reaction statements, used a slight different overall deal response from Merritt. His use of the apology response of the SCCT was also appropriate to a scandal in the preventable crisis cluster. The effectiveness of Haggard’s strategy is easier to determine than some
other pastors, since he was such a high-profile figure both in the local community and nationally. As such there were numerous articles written about him, and his every move was extensively documented by the media. Haggard’s wife remained with him throughout the scandal, and even published a book in 2010 entitled *Why I Stayed: The Choices I Made in My Darkest Hour* to explain her rationale for remaining married to Haggard (Bailey, 2010b). Despite his wife remaining by his side, Haggard was not able to retain his position with New Life Church, and was even asked by the church to leave Colorado Springs for a set period of time, before he returned in 2010 and began a new ministry project (Grossman, 2010).

Out of all the pastors included in this study, Haggard had the highest number of articles written about him by the media outlets in the sample. Of the 62 articles written about him by the sampled media, 55% \( (n=34) \) of them came from the largest local daily paper, *The Denver Post*, with the rest originating from the Christian media outlets.

Haggard’s reaction statements came out on November 4 and 5, 2006, and prior to that 13 stories had been published regarding his scandal. Of those, 15% \( (n=2) \) took a favorable tone toward him, 54% \( (n=7) \) appeared neutral, and 31% \( (n=4) \) were critical of Haggard. Following the public release of Haggard and New Life’s reaction statements, the remaining 49 articles came out, and 12% \( (n=6) \) of those spoke of Haggard favorably compared with 43% \( (n=21) \) that held a critical or antagonistic tone toward the pastor. The remaining 22 (45%) articles post-statement release were strictly neutral in their portrayal of Haggard (see Figure 6).
Of the 21 articles that came out after Haggard’s reaction statements were released and harbored an antagonistic or critical tone toward him, only nine (43%) of them referenced the statements at all, whereas 33% ($n=2$) of the six statements that portrayed Haggard favorably referenced the statements. The articles that portrayed Haggard neutrally and came out after the release of the statements referenced the statements in 41% ($n=9$) of the articles.

Though Haggard’s strategy was ultimately unsuccessful with the audience of church pastors and members, resulting in him being removed from his role as senior pastor, he was successful on a personal front by managing to maintain his marriage. In terms of the media, the results are somewhat more complex. There was only a slight decrease in the percentage of favorable stories that were published after the release of the reaction statements; however, there was a more than 10% jump in the number of stories that portrayed Haggard in a negative light and a 10% decrease that held a neutral tone
toward him. Based on the increase of negative stories and the fact that Haggard was removed from his position, it appears that his response strategy was ineffective. Haggard may have complicated his own crisis by initially denying and then admitting to various parts of the allegations against him, thus, confusing his audiences. Had Haggard utilized the apology response and transcendence form of apologia immediately, there is a chance he might have recovered from the crisis more successfully.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Discussion and Implications

Based on the barometers this study used to evaluate the effectiveness of each pastor’s strategy, three were more effective than the others in their use of an SCCT response strategy and the mode of apologia they utilized. Crouch, Long, and Merritt were more effective overall as a result of their responses to their respective scandals than were Latham, Haggard and Rekers.

All three of the pastors who had a more positive outcome from their scandals utilized the recommended response strategies of the SCCT for the type of crisis they faced. Crouch and Long utilized dual responses to combat both the rumors and the idea that their crises could have escalated beyond rumors to an organizational misdeed with no injuries in the minds of some of their stakeholders. Additionally, the modes of apologia (denial and bolstering) they used directly complemented the response strategies they chose to execute. Merritt, on the other hand, never entertained the idea that his scandal could just be rumor-based, likely because he knew that Southworth had proof to back up his claims, thus he treated the crisis immediately as a preventable crisis and employed a response strategy and mode of apologia appropriate for this situation, which was the appropriate response for such a crisis as evidenced both by the SCCT and the results of the analysis of this study.

Though Crouch, Long, and Merritt were judged to be successful in managing their crises, it is interesting to note that even these three pastors had a significant number of neutral articles written about them in the sampled media. In this study, neutral articles were generally thought to indicate a more successful strategy, particularly if there was a
shift away from negative articles toward neutral ones or if the percent of positive and 
neutral articles outweighed the negative or antagonistic ones. The main reason for 
viewing neutral articles more positively is the idea that neutral articles do not exacerbate 
a crisis. Though neutral articles may continue to bring attention to a crisis situation, they 
only provide the information and allow the audience to make up their own mind, whereas 
negative articles clearly express an opinion and may sway the audience to see the pastor 
in a negative light. There has been little study of media neutrality and what the actual 
implications of this type of coverage are for organizations involved in a crisis. With little 
in the way of guiding studies on this issue of neutrality in media coverage of a crisis, this 
study categorized neutral articles as generally indicating a more effective crisis response, 
since they simply report the news without offering an opinion on the scandal or pastor. 
Indeed, in the case of Crouch, Long, and Merritt, a significant number of neutral articles 
were published about them, and they managed to retain their positions with their 
respective organizations.

The common denominator between Latham, Haggard, and Rekers’s ineffective 
strategies appears to be the inconsistency of their messages throughout their crises. All 
three of the leaders made initial comments to the press that differed from their later 
official reaction statements. In early remarks to the media Haggard denied the charges 
against him, while Latham made it clear that he had been in the area for a different reason 
than what the police had cited in their arrest report, and Rekers expressed a different 
reason for having an escort accompany him on a trip than the one the media attributed to 
him. Despite strong evidence to the contrary obtained by the media and law enforcement, 
these three pastors reiterated their own rationales or denials for the activities leading up to
the scandals. Though all three men ultimately used the correct SCCT strategies for their respective crises, their initial statements to the media generated confusion, and, in some cases, derision from the media and bloggers. So, though the SCCT offered correct response strategies for the pastors to utilize in an effort to mitigate the damage caused by their respective crises, the effects of the recommended SCCT strategy can clearly be muted by message inconsistency during a crisis. Though the results of this study were as comprehensive as possible, interviews with the pastors and staff would enable a more significant understanding of the rationale behind the crisis responses they utilized. Unfortunately, all of the pastors contacted by the researcher declined to speak about the crisis or did not respond to questions or interview requests (with the exception of Ted Haggard).

Thus, based on the qualitative research done in this study, the SCCT can be applied to evangelical pastors involved in crises, and the SCCT’s recommended response strategies can be applied to these type of sex scandals as well. The one caveat to this conclusion, is that the pastors must refrain from making multiple statements using different types of response strategies, but this is true for many other types of crises as well. Additionally, the mode of apologia each pastor uses in their reaction statement should be consistent with and reinforce the type of SCCT strategy they use; for example, a deny response should utilize a denial or bolstering form of apologia, a diminish response can utilize a deny (with a disclaimer of intent), transcendence, or differentiation mode of apologia, and a deal response should utilize a differentiation or transcendence mode of apologia. Provided the chosen SCCT strategy matches up with the type of crisis
the religious organization is experiencing and the appropriate mode of apologia, this research indicates that the pastor/organization can expect to recover from the crisis.

Based on these results, the SCCT has the potential to be utilized by evangelicals and other religious organizations to aid in crisis management strategies. Additionally, as was the case in this study, the SCCT can be reinterpreted to aid in managing crises for individuals within the evangelical and religious communities as well. Utilizing an appropriate strategy for the type of crisis is important, but as this research shows, even using an appropriate strategy prefaced by conflicting positions and messages about the crisis can result in the negation of its positive impact. Thus, care must be taken when an individual or organization chooses a response strategy to ensure their position considers future developments of the scandal as well and a consistent voice regarding it. This is particularly important in the case of evangelical pastors involved in gay sex scandals, since conflicting statements will lead to derision from bloggers, particularly LGBT bloggers, which serves to prolong the crisis, as was the case with Rekers, Latham, and Haggard.

One of the most important findings from this study relates specifically to the SCCT. The results of this study do lead to one key recommendation with regard to the application of the SCCT for religious organizations in a crisis, however, is the lack of a organizational misdeed with spiritual or emotional harm category. As was discussed earlier in this paper, many evangelicals believe that having a prominent member of their community sin can ultimately lead to a corrupt society and lead others to either intentionally or unintentionally participate in that system. This belief that one person’s sin may cause others to sin, gives credence to the idea that damage from the crisis can be
spiritual rather physical. Since the SCCT was initially created with the idea of aiding corporations and other non-religious entities in determining an appropriate crisis response, there is no category that relates to a crisis that causes spiritual damage rather than physical. Thus, several of the scandals included in this paper were categorized in the organizational misdeed with no injuries category of the SCCT. While this category is the best fit for a same-sex sex scandal (if the evidence goes beyond rumors of the sexual impropriety) based on the current model of the SCCT, it is not a perfect fit for the circumstances of a religious crisis, since it does not account for emotional distress and harm to the spiritual well-being of religious audiences. Based on the results of this paper, it is then recommended that the SCCT’s preventable cluster of crises be expanded to include an organizational misdeed with emotional/spiritual injuries category, so that it can be applied to crises for religious organizations as well.

In addition to recommending the inclusion of another subcategory category in the SCCT, this research also sets up a foundation for further study of religious organizations, particularly evangelical Christian ones, and crisis communication. Due to the necessarily small sample size of pastors included in this study, its results should be examined as one step toward a comprehensive understanding of crisis communication and religious figures/organizations. Several other pastors who had gay scandals within the timeframe this paper examined, they were excluded due to limitations of available resources for examining them. Charismatic preacher Paul Cain was eliminated from this paper as a result of a complete lack of news articles written about his scandal. Similarly, John Paulk, a former leader of the ex-gay movement, was excluded from this paper because of an inability to gain access to his reaction statements. Paulk’s apology occurred on a
Focus on the Family radio broadcast, where he spoke with the organization’s founder, James Dobson, and offered a verbal apology for his sexual indiscretions. Neither James Dobson nor Focus on the Family retained any recordings or transcripts from the program, and the researcher was unable to find them in any other databases. Another pastor, Jim Swilley, was excluded from this study, but for a different reason. Swilley proactively came out as a gay man to his congregation without any accompanying sex scandal. The lack of a sex scandal and the proactive aspect of Swilley’s admission indicated he did not feel his admission of his sexual orientation to be a negative thing and resulted in his exclusion from this study.

Despite the small sample size, the results in this study provide a good initial idea of what can be expected from a crisis communication perspective in other religious organizational crises. The researcher intends to build on the foundation this research created and conduct further studies with comparative samples by using the data results from this analysis to compare with an identical analysis of evangelical pastors involved in heterosexual sex scandals. This research will be useful on two fronts, since it will show whether pastors utilize the same crisis responses regardless of whether the scandal is heterosexual or homosexual, and it can either reinforce or disprove the idea that the SCCT and modes of apology can be applied to religious organizations overall. This point is important to understand for religious communicators, since understanding if the findings are universally applicable to religious crises could help to reinvent the approach religious organizations currently take to addressing crises situations. As such, the researcher intends to conduct further comparative studies utilizing pastors from different faiths and denominations who have become involved in various scandals to determine an
even wider application for the SCCT and modes of apologia in a religious crisis response and how religious communicators may revise their approach to crisis management.
References


Lumpkins, P. (2012, July 24). *Jonathan Merritt outed as gay?* Retrieved from Peter Lumpkins: http://peterlumpkins.typepad.com/peter Lumpkins/2012/07/jonathan-merritt-outed-as-gay-by-peter-lumpkins.html?cid=6a00d83451a37369e201774394822a970d#comment-6a00d83451a37369e201774394822a970d


http://azariahspeaks.blogspot.com/2012/07/why-i-outed-jonathan-merritt.html#comment-form


http://www.businesswire.com/portal/site/google/index.jsp?ndmViewId=news_view&newsId=20040912005035&newsLang=en


Appendix A

Reaction Statement Codebook

The coding for the reaction statements involves two types of feedback from the coder. If the entry requires the selection of one of the provided options, then either circle or highlight the choice you select. If the entry does not provide options for you to choose from, then please write in the data as indicated in the directions below:

**Coder ID**
Enter the unique two-digit coder ID assigned to you by the researcher.

**Evangelical leader**
Select which leader the reaction statement was issued by or on behalf of. Enter the corresponding two-digit number on the code sheet for each pastor:

01 – Paul Crouch  
02 – Jonathan Merritt  
03 – Ted Haggard  
04 – Lonnie Latham  
05 – Eddie Long  
06 – George Alan Rekers

**Date of Scandal**
Enter the two-digit month followed by the two-digit day in which the initial news of the same-sex sex scandal broke.

**Date of Reaction Statement**
Within the provided blanks, insert the two-digit month followed by the two-digit day that the pastor or his organization issued the reaction statement.

**Statement Issued By**
Indicate if the statement was directly issued by the pastor or if it was issued on his behalf by entering one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – If the statement was issued directly by the pastor/leader  
02 – If the organization (with which the pastor was affiliated at the time of the scandal) issued the statement on the leader’s behalf  
03 – If the statement was neither issued by the pastor or their organization
Medium Used
Indicate which medium the pastor or their organization initially used to issue the reaction statement to the public. Enter one of the following two-digit codes to indicate the method by which the statement was delivered:

01 – Pastor’s personal website
02 – Church/organization’s (affiliated with the pastor when the scandal broke) website
03 – Press release wire service (such as BusinessWire or PRNewswire)
04 – Interview with a media outlet
05 – Directly to followers (such as in a sermon or an email sent to followers)
06 – Other

Audience
Indicate the target audience for the statement. This can be determined by examining the medium used to issue the statement, any salutation used in the statement, or key words the pastor uses in the body of the statement. Enter one of the following two-digit codes for the intended audience:

01 – The congregation or followers of the leader
02 – Mainstream or religious media
03 – The general public
04 – The general evangelical community
05 – Other
06 – Unable to determine

Leader Denial
Within the content of the statement, indicate if the leader denies the accusations against him either wholly or in part.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – If the leader denied the accusations
02 – If the leader did not deny the accusations, but included a disclaimer of intent6
03 – If the leader did not deny the accusations

---

6 A disclaimer of intent means that the leader admits that he did commit the acts he is accused of, but he was unaware what the results of his actions would be; this implies that he would not have committed the acts if he had anticipated the consequences.
**Attempt to Bolster**

Within the content of the statement, indicate whether the leader uses bolstering\(^7\) in the statement.

*Example of bolstering:* An evangelical audience would view the Bible favorably, so the pastor may attempt to more closely associate himself with the Bible. Similarly, the general U.S. public might view patriotism favorably, so the leader may discuss how patriotic he is.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:
01 – If he does use bolstering
02 – If he does not use bolstering
03 – If it is unclear whether or not he used bolstering

**Bolstering Relationship**

If you indicated that the pastor used bolstering, please write in what he was attempting to associate himself with.

**Differentiation**

Indicate whether or not the pastor uses differentiation\(^8\) in his statement.

*Example of differentiation:* A defendant in a trial might ask the jury to view his crime as a self-defense rather than pre-meditated.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – If he does use differentiation
02 – If he does not use differentiation
03 – If it is unclear whether or not he used differentiation

**Object of Differentiation**

If you indicated the pastor was asking his audience to view his actions in a different context, explain how he utilizes this.

**Transcendence**

Indicate whether the pastor attempts to use transcendence\(^9\) in the reaction statement.

---

\(^7\) Bolstering means the leader attempts to associate himself with something (fact, sentiment, object, relationship, etc.) that his target audience will view favorably.

\(^8\) Differentiation means the leader asks the audience to view his actions in a different context.
Example of transcendence: a soldier accused of mutiny for refusing to go to war might indicate that he is not the one on trial here, but the real issue is the impact war has on families.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – If he does use transcendence
02 – If he does not use transcendence
03 – If it is unclear whether or not he used transcendence

*Issue of Transcendence*

If you indicated the pastor was utilizing transcendence, explain what issue he is tying to the scandal.

*Explicit Apology*

Indicate if the leader includes an explicit apology for the scandal with the content of the reaction statement. An explicit apology will include words like “sorry” or synonyms for it.

Enter one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – If the leader explicitly apologizes
02 – If no explicit apology is made
03 – If it is unclear whether an apology was made

*Apology Words*

Indicate which words (or variations of the words) on the list appear in the statement. These are all synonyms for sorry as taken from the thesaurus, so they all indicate regret and signal an apology.

Input any of the following two-digit codes (more than one code can be included if more than one of these words appears):

01 – Sorry
02 – Apologize
03 – Regret

---

9 Transcendence means the leader attempts to tie the scandal, or his role in it, in to a larger concept with which it would not normally be associated. Transcendence will not deny guilt, but it will indicate it may be in service of something else—a larger issue.
04 – Remorse
05 – Lament
06 – Forgiveness / Forgive
07 – Repent
08 – Penitent
09 – None of the words appear

Placing Blame
Indicate to whom the author of the statement attributes blame for the scandal.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – Himself / Own “moral failing”
02 - Accuser(s)
03 – Society
04 – Parents/upbringing
05 – Devil / Demons
06 – Church
07 – Gay community
08 – Addiction
09 – Other
10 – Does not blame anyone/anything

Explicit Reference to Scandal
Indicate if the statement references the scandal explicitly.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – Yes, it is referenced in the statement
02 – No, it is not referenced in the statement

Overall Tone of the Statement
Indicate the overall tone of the reaction statement. The category options were determined based on a test reading of the statements.

Input the one of the following two-digit codes for the statement tone:
01 – Apologetic\textsuperscript{10}  
02 – Accusatory\textsuperscript{11}  
03 – Angry  \textsuperscript{12}  
04 – Pleading\textsuperscript{13}  
05 – Indifferent/factual\textsuperscript{14}  
06 – Other

Recovery Strategy Included

Indicate if the reaction statement outlines an explanation of what the pastor intends to do to make amends for the crisis.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – Yes, a recovery strategy is included  
02 – No, a recovery strategy is not included

\textsuperscript{10} Select apologetic if the category includes one or more “sorry’s” (or synonyms) and the pastor appears to accept responsibility for the scandal, but he does not appear to beg for forgiveness and apologizes in a more straightforward way.

\textsuperscript{11} Select accusatory if the pastor appears to blame someone else for the scandal.

\textsuperscript{12} Select angry if the pastor does not apologize for the scandal and appears to write about someone or something else scathingly.

\textsuperscript{13} If the pastor is apologetic, but begs for forgiveness and implores the readers to forgive him, select pleading.

\textsuperscript{14} If the pastor does not apologize for the scandal and does not attack anyone or anything in the statement, but either discusses the scandal in factual terms or does not address the scandal, select indifferent/factual.
Appendix B

Coding Sheet for Reaction Statement

Coder ID

__________________

Evangelical Leader

__________________

Date of scandal

__________________

Date of reaction statement

__________________

Statement issued by leader or organization with which they were affiliated

__________________

Medium Used

__________________

Audience

__________________

Leader Denial

__________________

Attempt to Bolster

__________________

Bolstering Relationship

_______________________________________________________

Differentiation

__________________

Object of Differentiation

________________________________________________________

Transcendence

__________________
Issue of Transcendence

Explicit Apology

Apology words

Placing blame

Explicit reference to scandal

Overall tone of the statement

Recovery strategy included
Appendix C

Articles Codebook

The coding for the reaction statements involves two types of feedback from the coder. If the entry requires the selection of one of the provided options, then either circle or highlight the choice you select. If the entry does not provide options for you to choose from, then please write in the data as indicated in the directions below:

Coder ID
Enter the unique two-digit coder ID assigned to you by the researcher.

Evangelical leader
Select which leader the reaction statement was issued by or on behalf of. Enter the corresponding two-digit number on the code sheet for each pastor:

01 – Paul Crouch
02 – Jonathan Merritt
03 – Ted Haggard
04 – Lonnie Latham
05 – Eddie Long
06 – George Alan Rekers

Date of Scandal
Within the provided blanks, insert a two-digit month followed by the two-digit day in which the initial news of the same-sex sex scandal broke.

Date of Publication
Provide the date of the issue in which the article under analysis appeared. Provide a two-digit day followed by a two-digit month.

Publication
Write the name of publication in which the article under analysis appeared. Enter one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – Religion News Service
02 – Guideposts
03 – Christianity Today
04 – Charisma
05 – World Magazine
06 – Christian Post
07 – Daily Paper (local to each pastor)

Format
Indicate in which format the article appears. If the article is a blog post, place it in whichever category is most appropriate for the content it expresses (e.g. if a
clear opinion is expressed identify it as an editorial or if it conveys additional background information about the leader identify it as a feature). Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 - News report (article is a straightforward factual report about the pastor or scandal)
02 - Editorial (primarily made up of the author’s opinions or argues for or against a side of an issue)
03 - Column (written by a syndicated/ local columnist who regularly has a column appear in the paper)
04 – Feature (a soft news piece that includes more background and/or discussion on the topic)
05 - Letter (written to the editor/paper by someone not employed by the paper or a wire service and includes the author’s opinion)
06 - News round-up (one of several 2-3 paragraph articles within a subsection)
07 - Other

Author
Indicate the affiliation of the author of the article. The author’s affiliation will typically be stated within their byline or at the end of the article.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – Reporter/editor from the publication
02 – Wire service
03 – Private citizen
04 – Religious official
05 – Other

Reference to Statement
Indicate if the article references the leader’s or his organization’s reaction statement(s) that is under evaluation for this study. Please make sure to make a distinction between if the article includes direct quotations from the reaction statement or just mentions it without any direct quotations.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – Yes, with direct quotations
02 – Yes, with no direct quotations
03 – No reference at all

Sources in Article
If it can be determined, select all the sources used by the reporter in the article.

15 If the article’s byline includes a wire service, whether or not it lists an individual author, select the wire service option.
Input as many of the following two-digit codes as are applicable:

01 – Leader involved in scandal
02 – Officials of organization affiliated with leader
03 – Accuser
04 – Leader’s church member/follower
05 – Law enforcement\textsuperscript{16}
06 – Leader’s attorney
07 – Accuser’s attorney
08 – Other religious leaders
09 – Other
10 – Unclear

\textit{Tone of Article Toward Evangelical Leader}
Indicate the tone the article takes toward the evangelical leader involved in the same-sex sex scandal.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 – Laudatory\textsuperscript{17}
02 – Favorable\textsuperscript{18}
03 – Neutral\textsuperscript{19}
04 – Critical\textsuperscript{20}
05 – Antagonistic\textsuperscript{21}
06 – Other

\textit{Primary Tone of Article Toward Accuser(s)}
Indicate the tone the reporter of the article takes toward the person(s) accusing the evangelical leader of homosexual activity.

Input one of the following two-digit codes:

01 - Laudatory
02 - Favorable
03 - Neutral
04 - Critical
05 - Antagonistic
06 - Other

\textsuperscript{16} Include district attorneys and prosecutors in the law enforcement category
\textsuperscript{17} Select laudatory if the article praises the leader
\textsuperscript{18} Select favorable if the article does not praise the leader, but expresses moderate support for the leader
\textsuperscript{19} Select neutral if the tone is very straightforward and factual
\textsuperscript{20} Select critical if the article moderately criticizes the leader and his actions
\textsuperscript{21} Select antagonistic if the reporter makes personal attacks on the leader and/or calls for some kind of action against the leader
Appendix D

Articles Coding Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coder ID</th>
<th>Evangelical Leader</th>
<th>Date of scandal</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Reference to statement</th>
<th>Sources in Article</th>
<th>Tone of Article Toward Evangelical Leader</th>
<th>Primary Tone of Article Toward Accuser(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix E

Reaction Statements

Paul Crouch

September 12, 2004 04:44 PM Eastern Time

TBN Response to the LA Times Article

TUSTIN, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sept. 12, 2004--The following is a statement from Trinity Broadcasting Network:

In a recent article in the Los Angeles Times reporting a story that Dr. Paul Crouch, the founder and president of Trinity Broadcasting Network, was allegedly involved in a wrongful termination and sexual harassment case in 1997 is deplorable and the scandalous claims leveled against him are false.

“Greater is He who is in me, than he who is in the world.”

The accuser is a convicted felon and longtime drug abuser who has been imprisoned for years for serious crimes ranging from child sexual molestation to using illegal drugs such as crack cocaine. The accuser became involved with TBN through a drug rehabilitation program conducted on TBN's property. Upon his successful completion of the program, TBN gave him a chance by offering him employment.

Although the accuser fell back into drug abuse on more than one occasion during his employment, TBN extended grace to this man and kept him employed while he continued to seek rehabilitation and counseling. Finally, after being arrested for yet another drug related violation, he was found guilty of violating his probation and was returned to prison for a year. Upon his release from incarceration in 1997, he again sought employment with TBN and when TBN declined, he threatened to sue TBN by alleging wrongful termination and sexual harassment, directing his most salacious allegations towards Dr. Crouch personally.

In an effort to address this matter in 1997, Dr. Crouch sought the advice and counsel of some trusted advisers, attorneys and spiritual leaders. The consensus viewpoint was that it would be better for TBN and Dr. Crouch to reach a financial settlement rather than to fight the accuser in court. This course of action was deemed less expensive and would avoid the bad publicity, time and effort that it would take to fight the false claims. Dr. Crouch reluctantly agreed to this advice with the understanding that the accuser would go away and leave both he and TBN alone forever. The importance of the settlement does not rest on the money paid, but rather on Dr. Crouch's vehement denial of the allegations made against him as well as the agreement of the accuser to keep confidential and refrain from repeating his false claims and accusations. Most importantly, at no time were ministry funds used in any portion of this settlement.
In violation of his agreement, and in an attempt to extract yet more money from TBN and Dr. Crouch, in late 2003, the accuser threatened to shop an autobiographical manuscript to the media should TBN and Dr. Crouch not agree to buy the manuscript for an exorbitant sum of money. Rather than even contemplating a second round of what Dr. Crouch considered extortion, and with the support of his present advisers and attorneys, Dr. Crouch and TBN fought the accuser in court where the accuser and his false claims were soundly defeated.

It is this litigation that is covered in the Los Angeles Times story. Dr. Crouch and TBN's only regret is that they did not take swift legal action to defeat these false claims seven years ago. Having not done so then, they have done so now.

It is a reprehensible fact of modern life that public persons like Dr. Crouch are targets of such dishonest, false and scandalous claims. The lifelong ministry of Dr. Crouch has been to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world. The good works of TBN are what define Dr. Crouch and it is this work that will continue to define him. As such, Dr. Crouch will continue to respond to God's call on his life as president of TBN, bringing to bear his own personality, integrity, enthusiasm and talent.

We request that all of TBN's partners and supporters pray for Paul and Jan as they weather yet another attack on their ministry and personal lives. This storm will pass and as the scriptures most aptly proclaim, "Greater is He who is in me, than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

Contacts

WDC Media
Susan Zahn, 602-296-4626
wdcmedia@earthlink.net
Ted Haggard

(Reaction Statement 1)

November 4, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE New Life Church Colorado Springs, Colorado

We, the Overseer Board of New Life Church, have concluded our deliberations concerning the moral failings of Pastor Ted Haggard. Our investigation and Pastor Haggard’s public statements have proven without a doubt that he has committed sexually immoral conduct.

The language of our church bylaws state that as Overseers we must decide in cases where the Senior Pastor has "demonstrated immoral conduct” whether we must “remove the pastor from his position or to discipline him in any way they deem necessary."

In consultation with leading evangelicals and experts familiar with the type of behavior Pastor Haggard has demonstrated, we have decided that the most positive and productive direction for our church is his dismissal and removal. In addition, the Overseers will continue to explore the depth of Pastor Haggard’s offense so that a plan of healing and restoration can begin.

Pastor Haggard and his wife have been informed of this decision. They have agreed as well that he should be dismissed and that a new pastor for New Life Church should be selected according to the rules of replacement in the bylaws.

That process will begin immediately in hopes that a new pastor can be confirmed by the end of the year 2006. In the interim, Ross Parsley will function as the leader of the church with full support of the Overseers.

A letter of explanation and apology by Pastor Haggard as well as a word of encouragement from Gayle Haggard will be read in the 9:00 and 11:00 service of New Life Church.

--Reprinted from NewLifeChurch.org
Ted Haggard

(Reaction Statement 2)

November 5, 2006

My Dear New Life Church Family,

I am so sorry. I am sorry for the disappointment, the betrayal, and the hurt. I am sorry for the horrible example I have set for you.

I have an overwhelming, all-consuming sadness in my heart for the pain that you and I and my family have experienced over the past few days. I am so sorry for the circumstances that have caused shame and embarrassment to all of you.

I asked that this note be read to you this morning so I could clarify my heart's condition to you. The last four days have been so difficult for me, my family and all of you, and I have further confused the situation with some of the things I've said during interviews with reporters who would catch me coming or going from my home. But I alone am responsible for the confusion caused by my inconsistent statements. The fact is, I am guilty of sexual immorality, and I take responsibility for the entire problem.

I am a deceiver and a liar. There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I've been warring against it all of my adult life. For extended periods of time, I would enjoy victory and rejoice in freedom. Then, from time to time, the dirt that I thought was gone would resurface, and I would find myself thinking thoughts and experiencing desires that were contrary to everything I believe and teach.

Through the years, I've sought assistance in a variety of ways, with none of them proving to be effective in me. Then, because of pride, I began deceiving those I love the most because I didn't want to hurt or disappoint them.

The public person I was wasn't a lie; it was just incomplete. When I stopped communicating about my problems, the darkness increased and finally dominated me. As a result, I did things that were contrary to everything I believe.

The accusations that have been leveled against me are not all true, but enough of them are true that I have been appropriately and lovingly removed from ministry. Our church's overseers have required me to submit to the oversight of Dr. James Dobson, Pastor Jack Hayford, and Pastor Tommy Barnett. Those men will perform a thorough analysis of my mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical life. They will guide me through a program with the goal of healing and restoration for my life, my marriage, and my family.

I created this entire situation. The things that I did opened the door for additional allegations. But I am responsible; I alone need to be disciplined and corrected. An example must be set.

It is important that you know how much I love and appreciate my wife, Gayle. What I did should never reflect in a negative way on her relationship with me. She has been and
continues to be incredible. The problem was not with her, my children, or any of you. It was created 100% by me.

I have been permanently removed from the office of Senior Pastor of New Life Church. Until a new senior pastor is chosen, our Associate Senior Pastor, Ross Parsley, will assume all of the responsibilities of the office. On the day he accepted this new role, he and his wife, Aimee, had a new baby boy. A new life in the midst of this circumstance—I consider that confluence of events to be prophetic. Please commit to join with Pastor Ross and the others in church leadership to make their service to you easy and without burden. They are fine leaders. You are blessed.

I appreciate your loving and forgiving nature, and I humbly ask you to do a few things:

1. Please stay faithful to God through service and giving.

2. Please forgive me. I am so embarrassed and ashamed. I caused this and I have no excuse. I am a sinner. I have fallen. I desperately need to be forgiven and healed.

3. Please forgive my accuser. He is revealing the deception and sensuality that was in my life. Those sins, and others, need to be dealt with harshly. So, forgive him and, actually, thank God for him. I am trusting that his actions will make me, my wife and family, and ultimately all of you, stronger. He didn’t violate you; I did.

4. Please stay faithful to each other. Perform your functions well. Encourage each other and rejoice in God’s faithfulness. Our church body is a beautiful body, and like every family, our strength is tested and proven in the midst of adversity. Because of the negative publicity I’ve created with my foolishness, we can now demonstrate to the world how our sick and wounded can be healed, and how even disappointed and betrayed church bodies can prosper and rejoice.

Gayle and I need to be gone for a while. We will never return to a leadership role at New Life Church. In our hearts, we will always be members of this body. We love you as our family. I know this situation will put you to the test. I’m sorry I’ve created the test, but please rise to this challenge and demonstrate the incredible grace that is available to all of us.

Ted Haggard

--Reprinted from Slate.com
Lonnie Latham

(Reaction Statement 1)

Today I resign as Senior Pastor from one of the most wonderful congregations in the Father's Kingdom, South Tulsa Baptist Church.

Sandra and I thank you for the love and encouragement you have shown us not only before this incident but also after. Your cards, calls, and emails of encouragement, your prayers, and your presence sustain us.

We will always love you. Our prayer is for you to continue to be the great ministry you are.

Your continued prayers and support for Sandra and me will be greatly appreciated.

"But I am confident of this very thing that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

Sincerely,

Lonnie W. Latham

--Reprinted from SouthTulsaBaptistChurch.org
Lonnie Latham

(Reaction Statement 2)

January 6, 2006

On Thursday night, January 5, 2006, Dr. Lonnie Latham turned in his resignation as senior pastor of South Tulsa Baptist Church to church leaders. He will not be returning to South Tulsa Baptist Church in any staff capacity.

This was an important first step, and one that will enable our church to begin a period of healing and reconciliation.

As stated previously, we will continue to love and support Lonnie and his family. We appreciate the outpouring of support and prayer from both our church family and the community of believers from all faiths. We also appreciate the counsel and support we have received from the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. Dr. Anthony Jordan, executive director of the BGCO, will be preaching this Sunday at our church.

Our church has a long history of sharing Christ’s message of love and redemption to people from all walks of life through both local and foreign missions. That same spirit of love will be the one that we continue to show Dr. Latham and his family.

Our ability to extend Christ’s love has been a hallmark of this church and will continue to be our emphasis as we walk on our journey of faith.

South Tulsa Baptist Church

--Reprinted from SouthTulsaBaptistChurch.org
Eddie Long

(Reaction Statement 1)

This is a transcript of Bishop Eddie Long's 8 a.m. sermon at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia on Sunday.

Good morning New Birth. And good morning to all our other guests.

And I would be remiss not to say good morning to the world.

You all may be seated in the presence of the Lord.

I do want to remind folk that we're here at 8 every Sunday morning. Every Sunday morning.

And I'll be here next week.

First of all, let me thank you on behalf on my wife, my family, for all of your support, your prayers. We are certainly humbled by such a loving congregation. I realize that many have been waiting on me to say something. I have to do ... (long applause)

My first responsibility is to my family. My next responsibility is not to address the world before I address my family, New Birth.

Because I'm pastor, I want to talk to you for a moment, and make a statement and we'll be gone.

This is an extremely difficult time for me, an extremely difficult time for my family. It's an extremely difficult time for you, because many who've called you and asked you questions and all of these kind of things. You ain't never got this many phone calls in your life. It's a time when you actually see the veil dropped and who's with you and who's not with you.

So, as a pastor, I want to help everybody. The first thing, I just want to talk to you for about 10 or 15 minutes. I want to thank all the pastors who left their churches, all my sons, daughters. It wouldn't be right without the preachers here. All my sons and daughters, pastors here, Bishop Murphy, Pastor Landers, Pastor William Murphy, I can go on and on and on out here ... Pastor Davis and all, but I want to help all of us this morning and if I can do that and say these things and then we'll move.

This is difficult, difficult for everybody. This is probably the most difficult time in my entire life. And so I thought the first thing I might just say for everybody is I want to just talk to you for a moment about how to handle painful and difficult situations. How to handle painful and difficult situations.
And I start with scripture from Psalms 34:19. Y'all did know I was gon' use my Bible today. Of all days. I just wanna take just a few moments. And then I'll say what the rest of you came to hear.

But I gotta talk to my family. Psalms 34:19 says many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of all of them.

Our purpose today is twofold, is to minister to those who are present, and to strengthen the New Birth family.

Above all this church, the church of the living God, and all that is precious and holy in this wonderful moment. And I want you to focus on what the spirit of God has to speak to us, not to focus on Eddie Long. There's a simple emphasis that I would like to use to minister and was given direction to our church and family in this time of ... because you got to understand the reality of painful situations. You got to understand the response to painful situations, and then we have to know what the remedy is for painful situations.

The reality of a painful situation, I would refer to Isaiah 43:2, just write it down, it says, when you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. And when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. Nor shall the flames scorch you. Unfortunately, my brothers and my sisters, life is filled with painful situations that makes the time of joy and happiness not as magnificent as we would like.

As long as man has to deal in life, you will find that life will be unfair, the rain's on the just and the unjust. And we are all subject to face distasteful and painful situations.

Bishop Long -- Eddie Long -- and you can put your name in that blank, will have some bad situations. The righteous face painful situations with a determined expectancy. We are not exempt from pain, but He promises to deliver us out of our pain.

Solutions or situations of destruction, pain caused by floods, pain caused by earthquakes, tsunamis, Katrina, those that had to be relocated, lost things in a day, the stress, the challenge of painful situations.

Some in here, situation of disease and sickness, have been to the doctor, got reports that wasn't favorable, that's why we do our confessions in this the ending of that 21 days to bring you into wholeness. Painful situations. Situations of disappointment, many have been disappointed. Hopelessness and unmet expectations; situations of death, there's parents in here who've lost children and people who were suddenly taken away in car accidents or unexpected things. Situations of deception, when one has been betrayed by those that they love; situations of divorce when love turns into resentment; situations, and the greatest pain of life is to love somebody that doesn't love you back.

Without a doubt there are painful situations in life that are inescapable. Protections from painful situations are absolutely impossible. Trust me, I tried to find them. Preparation is
the most important, but the response to painful situations is, also. Matthew 6:33 says seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things will be added unto you.

We cannot always control and avoid painful situations, but we can control our response to them. We must decide in the midst of all that occurs, that we will maintain our righteous focus and spiritual witness. Some possible responses as I close and move.

You can curse it, and allow the situation to make you bitter.

You can nurse it and allow the situation to make you a blamer.

You can rehearse it and allow the situation to be relived and make you a worse person because you continue to go over it and over it and live in that pain.

Or you can reverse it, and allow the situation, response, to cause you to be better.

We will not allow the present pain to cause us to abandon our righteous commitment and stand.

Someway and somehow we will become better and we will walk through this painful situation.

The remedy for a painful situation is described by David in the best way that I know how to make it through rough times. Yea though I walk through the valleys and the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You art with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. David, the writer, gives us an insight of how to make it through a painful time. Because he seems to be focused on something higher than the pain. We can make it through these times if we stay focused on the spiritual things that have brought us thus far. And we can make it through by the focus on power.

So I just took the power and took the first letters of that word and this, New Birth, is our focus.

No. 1 is the P for the power of prayer. We must be committed and stay committed to prayer. Not just for me and not just for my family, but also for everyone concerned in these allegations and all that is going on. We must stay prayerful for the nations and prayerful for our president. We have a wonderful opportunity and it is election time in Georgia. It's very important. We cannot be distracted and not go to the polls because we're trying to chase folk down. Early voting is now. You can go and vote. Because Jesus teaches us that even we have to love our enemies and pray for them, too.

The next letter is O for outreach. We cannot allow these things to distract us from our mission to seek and to save the lost. We are going after the lost. And some of you who think I'm lost ... and your need to see God, there'll be an opportunity to come down to the altar. We must continue to minister to those who are lost.
The W is for worship. We must focus on the power of worship. New Birth, we have some powerful worship here and we ain't gon' stop having it. There's been healing going forth, deliverance going forth. All kind of things that happen in the power of worship. And you just need to focus yourself and look back on the wonderful dimensions of worship that God is continuing to take us in.

The E is for encouragement. We must be there to encourage one another. The Bible says David had to encourage himself. He had to do that because he was alone. We are not alone. There's a whole lot of folk up in here, up in here, up in here. And there's a whole lot of people that we can use to encourage one another.

And finally the R is for resolve. We must not forget that our strength is not in man, but in the Lord. We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord. We have a reliance on the holy spirit. And the scripture teaches us that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk....

There have been allegations and attacks made on me. I have never in my life portrayed myself as a perfect man. But I am not the man that’s being portrayed on the television. That’s not me. That is not me.

By the counsel of my lawyers, they have advised me not to try this case in the media. I am not gon' try this case in the media. It will be tried in the court of justice and dealt with in the court of justice and please understand because that's the only place I think I'll get justice, but being in the hands of God.

Please hear this. Please hear this: I’ve been accused. I’m under attack. I want you to know, as I said earlier, I am not a perfect man. But this thing I’m gon' fight.

And I want you to know one other thing. I feel like David against Goliath, but I’ve got five rocks and I haven’t thrown one yet.

--Transcribed by Fran Jeffries for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Eddie Long

(Reaction Statement 2)

"Uh, good morning and I just want to take this uh moment to address you again as I, as advice of counsel uh I am not going to uh address uh the allegations and the uh attack that's been levied upon me at this moment because again as I stated earlier in the service you know I would want this to be dealt in, in the court of justice and not by public opinion. I uh will say that uh I am going to fight, fight very vigorously uh against these charges and uh I've been at this church for 23 years. This is the first time I realize we are as important as we are to get this much attention and uh we're going to continue as a church to do the things that we do to touch the world; hospitals that we built in Nigeria, and in Kenya and uh things that we're doing in Honduras with uh building homes for missionaries even as we support hospice in South Africa as you witnessed even today. Uh, there's so many things and I even increased my commitment to working with youth. I've always done that. We've always done that as a church. Uh, we've always helped young men and young ladies and families and to make sure they're able to move forward, and move into college and to do things that make them better and more productive citizens. So, the things that New Birth has stood for, the good things that we have done and we will continue to done, continue to do and increase in all of that. So uh without violating anything that my attorney has uh so commissioned me and uh (unintelligible) to instruct me I appreciate your time, I appreciate you uh being here and uh I thank you."

--Transcribed by Statement Analysis
Jonathan Merritt

(Reaction Statement 1)

JUL 26, 2012

CULTURE; INTERVIEWS

Jonathan Merritt Shares His Story

Ed Stetzer

Jonathan Merritt is a nationally known writer, blogger and news personality. He has written two books, *Green Like God* and *A Faith of Our Own* and has written for USA Today, the Huffington Post, and many others. He's done lots of news appearances--the last I saw him on television was on "The O-Reilly Factor" a few weeks ago.

Recently, after Jonathan, in a piece written for The Atlantic, defended Chick-fil-A against a potential boycott by gay activists, a "gay, former-evangelical" blogger claimed he had evidence Jonathan himself was gay. In the parlance the effort was to "out him." Merritt's defense of Chick-fil-A had already exploded in the LGBT blogosphere, but this enflamed the issue as many sought to discredit Jonathan after he dared to defend Chick-fil-A.

Jonathan's views have been clear--he considers homosexual practice as sin and is not in favor of redefining marriage (about half of America agrees, btw). Such views make you a target today, regardless of your personal situation.

"Outing," in case you do not know, is the practice of revealing that a certain person is gay without his or her consent, is not an unheard of occurrence though it is not always looked on favorably within the LGBT community. My heart grieves to see such low integrity, particularly when done by a person who claims the title "Christian"--and I am deeply disappointed with a few "Christians" in the blogosphere, who, since they disagreed with Jonathan in the past, seized the moment. Sad.

Yes, Jonathan Merritt is a public figure who lives in the intersection of church and culture, and is accustomed to cars coming from both directions--which appears to be the case now. In the past I have used my blog as a way for leaders to address blogosphere issues (see this interview with Rick Warren, for example) I want to do the same today.

So, I asked Jonathan if he would take a few questions and respond to this situation for himself. He has agreed, and I welcome him to the blog today.

---

Q: A blogger alleges that you have not been transparent, honest or authentic about who you are because of your religious affiliation. Tell us about the situation.
A: My story begins at a very young age when an older male who lived in our neighborhood sexually abused me. The experience was followed with a tidal wave of shame and guilt so great that I never told anyone for many years. In the years following this event, I mostly stuffed the experience away and didn't deal with it. On rare occasion, oppressive thoughts would enter my mind and bring on periods of depression and questioning. I wondered why this had happened to me and what, if anything, it meant.

I decided to follow Jesus at 13 and quickly realized that this event and the confusion that followed was not my fault. God had allowed an experience of brokenness into my life even if I didn't fully understand it. Rather than run from God, I decided to walk with him in this. And, I believe that helped shape my worldview that sin can be overcome. It's through that lens that I write. And, it's through that brokenness that I try to live.

In 2009, I was contacted by the blogger in response to an article I wrote about just that--that Christians must love people who experience sexual brokenness. We corresponded several times by email and text for a couple of weeks, some of them inappropriate. When I was traveling through a city near him, we met for dinner because we'd corresponded so recently. As we were saying goodbye, we had physical contact that went beyond the bounds of friendship. I was overcome with guilt, knowing I had put myself in an unwise situation. We never saw each other again and we ceased contact after a period of time.

Q: What happened after this?

A: When I returned home, I saw a Christian counselor to address the events in my life and sort through my childhood and what I believed God wanted for me. I also began to acknowledge to myself that I have sin in my past, sin for which I accept responsibility. Inappropriate texting, inappropriate actions are inappropriate no matter who the other party is. These were my decisions and no one else's.

It's from my brokenness, that I feel I can now be transparent, honest, and authentic about these accusations. Those close to me know I have actually been planning to share the story of my brokenness for some time. Because it is part of my spiritual journey. And because it underscores the power of the Gospel to transform lives.

Although I was unable to choose when I would share some of these painful memories, I am thankful for the opportunity to share it now. I'm thankful that I am able to make better decisions about how to handle a difficult situation. And, I'm thankful that because of grace, I can identify with those who have dealt with similar situations.

Q: How has this experience shaped you?

A: It's bred compassion in me towards others who wrestle with the baggage they carry in life. People like me who passionately pursue God--on His terms and not ours--
experience incredible times of struggle along the way. I know what it is like to experience periods of depression, frustration, and confusion. And that's why I live out my calling the way I do, as best as I can, sometimes stumbling along the way.

I don't identify as "gay" because I believe there can be a difference between what one experiences and the life that God offers. I'm a cracked vessel held together only by God's power. And I'm more sure each day that only Christ can make broken people whole.

**Q: How has your church leadership responded, and what is their response now?**

**A:** I'm an active member at Cross Pointe, though I'm not on staff there. I met with our church leaders who have been incredibly supportive. They know I'm committed to living the life God demands for those who follow him. And they know that as I follow Jesus, I'm committed to pursuing his best for me, which includes the Bible's unambiguous standards for sexuality.

**Q: What kind of response have you received since this blog posted?**

**A:** Mostly emails and texts and calls from Christian friends who are reaffirming their love for me. I've been overwhelmed by this, and reminded again how important Christian community and accountability can be. That's also why I felt that it was important to tell my story. I'm committed to this journey in Christ, and I'm committed to remaining within the Christian community while maintaining valuable friendships with those who are not Christians. Sometimes this means being vulnerable and transparent when it's tough. But that's also when we can lean in and know that the truth is never something to be ashamed of and that in our brokenness we can find strength.

I am thankful that my struggles are not public discussion, but I appreciate Jonathan sharing what he has--and am praying for him in the days ahead.

Feel free to comment below, but the comment rules will be in place as always. Be sure to read them if you have not. If your comments are not posted, I don't argue nor justify my moderation policy.

Please commit to pray for Jonathan as he allows God to heal his brokenness while using him in the midst of it.

That's probably a good prayer for each of us.

Thanks for all the comments-- lots of different views expressed.
We are closing the comments now since it appears that the same comments are just being repeated, etc.

--Reprinted from “The Exchange: A blog by Ed Stetzer”
George Alan Rekers

(Reaction Statement 1)

***MISLEADING INTERNET REPORTS ABOUT PROFESSOR GEORGE REKERS***

A recent article in an alternative newspaper cleverly gave false impressions of inappropriate behavior because of its misleading innuendo, incorrectly implying that Professor George Rekers used the Rentboy website to hire a prostitute to accompany him on a recent trip. Contrary to Internet stories based on this slanderous article, following medical advice Professor George Rekers requires an assistant to lift his luggage in his travels because of an ongoing condition following surgery. His family, local friends, and even another university professor colleague have offered to accompany him on trips to assist him in his travel. Dr. Rekers found his recent travel assistant by interviewing different people who might be able to help, and did not even find out about his travel assistant’s Internet advertisements offering prostitution activity until after the trip was in progress. There was nothing inappropriate with this relationship. Professor Rekers was not involved in any illegal or sexual behavior with his travel assistant.

--Reprinted from ProfessorGeorge.com
George Alan Rekers

(Reaction Statement 2)

Thank you for your friend request

Between You and George Alan Rekers

George Alan Rekers May 4 at 3:00pm Report

Thank you for taking the time to write to me about the recent "news" story that is a mixture of truth and falsehood. The article truthfully stated that due to surgery I require assistance in lifting luggage when traveling, that I am a professor and I am also a Baptist minister, and it is true as the article states, "Rekers isn't gay himself."

NARTH and Family Research Council co-founder Dr. George Rekers has responded to my inquiry about where to find the hottest male prostitutes. After the above, he continues: I have spent much time as a mental health professional and as a Christian minister helping and lovingly caring for people identifying themselves as “gay.” My hero is Jesus Christ who loves even the culturally despised people, including sexual sinners and prostitutes. Like Jesus Christ, I deliberately spend time with sinners with the loving goal to try to help them. Mark 2:16-17 reads, “16When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 17On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." In fact, in a dialogue with hypocritical religious leaders, Jesus even stated to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. " (Matthew 21:31).

Like John the Baptist and Jesus, I have a loving Christian ministry to homosexuals and prostitutes in which I share the Good News of Jesus Christ with them (see I Corinthians 6:8-11). Contrary to false gossip, innuendo, and slander about me, I do not in any way “hate” homosexuals, but I seek to lovingly share two types of messages to them, as I did with the young man called “Lucien” in the news story: [1] It is possible to cease homosexual practices to avoid the unacceptable health risks associated with that behavior, and [2] the most important decision one can make is to establish a relationship with God for all eternity by trusting in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins, including homosexual sins. If you talk with my travel assistant that the story called “Lucien,” you will find I spent a great deal of time sharing scientific information on the desirability of abandoning homosexual intercourse, and I shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with him in great detail.

Oh, well that explains EVERYTHING! Dr. George Rekers is curing homosexuals ONE BY ONE by hiring them on MALE PROSTITUTION websites! Glory! Praise His Name!

UPDATE: Let's call Reker's bluff and talk to "Lucien." I know at least ONE of you
knows him and has contact details. Spill it! Or was there enough information in the *Miami New Times* story to figure out who he is on Rentboy.com? Unsurprisingly, Rekers thinks this is a bad idea:

—Reprinted from Joe.My.God.com
George Alan Rekers

(Reaction Statement 3)

NARTH Responds to the
Recent Media Coverage of Dr. George Rekers

May 6, 2010 -- The National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) is a professional scientific organization with hundreds of academic, research, and clinical members dedicated to assisting individuals dealing with unwanted homosexual attractions. While NARTH is focused on the science of homosexual attraction, personal controversies often deepen the existing cultural divide on this issue. Such is the case in the recent news stories concerning one of our members, Dr. George Rekers.

NARTH takes seriously the accusations that have been made, and we are currently attempting to understand the details behind these press reports. We are always saddened when this type of controversy impacts the lives of individuals, and we urge all parties to allow a respectful and thorough investigation to take place.

At this difficult time for the families and individuals involved, we extend our sympathies. We also wish to reiterate our traditional position that these personal controversies do not change the scientific data, nor do they detract from the important work of NARTH.

NARTH continues to support scientific research, and to value client autonomy, client self-determination and client diversity.

--Reprinted from NARTH.org