Performance-Enhancing Drug Use in Professional Baseball:
A Study of Image Repair and Public Perception

Jessica Korn

A Capstone Project

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Supervisor: Prof. Lauren Feldman

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2010
“My Team”

Michael K.  
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Gino  
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Lauren Feldman
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Abstract

In just the last ten years, several well-known, successful baseball players have been accused of performance enhancing drug use. This paper uses William Benoit’s image repair theory as a framework for analyzing the image repair strategies used by Alex Rodriguez, Mark McGwire, Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens in response to allegations of performance enhancing drug use, and assesses the impact of these strategies on public perception of the players. The use of image repair by professional baseball players following accusations of performance enhancing drug use is a topic that lacks considerable scholarly analysis; moreover, research on image repair discourse, in general, often falls short of considering the impact of these strategies on audience perception. Based on an analysis of various news conferences, one-on-one interviews and grand jury testimonies as well as public polling data, the most common image repair strategies used by the players were simple denial and attacking the accuser. However, not one image repair strategy is found to be more successful than another in generating favorable public perceptions. Contrary to prior research, which suggests mortification would be the most effective, the results of this study found that men who did employ this image repair strategy- Alex Rodriguez and Mark McGwire- were not perceived any more favorably than men who did not- Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens.
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Introduction

In recent years, Major League Baseball (MLB) has been plagued with recurrent controversy regarding the prevalence of performance enhancing drug use. In June 2002, late professional baseball player Ken Caminiti admitted to *Sports Illustrated* magazine that he had used performance-enhancing drugs during his 1996 Most Valuable Player-winning season with the San Diego Padres (Verducci, 2002). Caminiti’s most startling assertion, “It’s no secret what’s going on in baseball. At least half the guys are using steroids” (Verducci, 2002, para. 6), made a long-standing baseball secret public knowledge, setting off a scandal that is still a source of embarrassment for Major League Baseball today. Evidence of the use of performance-enhancing drugs was hearsay prior to Caminiti’s 2002 claims. Journalists jumped on the *Sports Illustrated* story and within two months Congress put in place mandates to begin drug testing the following season (Denham, 2004).

In the eight years since Caminiti’s revelation, Major League Baseball has had a succession of well-known players face allegations of performance-enhancing drug use. The Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative (BALCO) raid of 2003 found strong evidence that five professional baseball players had used performance-enhancing drugs, which led to a 2005 Congressional hearing (Haigh, 2008). The scandalous 2005 Jose Conseco autobiography, *Juiced* followed the BALCO debacle (Haigh, 2008). In December 2007, the Mitchell Report named 89 professional baseball players as those tied to the use of banned substances (Wilson & Schmidt, 2007). In early 2009, Alex Rodriguez acknowledged that he used performance-enhancing drugs from 2001 to 2003 (Kepner, 2009). Then, in January 2010, Mark McGwire confessed to using performance-enhancing drugs on and off for ten years, including in 1998, when he broke baseball’s home run record (Kepner, 2010).
Professional baseball players who are accused of participating in the use of performance-enhancing drugs face strong criticism from both the public and media. It is the responsibility of each individual athlete to take appropriate actions toward repairing his image. In this capstone, William Benoit’s theory of image restoration discourse (1997), which focuses on the various message strategies an individual may take when faced with a crisis situation, will be used as the framework for analyzing player strategy and the effects of these different image repair tactics on public perception. The players selected for this study- Alex Rodriguez, Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire and Roger Clemens- are four of the most recognizable names not just in baseball, but in all of sports. They have all achieved incredible levels of personal success, won copious accolades, and received millions of dollars in salaries and endorsement deals. And they are all closely involved with the controversy of performance-enhancing drugs in professional baseball.

Based on a review of the available literature, there appears to be a substantial gap in existing research focused on the relationship between image repair strategy used during baseball’s “steroid era” and public perception of baseball players. This paper does not suppose the crisis of performance-enhancing drug use is limited to only professional baseball. Yet given the attention this topic has received over the last decade, it is surprising that more has not been written on the subject. Called the “story of the decade” by The Associated Press, Howard Bryant of ESPN wrote, “at no time in the nation’s sporting history have the greatest players of their time all been taken down at the same time for the same reason as baseball players have this decade” (Bryant, 2009). Through an analysis of both strategy and polling data, this paper intends to identify which image repair strategies are most effective.

Following this introduction, a literature review will offer a detailed description of Benoit’s image restoration theory, including criticisms of his work. The literature review will go
on to describe prior studies that used Benoit’s theory to analyze the image repair strategies of various public figures and will conclude with a review of what limited research has been conducted applying image restoration theory to Major League Baseball. Following the literature review, a methods section will lay out how the research was conducted. The analysis section treats each of the four players in turn. Background information about each player’s baseball career is provided, along with a summary of the drug allegations that each faced. From there, an in-depth evaluation of each man’s image repair strategies will be compared with public polling data to determine common (if any) trends that influenced perception. Finally, the research will serve to synthesize recommendations for future image repair strategy.
Literature Review

Benoit’s Theory of Image Restoration Discourse

Based on the abundance of prior studies (e.g., Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Liu, 2008; Sheldon & Sallot, 2009) that use the theory of image restoration discourse to analyze crisis strategies, Benoit’s model is arguably the most thorough and comprehensive. His model aims “to offer a typology that is more complete than those found in the rhetorical literature while avoiding the extreme detail... of accounts” (Benoit, 1995, p. 74).

Benoit uses the term strategy as “an abstract or general concept that represents a goal or an effect sought by discourse” (Benoit, 1995, p. 80). Founded on the prior work of theorists such as Fisher (1970) and Semin and Manstead (1982), the theory of image restoration discourse is designed with two communication assumptions in mind: that communication is both a goal-directed activity and that it is critical for maintaining a positive reputation (Benoit, 1995). If an individual (or organization) is held responsible for an act that is considered offensive or reprehensible, his reputation is at risk (Benoit, 1997b). The theory of image restoration discourse “focuses on message options” (Benoit, 1997b, p. 178). Benoit (1995) acknowledges his exclusion of strategies such as silence or ignoring accusations in favor of more proactive approaches to image repair.

Image restoration strategy is divided into five broad categories (with three of these categories divided into subcategories). Table 1 below outlines the fourteen strategies and key characteristics of each one.
Table 1. Benoit’s Image Restoration Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Key Characteristic</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Denial</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Simple Denial</td>
<td>Did Not Perform Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift the Blame</td>
<td>Act Performed by Another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evasion of Responsibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocation</td>
<td>Responded to Act of Another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defeasibility</td>
<td>Lack of Information or Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident</td>
<td>Act Was a Mishap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Intentions</td>
<td>Meant Well in Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reducing Offensiveness of Event</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>Stress Good Traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>Act Not Serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Act Less Offensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transcendence</td>
<td>More Important Considerations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attack Accuser</td>
<td>Reduce Credibility of Accuser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Reimburse Victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corrective Action</strong></td>
<td>Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mortification</strong></td>
<td>Apologize for Act</td>
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The first category described by Benoit is denial. One strategy of denial is simple denial. An individual may either deny that the act occurred or say that he wasn’t the individual to perform the act in question (Benoit, 1997b). A claim of denial may be reinforced with solid evidentiary support (Benoit, 1995). Shifting of blame is more effective than simple denial because it argues that another individual is responsible for the act (Benoit, 1997b). Shifting the blame provides another target as well as answers the question of who did it (Benoit, 1995).

A second category, evasion of responsibility, has four variants. Provocation may be used to claim an action was in response to another offensive act therefore making the behavior seem justified (Benoit, 1997b). A second strategy is defeasibility. An individual alleges lack of information about or control over factors involved in the situation (Benoit 1995). Third, an
individual will claim a situation was accidental. If an individual can convincingly argue his actions occurred by accident, he will be held less accountable (Benoit, 1997b). Benoit argues, “we tend to hold others responsible only for factors they can reasonably be expected to control” (Benoit, 1995, p. 76). Good intentions is the fourth variant of evading responsibility. An individual does not deny the act, but asks to not be held fully responsible because it was done with good rather than bad intentions (Benoit, 1995).

The third category of reducing offensiveness has six variants. Bolstering is when an individual will attempt to reduce offensiveness by highlighting the positive attributes he possesses or positive actions he has performed in the past (Benoit, 1995). Minimization is a successful strategy if an individual can convince his audience that the situation is not as bad as it may appear, thus reducing the level of negative affect associated with it (Benoit, 1995). Third is differentiation, which involves distinguishing the act as less offensive than similar actions in order to reduce its offensiveness (Benoit, 1997b). A fourth possible strategy is transcendence. If an individual can place his actions in a different context, one that is broader or more favorable, his reputation may be improved (Benoit, 1995). An individual may also use the strategy of attacking his accuser. This strategy may be used if an accused individual can successfully discredit the source of the accusations (Benoit, 1995). Finally, there is compensation. An individual offers goods, services or monetary reimbursement to help improve negative feelings. Essentially, “compensation functions as a bribe” (Benoit, 1995, p. 78).

An individual who uses corrective action, Benoit’s fourth category of response, is promising to correct the problem. This can be achieved through two forms. The individual can either vow to restore the situation to what it was before the action in question and/or he can promise to make changes to prevent the action from happening again (Benoit, 1995).
The final category is mortification, whereby an individual admits responsibility for his actions. He will “confess and beg forgiveness” (Benoit, 1997b, p. 181). Benoit (1995) suggests coupling mortification with another strategy to correct the problem.

**Criticisms Concerning the Theory of Image Restoration**

As Benoit’s own (1997b) research reflects, it is difficult to compare studies on image restoration. Burns and Bruner (2000) argue that Benoit’s theory “invites misinterpretation” (p. 27) because of language issues. In their essay, they give credit to Benoit for his depth of research, but express concerns over his use of the words “image” (p. 29), “restoration” (p. 30) and “strategies” (p. 30) as well as what they believe is lack of substance accounting for audience perspective (Burns & Bruner, 2000). For each of these criticisms, they offer suggestions for clarification and ways to expand and develop the theory. In direct response, Benoit (2000) both defends his research and acknowledges the “thought-provoking insights” of the Burns and Bruner critique.

Both appraisals of the theory agree on two important points. Burns and Bruner (2000) argue that the word “restoration” is oversimplified because it implies a return to a similar state that existed prior to the crisis situation (without lasting implications), and should instead be replaced with a substitute such as “recreating.” Benoit (2000) not only agrees with this assessment, but also affirms his own preference for the word “repair” in lieu of “restoration.” True to Benoit’s belief, “restoration” will be substituted with “repair” for the remainder of this paper. Second, Benoit embraces their call for more experimental research into image restoration.

Yet Benoit defends against the majority of Burns and Bruner’s criticism. Burns and Bruner (2000) are concerned the theory focuses too much on the source of the image repair and not enough emphasis is put on an audience-oriented point of view. They suggest to “flesh out
fragments, themes, and issues from the perspective of significant audience(s)” (Burns and Bruner, 2000, p. 34). Benoit (2000) argues that since his theory is “a menu of options for those who feel the need to engage in image repair” (p. 40), it inevitably focuses more on the source and less on the audience. Benoit (2000) goes on to remind his reviewers that the entire purpose of image repair is to influence audience perception and each strategy of the theory was written with the audience’s most likely reactions in mind.

Benoit and Drew’s 1997 study provides evidentiary support for Benoit in his defense of the theory’s consideration of audience perception. The study compares the fourteen strategies of image repair to determine the most effective and the most appropriate. Benoit and Drew hypothesize that there will “be significant differences in perceived appropriateness and perceived effectiveness of the fourteen image restoration forms” (p. 157). In the study, 202 participants were asked to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of remarks given by an individual who had engaged in objectionable behavior. Results found that participants clearly ranked mortification and corrective action as the two most appropriate and effective strategies. Benoit and Drew conclude that apologies are most effective in dealing with problematic situations: if a person is held responsible for an offensive act, we expect that individual to apologize and we are often willing to forgive them when the apology seems sincere. Conversely, denial, provocation, minimization and bolstering were found least appropriate and effective (Benoit & Drew, 1997). As Benoit and Drew mention, while the strategies of denial, provocation, minimization and bolstering were rejected in this study, they have been defined as appropriate and effective in previous research (e.g., Riordan, Marlin & Gidwani, 1998, Gonzales, 1992; Hale, 1987). This supports Benoit’s claim that the theory is structured to allow for a variety of audience reactions.
A more recent study analyzes 18 years of Benoit’s image response strategies (Kim, Avery & Lariscy, 2009). Assessing the most frequent and most effective strategies by organizations serves as a benchmark for the current state of image repair in crisis communication. The researchers used a quantitative content analysis, sampling 51 articles from databases of communication and business journals (Kim et al., 2009). The study found that the most frequently used image repair strategy was bolstering, followed by denial, corrective action and mortification. The authors of the articles evaluated the effectiveness of a crisis response strategy and found that the most effective strategy was full apology, followed by corrective action and bolstering (Kim et al., 2009). This study suggests that if mortification is the most effective strategy, yet bolstering is most frequently used, there are gaps between theory and practice, which press for further research to explain the discrepancy.

**Applying the Successes and Failures of Image Repair Discourse**

Although there are criticisms concerning Benoit’s theory of image repair discourse, it provides the most comprehensive foundation for assessing image repair strategy. In the literature available, there is a substantial trend that suggests an individual who simply apologizes in response to public disparagement will more successfully repair his image. Through a review of image repair tactics employed by Hugh Grant, Tonya Harding and Terrell Owens, and briefly by George W. Bush, George Allen and Gary Condit, it can be inferred that there are distinct lasting consequences relating to repair strategy and public perception.

**Tonya Harding**

Tonya Harding’s necessity for image repair followed the January 1994 attack on fellow figure skater Nancy Kerrigan (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994). In the days following, allegations began to surface linking Harding to the incident. The man directly responsible, Shawn Eckardt, was
Harding’s bodyguard, and Steve Gillooly, Harding’s ex-husband, was implicated as well. Both men identified Harding as a co-conspirator. Additional physical evidence emerged, which appeared to even further link Harding to the assault (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994).

Harding appeared on *Eye-to-Eye With Connie Chung* on February 10, 1994 and employed bolstering, denial, attack of accuser and defeasibility (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994). Repeatedly denying wrongdoing, Harding rejected the accusations of Eckardt and Gillooly, reiterated claims that she had not violated Olympic code of conduct, and continued to assert that she had no knowledge of the attack (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994). Her strategic use of denial was weakened when she was forced to admit that she had lied in the past. As with her use of bolstering, Harding had no one to corroborate her statements of denial (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994). During the Connie Chung interview, Harding attacked her accusers (Eckardt and Gillooly) and offered two examples of defeasibility to justify her inaction (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994). Attacking her accusers and claiming defeasibility may have been more effective if Harding had engaged in mortification as well. Even the smallest expression of remorse may have strengthened her attempt at image repair (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994).

Terrell Owens

Terrell Owens is one of professional football’s most talented, popular and outspoken athletes. In 2005, Owens sabotaged his own image during a contract dispute with the Philadelphia Eagles (Brazeal, 2008). Brazeal’s analysis of Owens’s image repair proposes a new example of ineffectual strategic planning. She suggests that if it were not for the damaging discourse of Owens’s agent Drew Rosenhaus, Owens would have been more successful in his image repair.
The Eagles deactivated Owens from play when he became belligerent with coaching staff and publically critical of teammates (Brazeal, 2008). Owens and Rosenhaus organized a press conference to try and convince “the coach, the Eagles organization, and the fans that he would mend his ways” (Brazeal, 2008, p.145). Owens read from a prepared statement, which employed the strategies of bolstering and mortification. He bolstered his image by highlighting his exceptional playing ability and he argued that his passion for the game led to his criticism of teammates. He emphasized his devotion to the Eagles by pointing out the difficulty of being deactivated (Brazeal, 2008). Owens apologized to fans, teammates, coaches and Eagles personnel. However, as Brazeal points out, Owens used vague language to avoid blame and made no effort to take specific corrective action.

Had Rosenhaus remained silent, Owens may have had a chance at image repair. Rosenhaus’s portion of the press conference was spent attacking Owens’s many accusers, including the Eagles organization and the media (Brazeal, 2008). Rosenhaus “aggressively promoted the image of Owens as a victim [and] confirmed that Owens did not accept responsibility for his actions or intend to change them” (p. 149). Any progress Owens had made with his fans or the Eagles organization was quickly forgotten. Owens was cut from the Eagles in March 2006 (Brazeal, 2008). While Owens’ discourse lacked elements of a sincere apology, corrective action or any attempt at humility, his image may have still been repaired with the strategies he did employ. His decision to rely on his agent to assist in the repair of his reputation backfired.

Hugh Grant

Hugh Grant’s image was threatened in July 1995 when he was found in his car with a 23-year-old prostitute named Devine Brown. Charged with lewd behavior, his mug shot printed in
The New York Times, and a new movie about to be released, Grant’s career was clearly in danger (Benoit, 1997a).

Instead of canceling his public appearances, Grant used them as springboards to repair his damaged image. Benoit (1997a) analyzed Grant’s five talk show appearances, and found Grant used four strategies—mortification, bolstering, denial and attacking the accuser. Grant’s main strategy was to use mortification. Grant admitted his offensive behavior and made no excuses for it. He repeatedly expressed concern for his girlfriend and his family, and he indicated he was willing to accept the consequences. Grant attempted to bolster his reputation by appearing on the talk shows. Benoit (1997a) evaluates Grant as maintaining a positive, modest demeanor, creating an impression of honesty and continually expressing concern for his loved ones. Grant also used humor to bolster his image. Individuals familiar with Grant’s wit were probably put at ease by his humor. Grant’s only instance of denial was against claims he frequented topless bars, and he attacked some of the British media for their treatment of his family (Benoit, 1997a).

Grant’s image repair strategy was highly efficacious. While the nature of the act probably influenced forgiveness, Grant’s acceptance of responsibility worked in his favor. He could have remained silent or minimized the situation with excuses, but he did not (Benoit, 1997a).

Politicians

Political figures constantly in the public eye will doubtlessly face a crisis situation at some point. There are substantial differences between politicians and athletes and other celebrities that affect discourse (Sheldon & Sallot, 2009). A politician is usually elected, therefore, reputations are much more valuable and admitting mistakes may be much more difficult (Sheldon & Sallot, 2009). Performance history may also play a role in influencing
audience perception. While the underlying commonality between George W. Bush, George Allen and Gary Condit is time spent in political office, necessities for image repair and public perception prior to their offenses differed greatly. As demonstrated in analyses (Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004; Benoit, 2006; Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004; Benoit & Henson, 2009) of the image repair discourse strategies of George W. Bush, George Allen and Gary Condit, mortification was completely absent or (in the case of George Allen) evoked too late and too minimally to have any positive effect. All three men were ineffectual at attempts at image repair, opting to rely primarily on denial, bolstering and shifting of blame despite research (Sheldon & Sallot, 2009) that suggests when “greater future costs are at risk” (p. 27) mortification and corrective action are the most successful strategies. Each of these strategies should serve as examples for future image repair discourse.

**Image Repair and Major League Baseball**

As acknowledged in the introduction, the objective of this capstone stems from the lack of significant scholarly analysis applying Benoit’s image repair discourse to professional baseball players and public perception. A review of past research was able to identify at least three prior studies involving professional baseball players, two which do not use image repair as a theoretical framework and one which focuses only on players named in the 2003 BALCO raid.

Denham’s (2004) study examines how in June 2002, *Sports Illustrated* built an agenda for mainstream press coverage after publishing its Ken Caminiti story. Denham conducted a content analysis of 231 newspaper articles, and found that in the week after the story was published, 94 percent of articles referred to the story (Denham, 2004). Through agenda-building theory, Denham argues that mainstream media is able to influence not only individuals, but also the policy-making process.
Von Burg and Johnson’s (2009) study argues that discourse involved in the steroids scandal is best understood through a “lens of nostalgia” (p. 351) for the game of baseball. When athletic success, such as Mark McGwire’s homerun record-breaking season, is called into question, “the pastoral image of baseball” becomes unsettled (p. 353). As a result, journalists who labeled McGwire “baseball’s hero” after his accomplishment were quick to later villainize him in order to preserve the purity of the sport. This could be important for understanding why people may (or may not) be quicker to forgive baseball players than other public figures.

Haigh (2008) conducted a content analysis of four newspapers and four magazines after several Major League Baseball players were called to testify before Congress following the 2003 BALCO raid. He briefly touches on the image repair strategies employed by Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire, Gary Sheffield, Rafael Palmeiro and Jason Giambi. Yet, the study focuses on media coverage- the tone of story, credibility of quotes and athlete depiction- not public perception of the athletes. Haigh’s results found that from September 2003 through March 2006 most newspaper articles covering the scandal were negative and the credibility of sources for these articles “lacked character” (Haigh, p. 12). Additionally, Haigh’s analysis found that only Giambi and Palmeiro publically apologized to their fans, but this use of mortification had no impact on the tone of the articles.

Considering the abundance of research applying Benoit’s image repair theory to public personas, it is only fitting an analysis be conducted on professional baseball players in crisis situations. The following study will look at specific uses of image repair and public polling to determine if prior research results are applicable to a specific segment of the population- professional baseball players accused of using performance-enhancing drugs.
**Methods**

In order to analyze the image repair strategies employed by the four players, a qualitative review was conducted of pivotal points, which were based on identified instances of Alex Rodriguez, Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire and Roger Clemens responding to accusations of performance enhancing drug use. These key moments included one-on-one interviews, news conferences, grand jury testimonials and statements. For this study, videos, quotes and transcripts were acquired from established, renowned websites. Documents that were reproduced from primary sources were fact checked for accuracy.

Public polling data, available from various national polling organizations, was then examined to determine which, if any, image repair strategies were most appreciated by survey respondents. With the exception of one polling question for Mark McGwire, poll results are based on a random sample of respondents drawn from a pool of national adults in telephone interviews. Due to the lack of available scientific polling for McGwire, a nonrandom polling question was substituted. In addition, with the exception of one question for Alex Rodriguez and one question for Roger Clemens, all polling questions asked a variation of “please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the player” (See Appendix for complete question wording and poll results). For Rodriguez, a 2007 question comparing him to another athlete was used, as favorability data was unavailable. For Clemens, a 2008 polling question about lying was used in substitution of favorability data.

The polling data used correlates time-wise with the content that was analyzed- that is, polling data was examined both before and after each pivotal response made by the players to accusations of drug use. This was done purposefully to determine how the strategies applied directly influenced public opinion.
The included sample of individuals represents the most prominent, acclaimed and infamous athletes involved in baseball’s steroid era. Each athlete played in Major League Baseball for over ten years, and all established themselves as being integral to baseball. Additionally, each athlete has figured strongly into baseball’s drug debate.
Analysis of Image Repair Strategies and Polling Data

Alex Rodriguez

Alex Rodriguez joined the majors in 1994. He spent his first seven seasons with the Seattle Mariners, then played three seasons with the Texas Rangers. In April 2010 he begins his seventh year with the New York Yankees (with eight years left on his contract). In his 16 years in Major League Baseball, he has been player-of-the-year three times (1996, 2002, 2007) and American League Most Valuable Player (MVP) three times (2003, 2005, 2007). He is a two-time Golden Glove winner (2002, 2003), 12-time all-star, four-time Hank Aaron Award winner, and a 10-time American League (AL) Silver Slugger. Rodriguez has appeared in and won one World Series (2009). He spent the first half of his career playing at shortstop until switching to third base when he joined the Yankees. He begins the 2010 season with 583 homeruns (8th on all-time list, tied with Mark McGwire), and a career batting average of .305. In 2009, the Yankees paid him $33 million and he stands to make $27 million playing in 2010. His endorsement deals have included contracts with Nike, Pepsi, and Guitar Hero¹.

Rodriguez sat down with Katie Couric three days after the release of the Mitchell Report in 2007. Although not named in the report, Rodriguez continually faced allegations, from both the media and public, of performance enhancing drug use.

December 17, 2007 60 Minutes Interview²

Katie Couric interviewed Rodriguez for 60 Minutes on Sunday December 17, 2007. The interview briefly touched on performance enhancing drug use in baseball, and Rodriguez relied on two main strategies- simple denial and bolstering.

**Simple denial.** When asked by Couric: “For the record, have you ever used steroids, human growth hormone or any other performance-enhancing substance?” Rodriguez replied: “No.” When asked by Couric if he had ever been tempted to use any of those things, he again said: “No.”

**Bolstering.** Rodriguez attempted to justify why he never felt tempted to abuse any substances: “I've never felt overmatched on the baseball field. I've always been a very strong, dominant position. And I felt that if I did my work as I've done since I was, you know, a rookie back in Seattle, I didn't have a problem competing at any level. So, no.”

But two years later, Rodriguez was forced to change his story. In response to a February 7, 2009 article on the *Sports Illustrated* website, which claimed he tested positive for steroids in 2003, as well as the release of Selena Roberts’ book, *A-Rod*, which claimed Rodriguez had in fact used anabolic steroids, Rodriguez sat down with ESPN’s Peter Gammons.

*February 9, 2009 Peter Gammons ESPN interview*\(^3\)

In this sit-down, which aired on Monday, February 9, 2009 during *SportsCenter*, Rodriguez admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs for a three-year period (2001-2003) during his time with the Texas Rangers. During his interview with Gammons, Rodriguez employed a wide variety of image repair strategies including defeasibility, attacking the accuser, shifting of blame, corrective action and mortification.

**Defeasibility.** Rodriguez says: “When I arrived in Texas in 2001, I felt an enormous amount of pressure. I felt like I had all the weight of the world on top of me, and I needed to perform, and perform at a high level every day. There was a lot of gray area, too. You know, back then you could walk in GNC and get four or five different products that today would probably trigger a positive test.”

“Again, it was such a loosey-goosey era. I'm guilty for a lot of things. I'm guilty for being negligent, naive, not asking all the right questions. And to be quite honest, I don't know exactly what substance I was guilty of using.” Gammons goes on to ask: “How long was it before you found out that what you were doing was actually illegal?” to which Rodriguez responds: “Again, at the time of that culture, there was no illegal or legal.”

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Mortification. Throughout the interview, Rodriguez employs mortification, asking at numerous times for forgiveness. For example, he says: “There's absolutely no excuse for what I did. I'm sorry. If I was a fan, a fan of mine, a fan of the Rangers, I would be very pissed off. And I can't take that back. But just realize that I'm sorry, and I want to do things to change.”

Attack Accuser. When asked by Gammons about being tested in 2006, Rodriguez goes on another tangent and discusses Selena Roberts: “I know this lady from Sports Illustrated, Selena Roberts, is trying to throw things out there that in high school I tried steroids. I mean, that's the biggest bunch of baloney I've ever heard in my life.

I mean, what makes me upset is that Sports Illustrated pays this lady, Selena Roberts, to stalk me. This lady has been thrown out of my apartment in New York City. This lady has five days ago just been thrown out of the University of Miami police for trespassing. And four days ago she tried to break into my house where my girls are up there sleeping, and got cited by the Miami Beach police. I have the paper here. This lady is coming out with all these allegations, all these lies because she's writing an article for Sports Illustrated and she's coming out with a book in May.”

Shifting the Blame. Rodriguez says: “You basically end up trusting the wrong people. You end up, you know, not being very careful about what you're ingesting.”

Corrective Action. Rodriguez says: “You know, I was born in Washington Heights [N.Y.]. I would love to really get into that community and do things that are real, that are going to make a difference. And I have an opportunity here to help out a lot of kids. And I have nine years and the rest of my career to devote myself to children in the future and really bring awareness.”

Ultimately, Rodriguez called and apologized to Roberts for the critical comments he made of her to Gammons. Rodriguez continued his attempt at image repair by holding a news conference eight days after his confession on ESPN.

February 17, 2009 news conference

Rodriguez held a press conference on Tuesday, February 17, 2009, from Yankees training camp in Florida. At 32 minutes long, Rodriguez read from a prepared statement and answered questions from the media. In this news conference, with Yankee teammates and staff

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in attendance, Rodriguez used mortification, shifting the blame, defeasibility and corrective action.

*Mortification.* “I [sat down with Peter Gammons] to accomplish two things: to tell the truth and apologize to my teammates and baseball fans everywhere.”

*Shifting the Blame/Defeasibility.* “My cousin started telling me about a substance that you could purchase over-the-counter in the DR … It was his understanding that it would give me a dramatic energy boost, and otherwise harmless. My cousin and I, one, more ignorant than the other, decided that it was a good idea to start taking it.”

*Corrective Action.* “Spring training represents a new start for me and the chance to win a championship, two opportunities I am excited about.”

An analysis was done based on available favorable/unfavorable polling data. In Figure 1 below (as in all the subsequent charts), the x-axis represents poll dates and sources. The y-axis represents respondent percentages.

*Figure 1. Alex Rodriguez (Favorability % vs. Date of Poll)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poll Source</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallup/USA Today</td>
<td>5/21/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallup/USA Today</td>
<td>2/13/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News/NY Times</td>
<td>2/24/09</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBC News/Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>3/6/09</td>
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In Figure 1, Rodriguez’s favorability preceding any public dialogue of performance-enhancing drug use was higher than after he denied use (as he did in late 2007) or admitted use and apologized (as he did in February 2009). While there is an absence of polling data available
immediately following the 2007 “denial” interview, his favorability declines dramatically from 2007 to 2009. Further, in 2009, he was perceived as more unfavorable after his news conference than after his one-on-one ESPN interview. Based on analysis, the chief strategy difference between the press conference and the one-on-one ESPN interview was the strong presence of Rodriguez’s attack on his accuser (Selena Roberts). Additionally, although polling data was conducted through three different media outlets, over the course of a two-year period the percentage of respondents who had either no opinion or didn’t know strongly increases.

**Barry Bonds**

Barry Bonds spent 22 years in MLB, first as a Pittsburgh Pirate from 1986-1992 and then as a San Francisco Giant from 1993-2007. His 762 career homeruns stand as the most by any baseball player in the history of the game. With a career batting average of .298, he had 14 all-star appearances, three player-of-the-year awards (1990, 2001, 2004), and was a seven-time National League (NL) MVP. He has eight Golden Gloves (outfield) and 12 Silver Sluggers (outfield). In his final season (2007) with the Giants, he made $15.5 million. He appeared in one World Series. His endorsement deals have included contracts with Charles Schwab, Fila, and Franklin Sports⁶.

Throughout his career, Bonds had been in the middle of the steroids argument. After the 2003 BALCO raid, in which he was named, numerous players were called to testify before Congress. Bonds was one of these men. While many points of his testimony were leaked in 2004, the specific details of what Bonds told Congress were not released until almost five years later.

December 4, 2003/Early 2008 Grand Jury testimony

In December 2003 Barry Bonds testified before a grand jury that was investigating steroid use in professional sports. In his testimony, which was not unsealed until early 2008, Bonds relied on two strategies—simple denial and shifting the blame.

*Shifting the blame.* “I mean, I didn't question anything when he [Trainer Greg Anderson] -- you know, if I'm at the ballpark or something -- you know, trainers come up to me and say: "Hey Barry, try this." I don't really question it, move on. You know?” “I would trust that he [Anderson] wouldn't do anything to hurt me.”

*Simple Denial.* Bonds was asked: “Have you ever yourself injected yourself with anything that Greg Anderson gave you?” To which he responded: “I'm not that talented, no.”

When asked: “He [Anderson] never gave you anything that you understood to be human growth hormone? Did he ever give you anything like that?” Bonds responded: “No.”

And when asked: “Do you know why your testosterone would have been -- according to this result -- higher than the level the normal range as indicated for males 29 to 49 years? Do you know why that would have been?” Bonds responded: “I don't understand this piece of paper. I've never seen it before, once again. So, I would not be able to answer that question because I don't understand how that works.”

December 2004

One year after Bonds testified, leaked grand jury testimony cited Bonds as acknowledging the use of both a ‘clear’ and ‘cream’ substance (both identified in the BALCO raid). Still he said he did not know they were steroids and that he had been told they were nutritional supplements, examples of shifting the blame and defeasibility. Bonds did not make any public comments after the leak, but his attorney attempted to attack his accuser, arguing that the leak was an attempt to discredit Bonds.

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July 2007

Bonds responded to Bob Costas’ HBO Costas Now television show, in which MLB pitcher Curt Schilling, chemist Patrick Arnold and Costas all suggested Bonds took performance enhancing drugs. What resulted was a heated and public battle between Bonds and Costas. Bonds defended himself against the accusations by attacking his accusers, specifically Costas.

*Attack the Accuser.* When asked about the Costas Now interview, Bonds said: “You mean that little midget man who absolutely knows jack s--- about baseball? Who never played the game? I saw it.”

And in a diary entry on barrybonds.com, Bonds wrote: “I take great offense to those statements, especially coming from someone who is supposed to have journalistic integrity and not make blanket reckless accusations.”

Costas responded to the attack, saying: “As anyone can plainly see, I’m 5-6½ and a strapping 150, and unlike some people, I came by all of it naturally.”

November 2007 Indictment

In November 2007 Barry Bonds was indicted on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice stemming from his 2003 grand jury testimony. As of April 2010, prosecutors are waiting for a set of appeals to be heard by the 9th Circuit Court in San Francisco. A decision will probably not come until September 2010 (Munson, 2009).

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Based on the available polling data, Bonds continues to remain more unfavorable than favorable, just as he continues to deny using performance-enhancing drugs. The two spikes in Bonds’ unfavorability came at two specific instances. The December 2004 percentage came on the tail of his testimony leak, in which he relied on shifting the blame and defeasibility. The February 2008 spike in unfavorability coincides with the release of the transcript of his grand jury testimony, which was far more in-depth than the leak. His unfavorability is at its lowest in July 2007, when he was feuding with Costas. It is also worth noting that Bonds’ favorability does not go above 30 percent at any point in almost four and a half years of data.

Mark McGwire

Mark McGwire played from 1986 until mid-1997 with the Oakland Athletics until he was traded to the St. Louis Cardinals in July 1997. He played the remainder of his career at St. Louis, retiring after the 2001 season. He has a career 583 homeruns (tied 8th all-time with Alex Rodriguez). McGwire was also a 12-time all-star, 1990 AL Golden Glove (first base) winner,
and three-time Silver Slugger recipient. He made $11 million in his final season. McGwire received broad acclaim in 1998 when he hit 70 homeruns, the most by one player in a single season. He has three World Series appearances and one win. His endorsement deals have included contracts with Nike and McDonalds.

After retiring in 2001, McGwire stayed primarily out of the public eye, that is, until he was asked to testify before Congress in 2005. McGwire received a multitude of negative criticism over the congressional interview, primarily because he refused to answer questions from the past.

March 17, 2005 Congressional hearing

Although McGwire primarily refused to talk about the past, he did read from a prepared statement. In the statement, he attacked former teammate (and admitted steroid user) Jose Canseco for alleging in his book that McGwire had used steroids.

*Attack the Accuser.* “… nor do I intend to dignify Mr. Canseco's book. It should be enough that you consider the source of the statements in the book and that many inconsistencies and contradictions have already been raised.”

Additionally, in response to questions about Conseco, McGwire again attacked his accuser-

*Attack the Accuser.* "It should be enough that you consider the source of the statements," he said.

In another attack on Canseco, who was also testifying in front of Congress, McGwire said prosecutors willing to rely on: “convicted criminals who would do or say anything to solve their own problems” could use his testimony.

12 http://www.cnn.com/2005/ALLPOLITICS/03/17/steroids.baseball/
McGwire remained in seclusion for almost five years until 2010 when he accepted a job as hitting coach with his old team, the St. Louis Cardinals. Stepping back into the public eye, McGwire felt compelled to acknowledge, after years of speculation, that he had in fact used performance-enhancing drugs.

January 2010 admission

McGwire’s 2010 admission of past performance-enhancing drug use was a highly calculated rollout. On January 11, 2010, McGwire first released a statement to the Associated Press (AP). His statement to the AP ensured overwhelming national coverage, both print and broadcast.

Mortification. “I used steroids during my playing career and I apologize.”

Minimization/Good Intentions “During the mid-’90s, I went on the DL [disabled list] seven times and missed 228 games over five years. I experienced a lot of injuries, including a ribcage strain, a torn left heel muscle, a stress fracture of the left heel, and a torn right heel muscle. It was definitely a miserable bunch of years and I told myself that steroids could help me recover faster. I thought they would help me heal and prevent injuries, too.”

McGwire then followed up with multiple interviews, the most publicized with Bob Costas for the MLB Network. In this interview, which aired on January 11, 2010, McGwire relied on minimization, good intentions, transcendence, mortification and bolstering.

Minimization. “The gyms you worked out back in the day. It was readily available. Guys at gyms talked about it. I believe it was the winter of ‘89 into ‘90. I was given a couple weeks worth. Tried it, never thought anything of it, just moved on from it.”

Good Intentions. “At the time, yeah, I was using steroids, thinking it was going to help me. It was brought to my attention it was going to help me heal faster and make my body feel back to normal. It doesn't feel good when you have teammates and people walking by saying, 'He's injured again.' I knew I was talented.”

14 http://mlb.mlb.com/media/video.jsp?content_id=7148421&topic_id=7898602
“I believe I was given this gift. The only reason I took steroids was for my health purposes. I did not take steroids to get any gain for any strength purposes.”

Reduce Offensiveness (Transcendence). “The wear and tear of 162 ballgames and the status of where I was at and the pressures that I had to perform and what I had to go through to get through all these injuries is a very very regrettable thing.”

Mortification. “I apologize to everybody in major-league baseball, my family, the Marrises, Bud Selig. Today was the hardest day of my life.”

“I totally regret everything I've done.”

Bolstering. “I did not take this for any strength purposes, at all. I look at my swing and look at how it evolved over time. My ball was getting so much backspin and driving. It was going out of the ballpark. That's from a lot of hard work. That's from many, many hours of hitting off the tee. I was the first one to the ballpark and the last one to leave.”

McGwire did however deny the claims Conseco made in his book, Juiced, about the two men shooting each other up with steroids.

Simple denial. “There's absolutely no truth to that whatsoever.”
“Absolutely not. I couldn't be more adamant about that.”

McGwire’s favorability was at an all-time high in 1998 following his home run record-breaking season (at 87 percent with only 3 percent of respondents viewing him as unfavorable).
After testifying before Congress in 2005, in which he primarily relied on attacking the accuser, his favorability declined, while his unfavorability increased. And in January 2010, after admitting steroid use and relying mainly on mortification and good intentions to repair his image, almost 80 percent of respondents believed his home run record should be erased from the record books.

**Roger Clemens**

Roger Clemens pitched 24 seasons for four different teams—Boston Red Sox (1984-1996), Toronto Blue Jays (1997-1998), New York Yankees (1999-2003, 2007) and Houston Astros (2004-2006). He made six World Series appearances, which includes two wins. Clemens was an 11-time all-star and seven-time Cy Young award winner. He was the 1986 player-of-the-year and two-time Triple Crown winner (1997, 1998). Clemens finished with a career record of 354 wins (9th best all time) and 184 losses. He is currently third on the all-time strikeouts list (4672) and has a career ERA of 3.12. In his final season (2007), he made $18 million. His endorsement deals have included contracts with Coca Cola, AutoNation and AT&T.

Clemens, one of 89 men named in the Mitchell Report, faced allegations from his former trainer Brian McNamee, which implicated him in the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

*January 6, 2008 60 Minutes Interview*  

At his home outside Houston, Texas, Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes* interviewed Roger Clemens. The interview was in response to Brian McNamee and the Mitchell Report allegations.

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/22398390/  
http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=3680216n
In the fifteen minute segment, Clemens relies on simple denial, attacking the accuser and bolstering -

*Simple Denial.* Wallace quotes from the Mitchell Report: “Clemens said that he was not able to inject himself and he asked for McNamee's help. McNamee injected Clemens approximately four times in the buttocks over a several week period, with needles that Clemens provided.” To which Clemens says: "Never happened. Never happened. And if I have these needles and these steroids and all these drugs, where did I get 'em? Where is the person out there gave 'em to me? Please, please come forward."

"It didn't happen. It didn't happen," Clemens insists. "It just didn't happen."

*Attack Accuser.* When asked why Brian McNamee would want to betray him, Clemens says: "I don't know. I'm so upset about it, how I treated this man and took care of him." Wallace asks: "Okay. Anything you want to tell him?". Clemens: "Yeah. I treated him fairly. I treated him as great as anybody else, I helped him out!"

Clemens: "If he's putting that stuff up in my body, if what he's saying which is totally false, if he's doing that to me, I should have a third ear coming out of my forehead. I should be pulling tractors with my teeth."

*Bolstering.* "Joe Torre and I were in the trainers' room and he basically shut the door and said, 'I don't need any damn heroes here. You didn't tell me how bad you're hurtin'. I notice you’re hurtin'. And I told Joe Torre that I'll be damned if 15 minutes before I'm gonna start a World Series game I'm gonna go out there and look my teammates in the eye and tell 'em I can't go. I said, 'As long as the other team doesn't know that I'm hurt, I can get people out throwin' 85 without using my leg. And get you six innings under my belt.' I'm gonna take this Toradol shot and hope it works. And mask some of this pain so I can get out there and do my job. That's the things I put my body through. And I'm not ashamed of that because I get paid a lotta money to go out and perform. And I appreciate that they put that kind of trust in me," he adds.

*February 13, 2008 Congressional Hearing*¹⁷ ¹⁸

Clemens was requested to testify before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform during its investigation into steroid use in baseball. This hearing came after testimony that Clemens’ former trainer, Brian McNamee, had injected Clemens with

¹⁸ http://nbcSports.msnbc.com/id/23119245/
performance-enhancing drugs approximately 16-21 times from 1998 to 2001. In his opening statement, Clemens used simple denial, attacking the accuser and bolstering.

*Simple Denial.* “I have never used steroids, human growth hormone, or any other type of illegal performance enhancing drugs. I think these types of drugs should play no role in athletics at any level, and I fully support Senator Mitchell's conclusions that steroids have no place in baseball. However, I take great issue with the report's allegation that I used these substances. Let me be clear again: I did not.”

*Bolstering.* “I have given speeches to young people all over the country about the dangers of taking shortcuts to reach your goals. Steroids are a dangerous shortcut. I have made no secret about my feelings on this subject, and I practice what I preach.”

*Attack the Accuser.* “There were times over the years in which I wondered about what kind of person he [Brain McNamee] was and what he was doing when he was not around me. I questioned McNamee about these things, and at the end of the day, I was willing to take him at his word and give him the benefit of the doubt.”

“McNamee was good at what he did -- helping me exercise, diet, and stay in shape…. I had no idea that this man would exploit the trust I gave him to try to save his own skin by making up lies that have devastated me and my family.”

**January 2009 Investigation**

Clemens was back in the news in January 2009 when it was confirmed that a grand jury was conducting an investigation into whether he committed perjury during the 2008 Congressional hearing (Fish, 2009). As of March 31, 2010, Clemens was not indicted on perjury charges and has continued to remain silent on the accusations he faces.
After his *60 Minutes* interview and Congressional testimony, in which he used denial, attacking the accuser and bolstering, 32 percent of respondents perceived Clemens as favorable, while 34 percent saw him as unfavorable. What is not illustrated in Figure 4 is that of those same respondents, 57 percent believed Clemens was lying, while 31 percent thought he was telling the truth when he denied using performance-enhancing drugs. The data from 2009, collected after the announcement that Clemens was being investigated for perjury, shows a decline in unfavorability from one year before.
Discussion and Interpretation

The main objective of this paper was to identify the chief image repair strategies used by baseball players in response to allegations of performance enhancing drug use to determine which image repair strategies most positively affected public perception of the players.

Based on the analysis, the most frequently used image repair strategies were simple denial, attacking the accuser and bolstering (with the exception of Bonds). Of Benoit’s list of fourteen strategies, only provocation, accident, differentiation and compensation were not utilized.

The prevalent use of denial and attacking the accuser is in strong contradiction to past research (Benoit & Drew, 1997; Sheldon & Sallot, 2009), which suggests mortification and corrective action are most successful. However, these suggestions prove not to be as cut and dry as previously thought. The most surprising finding of this paper is that the two men who used mortification, Rodriguez and McGwire, both declined in favorability immediately after apologizing for performance enhancing drug use. It remains to be seen how public perception of the men will change in coming years, but respondents initially held unfavorable views of them, despite their attempts at mortification. Bonds and Clemens, who have relied on denial and attacking the accuser in attempts at image repair, also declined in favorability, though this is more in line with conclusions of past research.

Explanations for the results of this study should be taken as unique to sports, specifically baseball. First, using drugs to enhance performance results at one’s job is not a common problem: politicians will not receive more votes if they use HGH. Second, baseball players face enormous pressure on such an individualized level, arguably more than any other major
professional sport. As a result, interpretations of the analyses in this paper must be made on an individual basis, and are not as generalizable as originally thought.

Alex Rodriguez

While the May 2007 polling question did not specifically ask about Rodriguez’s favorability, it asked respondents of their interest in witnessing him break Bonds’ home run record. A large majority of respondents, 73 percent, wanted Rodriguez to break the record. It can be inferred that, at the time, these same respondents held a favorable perception of Rodriguez.

Despite the lack of multiple data points, his favorability seems to be in free-fall between 2007 and 2009, suggesting that his attempt at image repair failed to produce any rebound in public perception. This is in sharp contrast to prior research, which suggests his image should see some repair after mortification.

A potential reason for the decline in favorability in 2009 between Rodriguez’s one-on-one interview and press conference may include his aggressive attack on Selena Roberts during the interview.

Barry Bonds

Because Bonds’ testimony was sealed (and not leaked until one year later) there was no polling data immediately available after he testified in 2003. However, as his comments became public, and eventually when his testimony was unsealed, his unfavorable public perception was at its highest. It seems, from the analysis, that respondents did not believe Bonds when he attempted to deny and shift the blame.
In addition, in over five years of polling data, his favorability does not once go over 30 percent. This seems to say that individuals have made up their minds about Bonds, and no amount of effort will be able to repair his image.

The lull in Bonds’ unfavorability came after his feud in 2007 with Bob Costas. From this, it may be assumed the public believed the three men (Costas, Schilling and Arnold) treated Bonds unfairly.

*Mark McGwire*

McGwire was motivated to admit wrongdoing because of the new position he accepted with the St. Louis Cardinals. Similarly to Rodriguez, the dramatic shift from favorability to unfavorability after he admitted performance-enhancing drug use is interesting because his confession relied mainly on mortification. While initial attempts at image repair were unsuccessful, within this new position he has an opportunity to further build positive public perception.

*Roger Clemens*

Clemens’ decline in unfavorability for 2008 to 2009 probably had less to do with what he said and more to do with what he did not say. It was after his *60 Minutes* interview and Congressional testimony in which he relied strongly on denial and attacking the accuser that his unfavorability was at its highest. When he stepped out of the spotlight, his unfavorability declined and his favorability slightly inclined. What is singular to Clemens is that it remains to be seen what will happen next. As a case builds against him, it will be interesting to see how he attempts to further repair his image.
Explanations for Unexpected Results

Public perception has less to do with image repair strategy and more to do with the individual and the offense. Prior research suggests mortification is the best strategy, yet polling data for Rodriguez and McGwire shows favorability actually decreased after mortification. Benoit’s argument in defense of his theory (i.e., that the entire purpose of image repair is to influence audience perception) must be reconsidered, at least within the context of professional baseball. As a result, a few things must be taken into account:

First, as baseball has long been considered “America’s pastime,” and as a result, baseball players are arguably held to higher standards than other athletes. As past research suggests, the “lens of nostalgia” (Von Burg & Johnson, 2009, p. 351) that surrounds baseball requires athletes to be held to higher esteem. Therefore, it can be argued that respondents will judge baseball players more harshly against other professional athletes because of preconceived expectations.

Second, the nature of the crisis often influences perception. While many scandals, such as infidelity or drunk driving, are unconscionable, they are not directly related to the actual game. The idea that performance-enhancing drug use skews the actual balance of baseball may strongly play into the considerations of respondent reaction.

Third, no one appreciates being lied to. The idea that Rodriguez and McGwire (and probably Bonds and Clemens) were dishonest before being truthful, does not sit well with most individuals. As a result, perceiving these athletes as favorable will not come as quickly as an athlete who immediately tells the truth, apologizes and asks for forgiveness.

Fourth, media portrayals of athletes will strongly influence public perception. Individuals often take cues from journalists, and research for this paper identified numerous biased articles on the men in question. As presented in Haigh’s (2008) content analysis, tone of
print coverage impacts depictions, and sources who employed mortification “were seen as more sociable and more competent” (p. 18). An individual with limited knowledge on the topic may determine his perception of an athlete based on media portrayals and not on specific image repair.

Limitations

Not all of the polling data used in this paper is based on random scientific samples and favorability data was cross-referenced across different sources. Additionally, two of the polling questions do not specifically ask about favorability, which forced assumptions that may not entirely be fact-based. Where possible, a supplemental analysis of polling data (See Appendix) verifies results. Because this study was reliant on existing polling data, only a minimal number of data points were available. Thus, certain fluctuations in public opinion not captured by the existing data points might have been missed. Additionally, with such a minimal number of data points, this study is unable to conclude with absolute certainty that public appearances by the players produced the shifts in the favorability/unfavorability. These shifts could have been due to other contextual factors (e.g., media coverage, other circumstances in the players’ lives and careers, or something that is more generally going on with the perception of baseball).

Limitations of this study also include unreliable coding of transcripts, videos, etc., which were only done by one person. For this reason, results may be inaccurate or incomplete.

Future Research

Future survey research would serve to demonstrate that public perceptions may be motivated more by preconceived inferences regarding an individual athlete than through image
repair strategies used. Or, as the old adage goes, “time heals old wounds,” do people, regarding Rodriguez and McGwire, just need more time to forgive and move on?
Conclusion

This paper found that public perception in relation to professional baseball players involved in performance-enhancing drug use is not wholly based on the image repair strategy employed. In actuality, there are many other external factors that will influence how an individual is perceived. Further research must be done to determine what shapes perception.
**References**


Appendix

Polling Data

Alex Rodriguez

Gallup/USA Today Poll- conducted 1,010 telephone interviews between May 4-May 6, 2007. Released May 21, 2007
Question- If Barry Bonds retires with the record for most career home runs, would you like to see Alex Rodriguez break that record in the future, or not?
   73% Yes, would
   18% No, would not
   9% No opinion

Gallup/USA Today Poll- conducted 1,023 telephone interviews on Feb 11, 2009. Released Feb 13, 2009
Question- Next, we’d like to get your overall opinion of some baseball players. As I read each name please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of that player-- or if you have never heard of him. How about… Alex Rodriguez?
   28% Favorable
   37% Unfavorable
   20% Never heard of
   16% No opinion

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll- conducted 1,007 telephone interviews between Feb 26-March 1, 2009.
Released March 6, 2009
Question- Now I’m going to read you the names of several public figures, and I’d like you to rate your feelings toward each one as either very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, or very negative. If you don’t know the name, please just say so… Alex Rodriguez
   4% Very Positive
   6% Somewhat Positive
   21% Neutral
   11% Somewhat Negative
   13% Very Negative
   45% Don’t know name/Not Sure

Released Feb 24, 2009
Question- Is your opinion of Alex Rodriguez favorable, not favorable, undecided, or haven’t you heard enough about Alex Rodriguez yet to have an opinion?
   17% Favorable
   41% Not favorable
   27% Undecided
Barry Bonds

Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll - conducted 1,002 telephone interviews between Dec 17-Dec 19, 2004.  
Released Dec 22, 2004
(Here are the names of some people who have been in the news this year (2004). Suppose you were Santa Claus and you were trying to decide who was 'naughty' and who was 'nice' this year. Would you put each of the following people on your 'naughty' list or on your 'nice' list?) How about...Barry Bonds?

  30% Nice
  48% Naughty
  22% No opinion

Released July 7, 2007
Question- Is your opinion of Barry Bonds favorable, not favorable, undecided, or haven’t you heard enough about Barry Bonds yet to have an opinion?

  18% Favorable
  27% Not favorable
  19% Undecided

Gallup/USA Today Poll - conducted 2,021 telephone interviews between Feb 21- Feb 24, 2008.  
Released Feb 27, 2008
Question- Next, we'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of these people-- or if you have never heard of them. How about… baseball player, Barry Bonds?

  25% Favorable
  47% Unfavorable
  10% Never heard of
  17% No opinion

Gallup/USA Today Poll - conducted 1,023 telephone interviews on Feb 11, 2009.  
Released Feb 13, 2009
(Next, we'd like to get your overall opinion of some baseball players. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of that player--or if you have never heard of him.) How about...Barry Bonds?
Gallup/USA Today Poll, Feb, 2009

  23% Favorable
  43% Unfavorable
  18% Never heard of
  17% No opinion
Mark McGwire

Gallup Poll- conducted 1,055 telephone interviews between Dec 28-Dec 29, 1998.  
Released Dec 31, 1998  
I'd like to get your overall opinion of some people who were in the news this year. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of this person, or if you have never heard of him or her... Baseball player, Mark McGwire  
87% Favorable  
3% Unfavorable  
10% No opinion

Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll- conducted 1,021 telephone interviews between June 22-June 25, 2000.  
Released June 29, 2000  
(We'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of this person--or if you have never heard of him. How about... Mark McGwire?  
72% Favorable  
6% Unfavorable  
10% Never heard of  
12% No opinion

Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll- conducted 909 telephone interviews between March 18- March 20, 2005.  
Released Mar 22, 2005  
Question- Next, we'd like to get your overall opinion on some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of these people-- or if you have never heard of them... Former baseball player, Mark McGwire  
53% Favorable  
25% Unfavorable  
5% Never heard of

Released January 2010  
Question- Should Mark McGwire’s home run record be wiped out?  
79% Yes  
18% No  
3% Not sure

Roger Clemens

February 2008  
Gallup/USA Today Poll- conducted 2,021 telephone interviews between Feb 21- Feb 24, 2008.
Released Feb 27, 2008
Question- Next, we’d like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of these people-- or if you have never heard of them.) How about… baseball player, Roger Clemens?
   32% Favorable
   34% Unfavorable
   14% Never heard of
   21% No opinion

February 2009
Gallup/USA Today Poll- conducted 1,023 telephone interviews on Feb 11, 2009.
Released Feb 13, 2009
Question- Next, we’d like to get your overall opinion of some baseball players. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of that player-- or if you have never heard of him.) How about… Roger Clemens?
   34% Favorable
   25% Unfavorable
   22% Never heard of
   19% No opinion

Supplemental Polling Data

Mark McGwire
From Boston Herald January 13, 2010, Total Votes: 1,070
How does Mark McGwire’s admission of past steroids use affect his Hall of Fame chances?
   74% - Too little, too late. He should have come clean long ago. Buy a ticket if you want into Cooperstown.
   4% - All is forgiven. Now that he’s finally talking about the past, he should be treated like any other candidate.
   22% - Jury’s still out. Until voters decide how to treat players from the Tainted Era, he should remain in limbo.

Roger Clemens
February 2008
Gallup/USA Today Poll- conducted 2,021 telephone interviews between Feb 21- Feb 24, 2008.
Released Feb 27, 2008
Question- As you may know, Roger Clemens testified before Congress that he never used steroids. Based on what you have heard or read, do you think Clemens was-- lying or telling the truth?
   57% Lying
   31% Telling the truth
   12% No opinion