



When Crises Change the Game: Establishing a Typology of Sports-Related Crises

Natalie Brown-Devlin¹  and Kenon A. Brown²

1. Assistant Professor, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA


2. Associate Professor, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA

ABSTRACT

In order to properly evaluate crises that occur in sports, scholars have previously called for a sports-specific crisis communication typology (Wilson et al., 2010). Two studies were conducted to develop the resulting typology. Study 1 utilized a questionnaire to obtain a comprehensive list of sports-related crises that were later grouped into 12 crisis types and three unique clusters through the use of qualitative content analysis. Study 2 utilized a questionnaire completed by 282 college students to determine the levels of crisis responsibility attributed to each cluster of crises. The resulting typology provides the necessary foundation for crisis communication research that uses sports as a context by evaluating the level of organizational blame that exists when a crisis occurs.

KEYWORDS: crisis communication, situational crisis communication theory, crisis typology, sports communication

In 1919, eight Chicago Black Sox baseball players were accused of accepting bribes from gamblers and intentionally losing the World Series. The scandal rocked the sporting world and landed on the front page of all major newspapers, marking the first time the mainstream media prioritized the coverage of a sports-related scandal. Today, sports scandals continue to receive vast amounts of public scrutiny. Controversy surrounding issues of drug use, domestic violence, sexual assault, racism, sexism, gambling, bribery, concussions, and more quite literally play out on the sports

CONTACTS Natalie Brown-Devlin  • E-mail: nataliebdevlin@utexas.edu • Assistant Professor, The University of Texas at Austin, 300 W. Dean Keeton (A1200), Austin, Texas 78712

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field while concurrently dominating media coverage. Because of the large emphasis culture places on sports (Raney, 2006), such scandals impact a vast audience as they dominate sports media headlines and online trending topic lists.

Sports scandals permeate popular culture, as perhaps no other form of entertainment connects as closely to a person's self-esteem as their sports team affiliation (Wann, 2006). When a crisis strikes a sports organization or player, it often negatively affects their key stakeholders, sports fans (N. A. Brown & Billings, 2013). Specifically, crises that impact sports organizations and athletes have the ability to cause harm by tarnishing a team or athlete's reputation or impairing their in-game performance. Additionally, the negative fallout from recent sports-related crises shows their impact has progressed beyond the field, including the potential to damage a university's entire organizational brand (e.g., Michigan State/Larry Nassar scandal; Penn State scandal; Baylor University scandal).

In order to address the impact of sports-related crises, this study seeks to test a primary component of Coombs's (1999b) situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) by examining the level of crisis responsibility attributed to a sports organization in crisis. Coombs and Holladay (2002) noted that organizations can improve the overall effectiveness of their crisis responses by evaluating the level of responsibility that stakeholders attribute to them during crises. By exploring the different types of crises that sports organizations encounter, this study seeks to answer the call of Wilson et al. (2010) to establish a typology of crises that impact sports organizations, which the authors noted would be valuable for sports crisis scholars by allowing them to more effectively define and examine sports-related crises.

Thus, this manuscript features two studies to measure the level of crisis responsibility attributed to each type of sports-related crisis. Following the methodology of Mitroff, Pauchant, and Shrivastava (1988), the first study surveyed sports communication researchers to form a comprehensive list of sports-related crises, which was then clustered through the use of conventional qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In the second study, researchers replicated the methodology utilized by Coombs and Holladay (2002) and administered a quantitative

survey of 282 college students to evaluate the level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization during each type of crisis. The survey also helped the researchers determine how each type of crisis impacts an organization's reputation and the amount of control stakeholders perceive an organization had over the situation.

Literature Review

Crisis Communication Typologies

Coombs (2012) defines a crisis as the “perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders related to health, safety, environment, and economic issues, and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generates negative outcomes” (p. 3). Communication scholars have long evaluated the reputational threat that results from organizational crises (Coombs, 2012; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Coombs and Holladay (2002) noted that an organization's reputation is a valuable asset among stakeholders; and, as such, reputational threats should be avoided. When crises do befall an organization, stakeholders typically re-evaluate the favorability of an organization's reputation, prompting organizations to strategically engage in reputation repair (Coombs & Holladay, 2005).

Scholarship has long investigated how to best respond to a plethora of crises. Benson (1988) suggested a need for a theoretical approach to address the following tenets: (1) synthesize existing crisis communication literature into a typology of crisis types that might alarm an organization; (2) synthesize reputation repair strategies that can be utilized during a crisis; and (3) establish a theoretical linkage between the type of crisis an organization faces and the corresponding repair strategy that should be selected. This call was later addressed by Coombs's (1999b) SCCT.

SCCT champions the importance of beginning a crisis response by first analyzing the type of crisis that threatens an organization in order to guide the effective selection of a reputation repair strategy (Coombs, 1999b). Coombs (2012) noted that to evaluate the reputational threat a certain crisis poses, three factors must be addressed: crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation. In order to address the first factor, Coombs and Holladay (2002) developed

a list of crisis types and the levels of crisis responsibility associated with each. Coombs and Holladay (2002) defined a crisis type as “the frame that publics use to interpret an event” (p. 167). Their list featured 10 crisis types that were placed into one of three different categories: victim crises (resulting in minimal crisis responsibility), accident crises (resulting in low crisis responsibility), and preventable crises (resulting in strong crisis responsibility). These crisis clusters are “premised on the logic of crisis portfolios: similar crises can be managed in similar fashions” (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 180). While Coombs and Holladay’s (2002) typology has been widely used in crisis scholarship, its methodology has not yet been replicated by other crisis scholars to create additional crisis typologies.

This concept is meant to simplify the process of selecting optimal response strategies that are associated with similar crises. By first acknowledging the type of crisis an organization faces, crisis managers can determine the amount of blame and crisis responsibility stakeholders attribute to the organization, itself (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). SCCT states that the more crisis responsibility the public attributes to an organization, the more accommodating an organization will need to be toward the victims when selecting reputation repair strategies (Coombs, 2012). Essentially, a proper evaluation of crisis type should improve the overall effectiveness of a crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). After analyzing the crisis type, a crisis manager should adjust his/her initial assessment of attribution, which depends upon other significant factors such as the organization’s crisis history and its prior relationship with stakeholders. Only then should a crisis manager select a proper reputation repair strategy.

Crisis Communication and Sports

The combination of media prominence of sports issues and an “increased activism of sports fans” led to a surge of sports crisis communication research (K. A. Brown et al., 2012, p. 155). The expansion of sports-centric programming channels such as ESPN and Fox Sports created print, broadcast, online, and mobile outlets dedicated to covering every aspect of sports, including sports

scandals. While the uncertainty of sports outcomes establishes a certain amount of inherent drama, a crisis striking the field of play can only heighten that effect. Such growth in exposure and interest can increase sports organizations' profitability. Thus, researchers wanted to determine the extent to which a sports team or athlete's reputation affected them financially by exploring the intersection of sports and crisis management (Brazeal, 2008). The resulting sports crisis communication research primarily examined sports crises through the use of image repair theory (IRT) and SCCT (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brazeal, 2008; N. A. Brown & Billings, 2013; K. A. Brown et al., 2012).

Rationale for Sports-Specific Crisis Typology

While previous sports crises have been evaluated using SCCT's reputation repair strategies (Brown & Billings, 2013; Richards et al., 2017; Williams & Olaniran, 2002), Brown et al. (2015) noted that SCCT's typology does not fully encompass sports-related crises and, as a result, scholars have been unable to fully test SCCT's theoretical linkages in the sports context. As such, the Coombs and Holladay (2002) typology has *not* been utilized by sports-related crisis research. Perhaps this is unsurprising given Björck's (2016) claim that "a single typology cannot capture the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of a crisis" (p. 1). Therefore, context-specific crisis typologies have been developed in areas such as tourism (Laws & Prideaux, 2008), restaurant management (Tse & Sin, 2006), governmental relations (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997), and, of course, corporate contexts (Coombs, 1999a).

Björck (2016) noted that crisis scholarship should formulate typologies that reflect important "cultural and contextual dimensions" (p. 1), such as the unique nature of sports and its vital cultural significance (Raney, 2006). In order to address this need for typologies in the sports context, Wilson et al. (2010) established an initial framework for classifying sports-related crises (i.e., "unintentional/intentional" and "internal/external"), and noted that future scholars should incorporate a quantitative component to this area of research. Yet, scholarly examinations of sports-specific crises must account for the fact that crises can result from

individual or organizational actions. As noted by Sato et al. (2015), Wilson et al.'s initial framework would need to be expanded upon to incorporate "the unique characteristics of athlete reputational challenges that distinguish them from other celebrity scandals" (p. 436), and how athlete actions that violate the "nature of sport" can also impact the larger organization's reputation. Additionally, Hughes and Shank (2005) sought to define characteristics of a sports scandal in order to aid sports scholars' understanding of the impact of such issues. However, they did not formulate a crisis typology with their results. Yet, the authors did call for future research that would help scholars quantitatively understand both the short- and long-term impacts of sports scandals on stakeholders' affiliations with sports organizations.

Previous scholarship displays a clear need for a crisis communication typology in the context of sports that can aid scholars who explore sports-related crises quantitatively, and are guided by theories such as SCCT (Wilson et al., 2010). While both corporations and sports teams are often thought of as organizations driven by profits, the largest threats to each of their reputations are too unique to be placed under one conceptual umbrella. Thus, in order to further extend the work of Wilson et al., the following research question is proffered:

RQ1: What types of crises do sports organizations and athletes commonly face?

In order to establish a sports crisis communication typology, a list of crisis types provides crisis managers with some guidance in their selection of response strategies. Wilson et al. (2010) advised future scholars to draw upon tenets of SCCT, namely attribution theory, when further developing sports-related crisis communication research. Coombs and Holladay (2002) noted that crisis managers must ascertain the level of crisis responsibility the public attributes to the offending organization in order to choose a response strategy with the proper level of accommodation toward the victims. SCCT (Coombs, 2012) includes a list of 10 crisis types divided into three clusters ranging from a minimal amount of crisis responsibility to a strong amount of crisis responsibility: victim crises, accident crises, and preventable crises (Coombs, 2012). In

order to establish a sports crisis communication typology, a list of sports crises must be categorized according to the level of crisis responsibility perceived by the public. Thus, the following research question is offered:

RQ2: Based on amount of responsibility attributed, what clusters will emerge from the list of crises?

One of the central tenets of SCCT posits that “perception of crisis responsibility is directly correlated [with] reputational damage,” meaning that as crisis responsibility increases, the possibility of damage to an organization’s reputation also increases (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 173). The correlation between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation is the key linkage in SCCT; therefore, this new typology must also demonstrate this linkage. Thus, the researchers posit the following hypothesis:

H1: A direct correlation will exist between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation for each of the clusters.

Study 1 Methods

Initial Qualitative Questionnaire

Following the methodology of Mitroff et al. (1988), researchers contacted an expert panel of sports communication scholars through member listservs of two scholarly organizations devoted to sports communication research: the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) Sports Communication Interest Group and the International Association of Communication and Sport (IACS). The researchers gathered responses and created a database of potential crises that plague athletes or teams, as this initial list would be synthesized into a typology of crises that ideally would be comprehensive with few potential outliers. The researchers provided members of each listserv with a link to an online survey that contained a single open-ended question requesting scholars to brainstorm a list of crises that have affected, or could have affected, sports teams and/or athletes in recent years. Scholars employed their own definition of what constituted a crisis when responding to the questionnaire

and were encouraged to list crises that affected *all* sports. The initial survey yielded responses from 23 researchers, and produced a list of 263 sports crises, which encompassed crises that have affected virtually every imaginable sport from badminton to baseball.

Qualitative Content Analysis and Formation of Crisis Types

The authors then utilized conventional qualitative content analysis as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), where the data gathered from the open-ended survey questions were then used to generate a list of crisis types. Qualitative content analysis was utilized since it is ideal for concept development (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Lindkvist, 1981). Conventional qualitative content analysis provides a method for researchers to “combine or organize this larger number of subcategories into a smaller number of categories” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279).

To follow the procedures as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the primary author examined the qualitative survey data guided by Coombs’s (2012) definition of a crisis, and made notes on initial impressions of the crises so that labels for codes emerged. In order to follow the method used in the development of previous crisis management typologies (Mitroff et al., 1988; Wilson et al., 2010), the author began grouping each response based on traditional crisis communication variables (internal/external crisis, individual/organizational, etc.), to develop groupings based on “how different codes are related and linked” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Each included crisis had to fit Coombs’s (2012) definition of a crisis, and accordingly present one of the following three threats: public safety, financial loss, or reputation loss.

Twelve crisis types resulted from this process. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) noted that, ideally, the numbers of clusters that result from conventional qualitative content analysis will be between 10 and 15. The project’s co-author examined the development of each crisis type to ensure there was agreement regarding the resulting list, as was recommended by Elo et al. (2014). In order to ensure face validity, the authors followed the recommendation by Elo et al. and presented the list during a conference panel comprised of sports scholars prior to publication in order to garner feedback. Scholars who attended the presentation agreed that a sport-specific

typology would greatly aid crisis communication scholars who conduct research in the sports context and did not recommend any changes to the presented typology. They did, however, recommend using it in additional studies to continue to validate it.

Study 1 Results

The first research question focused on synthesizing the crises provided during the initial survey into a crisis typology. Based on the list of crises, a typology of 12 crises was formed, divided tentatively into two categories for the sake of discussion: internal crises and external crises. Appendix A provides specific examples from the questionnaire results for each crisis type.

Internal crises directly affect the field of play. There are six of these crisis types. *Internal criminal transgressions* include actions that involve a sports figure that leads directly to an arrest, legal action, and/or conviction that happened during a competition. *Logistical and operational issues* involve issues that affect the viewing of a sports event that were not caused by a natural disaster. *Amateurism transgressions* consist of issues that affect the amateur status of a sports figure (notably college or Olympic-style competitors). *Competition transgressions* contain actions involving a sports figure or team that directly compromises the fair nature of competition. *Player/coach management issues* encompass issues surrounding a sports figure that would directly affect the team's active roster or coaching staff, such as illegal or unethical firings, especially those that result in legal action. *Misleading internal information* involves statements or other information provided by a sports figure related to internal operations that causes some controversy or compromises his/her position with the team.

External crises indirectly affect the field of play. There are also six of these crisis types. *External criminal transgressions* involve actions involving a sports figure that leads directly to an arrest, legal action, and/or conviction that did not happen during the course of competition. *Personal lifestyle transgressions* result from actions involving a sports figure that affect his/her personal life, but do not lead to an arrest and/or conviction (more morally wrong than criminally wrong). *Controversial statements/actions* consist of

statements or actions made by a sports figure that are inappropriate or that caused some controversy, but did not lead directly to an arrest and/or conviction, and did not address some aspect of the team. *“Act of God” events* are actions that affect a sports figure or a team that were outside of his/her/its control. *League/conference management issues* result from issues surrounding a team affiliation or league operations that do not directly affect the course of competition.

Study 2 Method

In order to establish a sports crisis communication typology, the list of sports crises generated in study 1 must be categorized according to the level of crisis responsibility perceived by sports audiences.

Quantitative Survey and Measurement of Crisis Responsibility

After the qualitative survey and qualitative content analysis, researchers conducted a full administration of the crisis typology to assign levels of crisis responsibility. The researchers used a method similar to Coombs and Holladay’s (2002) method of clustering organizational crises according to its level of responsibility, which ranged from minimal crisis responsibility to strong crisis responsibility. In order to measure the level of crisis responsibility associated with each of the crisis types synthesized from the pilot study, the researchers distributed an online survey hosted by Qualtrics to participants. The authors selected articles from ESPN.com reporting on a crisis that could be classified into one of each of the 12 resulting categories. The 12 articles used in the study included an average of 550 words, which lead to approximately 1.5 double-spaced pages. Appendix A provides definitions and examples of each crisis type. Participants were given as much time as needed to read the articles and answer the questions that followed. To prevent survey fatigue, participants were randomly assigned by the Qualtrics software to evaluate only two of the crisis types. Participants were asked to read each article and answer

items to help evaluate the level of crisis responsibility associated with each crisis.

Questionnaire

In order to measure the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to each of the 12 resulting crisis types, the researchers designed a 22-item questionnaire to measure organizational reputation, personal control, and crisis responsibility. A sample consisting of 282 college students from a large Southeastern university was utilized for this study. The sample was 25% male ($n = 72$) with ages ranging from 18 to 29 ($M = 20.4$, $SD = 1.3$). While Coombs and Holladay (2002) noted that students are not generally the primary audience for corporate crisis response, Enoch (2011) stated that people ages 18–24 classify themselves as avid sports fans. Therefore, college students constitute a large audience for crises involving sports organizations and/or athletes and are a valuable population to examine.

Organizational reputation. The researchers measured organizational reputation using five 7-point Likert scales adapted from Coombs and Holladay's (1996) Organizational Reputation Scale ($\alpha = 0.806$). This scale is an adaptation of McCroskey's (1966) scale used to measure credibility, and included items such as "The organization is basically DISHONEST," and "Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says." The items were combined to create a composite mean score. This scale was also utilized in a study that sampled the same population by K. A. Brown et al. (2015).

Personal control. Researchers measured personal control using four 7-point Likert scales adapted from McAuley et al.'s (1992) Causal Dimension Scale II ($\alpha = 0.745$). These items measured the degree to which the event is controllable by the organization, and included items such as "The cause of the crisis is something that was manageable by the organization," and "The cause of the crisis is something over which the organization had no power."

Crisis responsibility. Crisis responsibility was measured using Griffin et al.'s (1992) three 7-point Likert scales for measuring blame. Coombs and Holladay (2002) noted this scale is acceptable for measuring crisis responsibility of an organization. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72 and included items such as "Circumstances, not the organization are responsible for the crisis" and "The blame for the crisis lies with the organization." Based on previous research, Coombs and Holladay (2002) treated personal control and crisis responsibility as one common variable, and combined the two scales into one variable of "crisis responsibility." Based on a principal components factor analysis with a Varimax rotation, similar to Coombs and Holladay (2002), the items used in this study loaded under one factor as well, accounting for 47.52% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 3.327. The final scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79. Thus, the two scales were combined to form a crisis responsibility composite mean score.

Other questionnaire items. The instrument included two questions to check comprehension. After participants read each news article, items asked "What is the name of the organization accused in the preceding article?" and "What is the crisis presented in the preceding article?" Participants that offered incorrect responses to the two questions were excluded from the sample. The questionnaire yielded a total of 562 article responses, since each participant viewed two news articles. Yet, incorrect responses to knowledge questions eliminated 57 responses, bringing the total number of responses to 505. Each participant also answered a four-item fan identification scale adapted from Wann and Branscombe (1993) Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS). Finally, four items measured demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and educational status. SPSS version 20.0 was used to analyze all collected data.

Study 2 Results

The second research question focused on grouping the 12 crisis types into clusters. Similar to the method used by Coombs and

Holladay (2002), a hierarchical cluster analysis was used to create homogeneous clusters of crisis types based on similar characteristics. Since crisis responsibility is central to this typology, just like in SCCT, it was the variable used to create the crisis clusters. This method creates clusters so that the members of the same cluster have a stronger degree of association among themselves, but a weaker degree of association between themselves and members of a different cluster (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

TABLE 1 Crisis Typology and Mean Scores for Three-Cluster Solution

	Crisis Responsibility	Organizational Reputation
Environmental/ Individual Crisis	<i>M</i> = 3.10 (<i>SD</i> = 0.997)	<i>M</i> = 4.96 (<i>SD</i> = 1.075)
“Act of God” Event	<i>M</i> = 2.56 (<i>SD</i> = 1.034)	<i>M</i> = 5.23 (<i>SD</i> = 0.931)
Controversial Statement/ Action	<i>M</i> = 3.12 (<i>SD</i> = 1.010)	<i>M</i> = 5.17 (<i>SD</i> = 1.119)
Personal Lifestyle Transgression	<i>M</i> = 3.25 (<i>SD</i> = 1.096)	<i>M</i> = 5.02 (<i>SD</i> = 1.280)
External Criminal Transgression	<i>M</i> = 3.16 (<i>SD</i> = 0.947)	<i>M</i> = 4.64 (<i>SD</i> = 0.996)
Internal Criminal Transgression	<i>M</i> = 3.40 (<i>SD</i> = 0.714)	<i>M</i> = 4.80 (<i>SD</i> = 0.997)
Rules and Norms Violations	<i>M</i> = 3.71 (<i>SD</i> = 0.899)	<i>M</i> = 4.86 (<i>SD</i> = 1.036)
Fan Involvement Issue	<i>M</i> = 3.69 (<i>SD</i> = 0.914)	<i>M</i> = 4.90 (<i>SD</i> = 1.126)
Amateurism Transgression	<i>M</i> = 3.70 (<i>SD</i> = 1.028)	<i>M</i> = 4.75 (<i>SD</i> = 0.920)
Competition Transgression	<i>M</i> = 3.74 (<i>SD</i> = 0.768)	<i>M</i> = 4.85 (<i>SD</i> = 1.070)
Organizational Mismanagement	<i>M</i> = 4.22 (<i>SD</i> = 0.873)	<i>M</i> = 4.47 (<i>SD</i> = 0.931)
League/Conference Management Issue	<i>M</i> = 4.02 (<i>SD</i> = 0.875)	<i>M</i> = 4.76 (<i>SD</i> = 0.922)
Logistical/Operational Issue	<i>M</i> = 4.30 (<i>SD</i> = 0.908)	<i>M</i> = 4.43 (<i>SD</i> = 0.859)
Misleading Internal Information	<i>M</i> = 4.35 (<i>SD</i> = 0.911)	<i>M</i> = 4.38 (<i>SD</i> = 1.006)

Based on the agglomeration schedule using Ward's method, a more efficient method of measuring distance between clusters due to its analysis of variance approach (Burns & Burns, 2009), the optimal cluster grouping was a three-cluster solution. Much less distinguishing existed between cases for subsequent clustering after the three-cluster solution. A one-way ANOVA found the cluster solution was a good fit, based on the cluster's crisis responsibility and organizational reputation scores. Table 1 provides the mean scores for the three-cluster solution. Significant differences existed among the three clusters for crisis responsibility ($F(2, 502) = 68.785; p < 0.001$) and organizational reputation ($F(2, 502) = 11.409; p < 0.001$).

The first cluster that resulted from the study was the "environmental/individual crisis" cluster. This cluster included the following crisis types: act of God event, controversial statement/action, personal lifestyle transgression, external criminal transgression, and internal criminal transgression. The crises in this initial cluster result from the actions of a specific individual or from an environmental event that are perceived to be outside of the organization's realm of control. Thus, such crises result in the lowest level of organizational crisis responsibility.

"Rules and norms violations" was the second cluster that emerged from the study. This cluster included the following crisis types: fan involvement issues, amateurism transgressions, and competition transgressions. The crises in this cluster all involve a rule being broken by the organization and a moderate level of organizational crisis responsibility is attributed to these crises.

"Organizational mismanagement" was the final cluster that emerged from the study. This cluster included the following crisis types: league/conference management issue, logistical/operational issue, player/coach management issue, and misleading internal information. These crises all involve an issue that should be located within the organization's realm of control; yet, the organization's mismanagement of that issue led to the crisis. Therefore, the organization possesses a high level of crisis responsibility attributed to crises in this cluster.

Hypothesis 1 examined the relationship between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation—the key linkage in SCCT.

The hypothesis posited that there would be a significant correlation for each of the three clusters. Based on the analysis, there was a negative, significant correlation for each cluster, meaning that the theoretical association between responsibility and reputation was present (Cluster 1: $r(207) = -0.584$; $p < 0.001$; Cluster 2: $r(128) = -0.328$; $p < 0.001$; Cluster 3: $r(170) = -0.286$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Discussion

Theoretical Contribution

This study establishes an important intersection of sports scholarship and crisis communication that aids scholars who wish to empirically examine crises in the sports context. First, this research provided an important theoretical contribution for crisis communication scholarship, as it was the first to replicate the Coombs and Holladay (2002) study. The findings confirmed the relationship between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation and supplied evidence to the use of hierarchical cluster analysis to create and analyze crisis typologies. While there could be concerns that contextually-specific crisis typologies such as the one that resulted from this study could decrease the comparability of results from differing contexts, this study's results show that it is possible to both conceptualize the unique crises that impact organizations in a context-specific typology and have the principle theoretical association between responsibility and reputation persist. Thus, the theoretical linkage of SCCT that is rooted in attribution theory should still persist and protect primary theoretical applications across contexts. This notion should be further examined by future research.

Additionally, as the number of sports-related scandals grow in both number and notoriety, the need to examine them with a proper theoretical lens also grows. This study initiates an important first step toward the development of a sports-related crisis communication typology by providing a synthesized list of potential crises that impact sports organizations. Coombs (2012) noted that three factors must be considered before engaging in crisis response: crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation. While

this study classifies crises into clusters based on similarly attributed levels of organizational responsibility, it is important to note that levels of resulting organizational blame can be heightened by an organization's crisis history and prior reputation. For instance, Coombs and Holladay (2002) noted that these factors can create a Velcro effect, where a negative reputation can lead to increased reputational damage. Conversely, a positive reputation can help an organization outlast a crisis, which is called the halo effect.

Crisis Typology Clusters

The 12 crisis types that resulted from this study were classified into three distinct clusters: environmental/individual crisis, rules violation, and organizational mismanagement. First, the "environmental/individual crisis" cluster results from the actions of an individual associated with the organization or from an environmental event. This cluster's low level of crisis responsibility suggests that the audience does not hold the organization largely responsible for the actions of each individual. The low level of organizational blame associated with this cluster suggests that the organization's reputation does not face a strong threat from these crises. However, the reputational threat sometimes increases when assessing crisis history and prior reputation (Coombs, 2012). For example, despite the University of Florida's on-field successes during Head Coach Urban Meyer's tenure, a string of over 30 player arrests eventually forced some media members to question the direction and discipline record of the Florida football program (Hyde, 2010). Thus, this example shows how the acts of individual players harmed the organization's reputation by boosting this crisis to the next level of organizational responsibility.

The "rules and norms violation" cluster involves rules that sports organizations either violated or overlooked. This cluster results in a moderate level of crisis responsibility being attributed to the organization, as fans expect sports teams to protect the heralded integrity and fairness of the game (Pawlenka, 2005). The "rules and norms violation" cluster possesses a strong dependence upon the factors of crisis history and prior reputation when determining the resulting crisis responsibility level. Audiences might

forgive a first-time offender when rules are violated, as organizations can claim ignorance. However, if an organization is a repeat offender, the current crisis would present a much larger reputational threat (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). Repeat offenses are likely to increase the perceived crisis responsibility from the moderate level typically associated with this cluster to the strong level of crisis responsibility typically associated with the organizational mismanagement cluster.

The final cluster, “organizational mismanagement,” resulted in the highest amount of crisis responsibility being attributed to the sports organization. All crises classified into this cluster arose from the organization’s own mismanagement. The public is unforgiving of crises that are preventable through proper management techniques. Organizations that face crises in this cluster also face a strong reputational threat and must select crisis response strategies accordingly.

Crisis Communication and Fandom

It must be noted that the mean scores that resulted from this study suggest that while participants did rank the organizational mismanagement cluster more highly, the scores were still in the “neutral” range. This finding points to the importance of team identification in sports crisis communication research (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Given that this study utilized true crises that affected a variety of teams and athletes, participants were likely not highly identified with all the organizations/athletes involved in the offending actions. Thus, the crises did not reach a level of personal relevance to participants that would lead them to more highly ranked levels of crisis responsibility. Therefore, this typology should be used to further examine the variable of fandom in crisis communication by examining fans’ evaluations of crises that feature the specific athlete or sporting organization with which they identify. Additionally, fandom might explain why the results of this study showed that the degree of correlation decreased as the level of responsibility increased. Future research should assess whether this relationship is also observed among highly-identified fans. Also, this study analyzes the *organizational* crisis responsibility

attributed to each of the 12 crisis types. Yet, sports crises are not simply experienced on an organizational level, as some crises primarily result from and impact an individual's actions. The relationship between the crisis typology clusters and the individual/organizational nature of the crisis must be explored, especially in a sports setting.

Limitations

This study is certainly not without its limitations. First, the researchers utilized a convenience sample of college students for the full administration of the survey. While this study still provides valuable findings, a convenience sample cannot yield generalizable results. As such, future research should examine this typology by utilizing a more generalizable sample. Furthermore, sports literature has also noted that men and women consume and enjoy sports differently (Raney, 2006). Given that this study's sample skewed heavily female ($n = 75\%$), future studies should obtain samples that allow for the examination of whether men and women evaluate crises in the resulting typology differently. This is especially necessary given the findings of K. A. Brown et al. (2015) that found that "race was a more predominant factor in the image repair process than gender" (p. 499). As such, potential racial differences should also be examined. In addition, in study 1, participants were encouraged to use their own definition of what constituted a crisis. While the authors conducted the resulting qualitative content analysis guided by Coombs's (2012) definition, not providing participants with Coombs's definition in the questionnaire could present a potential limitation.

Conclusion

This study established a foundation for a sports-specific crisis typology, simplifying the lens through which crises will be evaluated. In doing so, the number of potential crises that could impact a sporting organization was reduced from an initial list of 263 to 12, greatly reducing the burden of the "pre-crisis" phase. This study also divided the 12 crisis types into three clusters (environmental/

individual crises; rules and norms violations; and organizational mismanagement), reflecting the amount of organizational crisis responsibility that would be associated with each event. This practice will aid both scholars and practitioners in evaluating prominent crises in sports.

ORCID

Natalie Brown-Devlin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8176-0647>

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