



Jon and Kate Plus 8: A case study of social media and image repair tactics

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ABSTRACT

Broadening the application of Benoit's image repair theory, this case study compares and contrasts crisis management strategies of Jon and Kate Gosselin during their 2009 highly publicized divorce. Specifically, it looks at how they presented themselves through personal statements, interviews and social media in two phases: the year before and the year after their divorce. Findings indicate the two used many image repair strategies and experienced varying levels of success. In the end, media outlets utilized traditional cultural narratives in their framing of both celebrities, depicting Kate as a distraught wife/single mother and Jon as an irresponsible and untrustworthy husband/father. Media later transitioned to a more positive portrayal of Jon and a negative portrayal of Kate. Exploring social media added a fresh dimension to previous image repair analyses. Findings indicate social media allow celebrities to publish information fast and efficiently without a gatekeeper; however, they must still follow traditional image repair strategies to succeed.

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1. Introduction

Jon and Kate Plus 8 enjoyed great success until the Gosselin's relationship became rocky during its fifth season. In April 2009, media reports alleged that Jon was having an affair with a third-grade teacher and Kate was having an affair with her bodyguard (Dehnart, 2009). Then on June 22, 2009, during the fifth and final season of the show, legal proceedings began to end their 10-year marriage. Undoubtedly, a divorce is a crisis for every family, but the Gosselin divorce was particularly problematic because Jon and Kate's relationship was the basis of their income, which stemmed from their TLC show. The divorce jeopardized their livelihood along with their image.

Using Benoit's (1995) image repair theory, this study compares and contrasts Jon and Kate's communication strategies via personal statements, interviews, social media and the resulting coverage in an entertainment magazine. It looks at whether their efforts were effective and to what extent cultural narratives and media frames of celebrity divorce and family matters played a role in media coverage of the issue. Previous studies in this area have focused on the nature of image repair strategies of athletes, politicians and celebrities (e.g., Benoit, 2006; Brewer, 2009; Kroon and Ekstrom's, 2007; Oles, 2010; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003).

While previous studies provide valuable insight into company image repair/crisis management and celebrity portrayals in the media, few have judged the effectiveness of social media. Conversely, previous studies relating to social media have focused on companies (Taylor & Kent, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2008). For example, Taylor and Kent (2010) found that blogs are a powerful social networking tool when responding to a crisis and the public holds a more positive perception of people and organizations that update their blog soon after a crisis than those who do not. Because of this exchange of information, Wright

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and Hinson (2008) noted, “the potential impact of blogs on public relations and corporate communications is phenomenal” (p. 4).

Benoit's Image Repair Theory provides a practical structure for analyzing the image repair strategies of Jon and Kate Gosselin. Most studies in this area use rhetorical criticism, or case studies, so generalizations are difficult to make (Benoit, 2006). To stay relevant, it is necessary for scholars to test theories in different circumstances. In this case, the Gosselin's use of traditional and social media during their divorce provided a good opportunity for exploration. Study findings may prove useful for future crisis and scandal management and provide insight into the best strategies for improving a scarred public image in the rapidly changing media environment.

2. Literature review

Generally, image is defined as the perceptions of a communicative entity shared by an audience (Benoit, 1995). A solidly constructed image must contain elements that will enhance an organization or individual's ability to project a perception of power, character, trust, leadership and name recognition (Benoit, 1995). Because of this relationship, image repair has become an important part of conflict management (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006). Benoit (1995) asserts that individuals and organizations tend to use one, or a combination, of five strategies when confronted with an embarrassing or damaging situation in order to repair a tarnished image. They are: (1) denial of the accusation, (2) evading responsibility of the act, (3) reducing the offensiveness of the accusation, (4) offering corrective actions, and (5) mortification or apologizing.

Studies looking at infidelity and image repair indicate mortification, or an apology, can be the most effective tactic after a crisis (e.g., Benoit, 2006; Grossberger, 1995; Kennedy, 2010; Rowland, 1988). For example, Hugh Grant, who paparazzi spotted with a prostitute in the 1990s, found that honesty is the best policy (Benoit, 1997; Grossberger, 1995). He apologized profusely on various talk shows and appeared genuinely sorry. In the end, the media could say little negatively about him, because he had already said it all. Eventually, his publics and his girlfriend forgave him. In contrast, Gary Hart, a politician who underwent intense public scrutiny after journalists photographed him and a young woman on a yacht nicknamed “Monkey Business,” failed to address the scandal truthfully. Rowland (1988) asserts that, “Hart concocted unbelievable stories and refused to answer questions and consequently undercut his credibility” (p. 8). Hart's decision to deny certain allegations that he had spent the night with Donna Rice coupled with his refusal to answer whether he had committed adultery hurt his case. The media framed him as untruthful, an assumption that destroyed his political career.

However, an apology is only effective if it appears legitimate and is relevant to the audience. For instance, Kennedy (2010) found that Kobe Bryant's quick admission of adultery and proclamation of legal innocence was more believable than Barry Bonds' denial of an obvious truth. She concluded innocent celebrities should quickly defend themselves. On the other hand, if he or she is guilty and there is really no doubt in the public's mind, it is better just to come out and say it than to try to deny it to those who do not believe the story. Kennedy also stressed the importance of keeping a low profile.

The manner in which the media framed Jon and Kate's divorce inevitably influenced public perception of their story. Therefore, an awareness of prominent celebrity divorce narratives or frames the media might draw upon is important. For example, Brewer (2009) examined 34 articles on the divorce of Paul McCartney and Heather Mills. The study highlighted several topics discussed by magazines that are applicable in coverage of the Gosselin case: the duty of divorcing parents to put their children's needs first, financial matters as a cause of disagreement, the inappropriateness of apparent self-seeking behavior and the different “camps” involved as voices of warning, justification or condemnation. The author concluded that attitudes on divorce vary, and people make judgments not only about divorce itself, but also about the ways a couple negotiates difficulties.

Similarly, Sandfield (2006) found an attitude among participants that placed significant blame for divorce on the couple involved—particularly if individuals prioritized personal motivations over goals of their children. Thus, one would expect a negative attitude in the media toward celebrities engaged in divorce if they appear to act selfish. Gender is also relevant, according to Kroon and Ekstrom (2007), who found that media frame harsh women negatively. The two also concluded women are more multi-dimensional than men and crises involving women tend to take on a more soap-opera-like tone.

3. Methodology

The interpretive analysis approach often outlines culture as a narrative or story-telling process in which particular “texts” or “cultural artifacts” consciously or unconsciously links themselves to larger stories in the society. In this study, researchers conducted a textual analysis of collected media articles. In order to compare the strategies of Jon and Kate before and after their divorce, this study is divided into two phases; 2009, the year of divorce proceedings, and 2010, the year after their divorce.

The researcher selected eight issues of *People* that included photos of at least one of them prominently on the cover. *People* magazine is of interest because it is one of the leading weekly publications focusing on celebrities. Therefore, it may be considered an opinion leader on issues relating to celebrities such as Jon and Kate who granted many interviews to the magazine many times. In addition, they were on several covers, and their statements often ran unaltered in the publication.

To analyze their social media presence, the study examined Kate's 2010 blog entries and Jon's 2009 and 2010 Twitter posts and five statements released by Kate, Jon and The Learning Channel (TLC) during their divorce proceedings. Each media

piece was examined for recurring themes and frames. This allowed for a sense of how the two handled their personal image repair during their divorce and the year following it.

4. Findings and discussion

The Gosselin family made its first appearance on national television in September 2005 when the Discovery Channel featured two one-hour specials on the family. The specials were such a hit, the Discovery Network created a show on one of its channels, TLC. *Jon and Kate Plus 8* debuted on April 2007. For 2 years, the show ran smoothly and the reality TV family became popular (Dehnart, 2009). At one point, the show was TLC's highest-rated program (TVguide.com). However, this success came to a halt in April 2009, when allegations of Jon's infidelity surfaced. The divorce and gossip surrounding it presented an immediate crisis for the couple whose show revolved around their family life. To repair negative perceptions and to remain marketable, Jon and Kate engaged in various levels of image repair.

4.1. Phase one: Kate's 2009 image repair strategies

In phase one of the divorce, it appears Kate primarily used *evasion of responsibility*, *attack on accuser* and *reducing offensiveness of the act* in her image repair tactics (Table 1). One can attempt to *evade responsibility* for an act by stating another person provoked you. The statement Kate issued on the day she filed for divorce illustrates this strategy (People.com, June 23, 2009):

Over the course of this weekend, Jon's activities have left me no choice but to file legal procedures in order to protect myself and our children. While there are reasons why it was appropriate and necessary for me to initiate this proceeding, I do not wish to discuss those reasons at this time, in the hope that all issues will be resolved amicably between Jon and myself. As always, my first priority remains our children.

Kate *evaded responsibility* by claiming her decision to divorce Jon was a reasonable response to his actions. She stated that although there were reasons it was appropriate and necessary for her to initiate the divorce, she did not want to discuss them. Her statements implied that Jon's actions were so horrible, she had no choice but to divorce him. Kate also used the *attack-accuser* strategy. For example, in the July 6, 2009, cover story titled "We Might Split Up," Kate discussed her sadness and anger over the split. In another article titled "Kate Strikes Back!" she discussed her plans for the future, her mortification about Jon's affair with Hailey, and feeling as if she was divorcing a 15-year-old instead of Jon. When reporters asked her about his change in behavior, she said, "Aliens have taken him away."

Kate's statement above also provides evidence she tried to *reduce the offensiveness* of the divorce by emphasizing that their children were her primary concern. She stated, "As always, my first priority remains our children," which alludes to the idea that she wants what is best for them and at that moment, it did not include their father. On December 18, 2010, after the divorce was final, Kate released the following statement in *People* magazine (Silverman, 2009):

I am very relieved that our divorce has been finalized, and I look forward to the New Year, focusing on the children. On behalf of myself and my legal team, I want to express my deep appreciation to the judge and his staff, as well as to the arbitrator, for resolving the case. This has been a challenging transition for all of us, but I am confident that we will move ahead with the important task of restructuring our lives.

Kate discussed restructuring her family life, which indicated she was proactive and working toward getting her children's lives back on track. By stating that the divorce was a challenging transition, she let people know that, although she is a celebrity, she experiences pain like any other divorcee. These tactics likely appealed to her key publics—women, loyal viewers, TLC advertisers, children's rights advocates, and people who became interested in the show because of the publicity surrounding the divorce.

Kate appeared on three *People* magazine covers in 2009, compared to Jon who appeared on one. Cover story titles reflected her image repair strategies: "We Might Split Up," "It Feels Like I Failed," and "Kate Strikes Back."

In keeping with her solemn façade, Kate appeared conservative and motherly in cover photos, wearing very little makeup and a short, cropped hairstyle (Illustration 1). In the first two covers, she looked somber. In the third one, she appeared happy, perhaps to illustrate that her mourning period following the divorce was over.

In interviews, she consistently brought up factors such as failure, loneliness, grief and anger, feelings most women who have gone through a divorce can understand. Other articles highlighted her ambitions to support her children, including a dispute over Jon allegedly removing \$200,000 from their joint bank account and the idea that she would not be able to

Table 1

Prominent themes for Kate Gosselin in 2009 issues of *People* magazine.

| |
|--|
| Kate feels like a failure |
| Kate lost the love of her life |
| Kate's ambitions to become a reality star over taking care of her children |
| Child labor issues |
| Kate believes she supports her children by working hard |
| Kate files for child and spousal support |



Illustration 1. *People* Magazine covers of Kate Gosselin in 2009.

support their children without an income from the TLC show. Following an article that discussed Jon suing Kate for primary custody, she said as a single mother, she would do everything necessary to provide for her children (Oh, 2010).

In 2009, the frames *People* magazine featured most frequently in its coverage were “sympathy” for Kate and “inappropriate behavior” by Jon, which illustrate Kate’s effective use of image repair strategies. Most articles framed her positively as she persistently reiterated concern for her children. In the end, the reality television star positioned herself as a distraught single mother struggling with her ex-husband’s irresponsible behavior. Subsequently, she came across as vulnerable, which may have helped people forget her previous portrayals as harsh and domineering, as discussed by Kroon and Ekstrom (2007) in the review of the literature.

4.2. Phase two: Kate’s image repair in 2010

A grid of Kate’s actions indicates she changed strategies in phase two (Table 2). In 2010, Kate graced three *People* magazine covers alone and one with her children. Her attire, hairstyle and facial expressions changed drastically in the year. Now wearing much longer hair, she smiled happily in every photo. During this phase, she often appeared more as a sex object than as a mother—even posing in a bikini for one cover. Articles focused on Kate’s ambitious work habits and the idea that she was not the dedicated mother she claimed. For example, she appeared on multiple talk shows and often went out of town to promote her new book.

Her stance on relationships was perhaps the most significant change in 2010. In a September 2009 article, she said there was not going to be romance anytime soon for her. “I could be alone for the rest of my life. Let’s be honest”

Table 2
Kate’s image repair strategies.

| Strategy/key characteristics | Phase one: 2009 | Phase two: 2010 |
|---|---|---|
| Denial | X | X |
| Simple denial: did not perform act | | |
| Shift the blame: act performed by another | | |
| Evasion of Responsibility | Jon left me no choice but to divorce him because of his actions | X |
| Provocation: responded to act of another | | |
| Defeasibility: lack of information or ability | | |
| Accident: act was a mishap | | |
| Good intentions: meant well in act | | |
| Reducing Offensiveness of Event | My children are my primary concern | I am a single mother and I will do what it takes to support my family |
| Bolstering: stress good traits | | |
| Minimization: act not serious | | |
| Differentiation: act less offensive | | |
| Transcendence: more important considerations | | |
| Attack accuser: reduce credibility of accuser | Jon left me no choice but to divorce him because of his actions | X |
| Compensation: reimburse victim | I plan to keep my family together | X |
| Corrective Action: Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem | X | X |
| Mortification: Apologize for Act | | |

Benoit (1997).



Illustration 2. *People* Magazine covers of Kate Gosselin in 2010.

(Coyne, 2009, p. 62). Conversely, in the September 27, 2010, issue that featured her in a bikini, she said she hoped Mr. Right was paying attention (Coyne, 2010a,b, p. 76).

In addition, the frames used in her coverage changed: gone were the sympathetic stories about the divorce and the poor, single mother of eight, which were prominent in 2009. Instead, in 2010, *People* magazine began to include an “inappropriate self seeking behavior” frame for Kate who appeared to have recovered rapidly from the sadness she projected the previous year. Referring back to Sandfield (2006), this is not a flattering frame for divorcees. To combat these negative portrayals, once again, Kate used the *reducing offensiveness* of an act strategy to handle negative framing of her parenting skills. For instance, in an April 10 article titled “Red Hot Mama,” she stated that she had a dance floor installed in the basement of her home to help her juggle her career and family. The article included this quotation “My kids will always know where to find me. When the floor was installed, we raced downstairs, got the trucks and cars out and had a blast pushing them to each other across the big floor. We also dance together every night before bedtime” (Coyne, 2010a,b, p. 7). Similarly, in a March 23, 2010, cover story titled “Why Can’t a Mom Have Fun?” (Illustration 2) she insisted she could balance fame and family. “You say I’m a bad mom, it destroys me” (Coyne, 2010a,b, p. 72). The January 18, 2010, issue titled “I’m Starting Over,” included an exclusive interview in which Kate opened up about her kids’ struggles, dealing with Jon’s drama and making room for romance (Table 3).

Overall, Kate projected a more optimistic and glamorous persona. This tactic did little to improve her image. Kate waited until 2010 to use social media to tell her side of the story. In March 2010, she announced her blog, “*Kate’s Take*,” on the official TLC Website (<http://blogs.discovery.com/kate/page/4/>). Her first post stated although she was hard at work taking care of her children, traveling and working and caring for her home, she decided to add one more thing to her list: a weekly blog. “I hope that my blog to you – moms, viewers and supporters everywhere – will continue to encourage you to hang in there and do your best with what life hands you!”

In her posts, Kate *reduced the offensiveness* of her actions by appearing down-to-earth and placing great emphasis on her family. Perhaps targeting mothers, she discussed mundane topics such as grocery shopping, chores, breakfast ideas and her expectations. “I’m finding it extremely exciting to watch my kids turning into responsible people. . . who I fervently hope will turn into responsible adults who contribute great things to society!” She also addressed sharing custody of her children. For example, on May 5, she discussed the disappointment she felt not being able to see her youngest child pull her tooth. “It’s yet another reminder that there WILL be moments I have to miss in the lives of my babies!”

The posts painted a picture of Kate as a real person. By including photos and frequent updates, her blog highlighted quality time spent in the role of a mother. However, it might have been too little, too little. The use of social media in phase one would have helped dispel rumors about her working too much and not spending enough time with her children. If she had documented time spent with her children sooner, her attempt to appear motherly would have been more convincing in phase two when she began to project a more youthful, fun image. In the end, Kate may have lost a portion of her fan base because she did not establish herself as a good mother before she unveiled her new sexier persona.

Table 3

Prominent themes about Kate Gosselin in 2010 issues of *People* magazine.

| |
|---|
| Kate’s new looks |
| Kate’s success since divorce |
| Kate back on television casted on <i>Dancing with the Stars</i> |
| Kate’s new body and diet |
| Kate’s new book discussing her year of turmoil |
| Kate’s new hair |



Illustration 3. *People* Magazine cover of Jon Gosselin in 2009.

4.3. Phase one: Jon's 2009 image repair strategies

Jon used a range of image repair strategies. In phase one, the primary tactic used was *evasion of responsibility*. Upon the announcement of the divorce, Jon released this statement (Silverman, 2009):

This afternoon, Kate filed for divorce. Our kids are still my number one priority. I love them and want to make sure they stay happy, healthy and safe. My job is being the best, most supportive and loving father that I can be to my kids, and not being married to Kate does not change that. This will be a difficult transition for all of us, but Kate and I will work out a schedule that enables our kids to have plenty of quality time with both of us at home in Pennsylvania. In terms of my marriage, it's no secret that the past 6 months or so have been very difficult for Kate and me. We are no different than other couples and parents who are facing a crossroads in their marriage. I am of course deeply saddened that we are divorcing.

By noting that he was deeply saddened that they were divorcing, Jon made it appear that it was not his choice. He asserted that his family is no different from other families, which implies that he was just a victim of societal trends. He also noted that his children were his No. 1 priority, which is a positive move to gain support from members of his key publics. However, while these statements were positive, his actions were otherwise. Almost immediately after announcing the pending divorce, paparazzi photographed him at several parties. He did not immediately disassociate himself from dating or appearing on vacations, which generated negative reports. This relates to previous findings by Brewer (2009) and Sandfield (2006). His actions and the media response demonstrated that being truthful to one's publics is essential to executing a successful crisis plan. While some celebrities get away with bad behavior in certain circumstances, Jon's celebrity status stemmed from his role as a father of eight young children. Therefore, media reports of an extra-marital affair did not help improve his reputation.

Once again, if the accuser's credibility is damaged, the accused's image might be somewhat repaired (Benoit, 1997). Jon used this strategy to gain sympathy and understanding for his new lifestyle. For example, he placed blame for his actions on Kate, referring to episodes in which she badgered him. In an exclusive interview with JuJu Chang on ABC's *Primetime Live*, Gosselin explained he was more assertive after escaping Kate's control. He issued this statement on the same episode (Chang, 2009):

I was verbally abused. I was beaten down. I was, she separated me from my family, my mom and my brothers. They say to me, "It's so good to have the real Jon back. It's so good to have the warm, loving, kind, caring person that we knew you when you were, before you got married."

In contrast to the many cover articles on Kate, *People* magazine only devoted one cover to Jon by himself in 2009 (Illustration 3). In the cover story titled "Enough is Enough," he opened up about his marriage to Kate and the crisis created by the pending divorce and his portrayals as a cheater. The article discussed the circumstances surrounding the rumors of his affair. He admitted to marital problems, "Kate's career is taking off and I'm a bit lost. This struggle has definitely put some tension in our marriage" (Hamm, 2009, p. 74).

Jon incorporated *denial* into his image management campaign by always maintaining that he never had an extramarital affair with Hailey Glassman (Table 4). Jon was not successful in transferring this frame to the media. For example, stories focused heavily on a string of women he dated almost immediately after the divorce announcement (Table 5). Paparazzi snapped him posing poolside with bikini-clad women in Las Vegas and at several bars and party spots. *People* magazine also

Table 4

Jon's image repair strategies.

| Strategy/key characteristics | Phase one | Phase two |
|--|---|--|
| Denial Simple denial: did not perform act Shift the blame: act performed by another | I did not have an affair | I did not have an affair |
| Evasion of Responsibility Provocation: responded to act of another Defeasibility: lack of information or ability Accident: act was a mishap Good intentions: meant well in act Reducing Offensiveness of Event Bolstering: stress good traits | It is all Kate's fault. She filed for divorce | X |
| Minimization: act not serious Differentiation: act less offensive Transcendence: more important considerations | I went out one night to blow off steam, but I did not have an affair. | I plan to spend more time with my children. |
| Attack accuser: reduce credibility of accuser Compensation: reimburse victim Corrective Action: Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem Mortification: Apologize for Act | She badgered and bullied me I will go out less X | Kate of works too hard and is spending little time with our children I will Tweet more about his children I am sorry for earlier actions and the grief they caused Kate and his children |

Benoit (1997).

featured Jon on their “Top Cheater’s Poll for 2009” and in an article titled “The Cheating Poll: Who is this Year’s Worst?” alongside David Letterman, John Edwards, Mark Sanford and Tiger Woods (Berman, 2009).

To make up for his lack of coverage in mainstream media, he cultivated a large social media following. In 2010, he had more than 79,000 followers on Twitter. Kate, on the other hand, deleted her Twitter page as soon as the marriage drama leaked; therefore, she had no presence on Twitter. Jon frequently used the social network to discuss his feelings about Kate and their children. For example, when Kate said, “Whatever happened, it happened so quickly. . . something had to give,” of their 10-year marriage, Jon tweeted “She claims she ‘didn’t remember’ who called it quits. Hey at least she said ‘didn’t remember’ instead of lying [sic]” (The Insider.com, November 2, 2009). Jon also attacked TLC, which many people blamed for their divorce. Jon posted a homemade sign on the front gate of their Pennsylvania home that read, “Notice: No film crew or production staff from TLC is permitted on this property under penalty [sic] of trespass.” –Jonathon Gosselin (People.com, October 1, 2009).

Jon indicated that TLC was somehow at fault in the break up of his family. He tried to build on the negative portrayal of other networks that have had reality television series featuring couples who have subsequently separated. However, his plan backfired as the media focused on the misspelled word, “penalty,” instead of his efforts to protect himself from a media giant, TLC (Illustration 4). In response, TLC released this statement (People.com, October 1, 2009):

We are aware of Jon Gosselin’s recent statements, and remain deeply disappointed at his continued erratic behavior. He and the family were shooting as recently as last Friday, without incident, and his latest comments are grossly inaccurate, without merit and are clearly opportunistic. Despite Jon Gosselin’s repeated self destructive and unprofessional actions, he remains under an exclusive contract with TLC. Direct filming of the children has been currently suspended, pending further conversations between both parents.

Bolstering emphasizes positive traits of the accused in an effort to minimize negative feelings (Benoit, 1997). After this statement and the collective negative press, Jon’s Tweets focused on his activities with the couple’s children. In September 2009, while the divorce was still pending, Jon changed his image on social media to appear more family-oriented. On August 30, he said, “I have decided to tweet about my life. Kids are great and I am fine. Thank god last year is over. Constant reminders. Oh well. Who cares?” In a September 5 post, he said “Home!!!! The kids loved the vegas treats. Definitely worth it, missed them!” After an October 13, 2009 tweet about going to court, Jon did not post again until March of 2010. On March 4, 2010, he posted “Congrats to Kate for joining new season of DWTS. I am thrilled for her. She has my support and vote.”

Jon’s image repair strategies perhaps garnered some sympathy for him because viewers remembered episodes in which Kate was domineering and condescending. However, his efforts might have been more successful if he had apologized immediately (Benoit, 1995).

Table 5Prominent themes for Jon Gosselin in 2009 issues of *People* magazine.

| |
|---|
| Jon Gosselin’s new bachelor antics |
| Jon Gosselin battles with TLC network |
| Jon Gosselin is out of work |
| Jon Gosselin’s new girlfriend and partying |
| Jon Gosselin is seeking primary custody of the children, claiming Kate does not spend enough time with them |



Illustration 4. Jon's note to TLC. Credit: INFphoto.com.

4.4. Phase two: Jon's 2010 image repair strategies

In phase two, Jon used different strategies in response to media reports that ranged from his efforts to clean up his act to how he was going to support himself and his family without a job. Denying the alleged affair became less important as the divorce was already final. However, the one thing many people waited for, an apology, did not occur until October 2010 when he apologized for his earlier actions and the grief they caused Kate and his children. He posted a message on his Twitter account about his many regrets, from putting his eight children on television to battling publicly with his now ex-wife. "I am acutely aware of the mistakes I made in 2009 and I am ashamed of the choices I made. I have apologized to Kate, my family, and to my friends. Through counseling, I have learned to own my actions. My goal is to move forward in a positive direction." Gosselin also explained that he used Twitter to "clarify a few things" and shed light on how being on TV has damaged his children." He added that the negative effect on his family was his greatest concern, far outweighing any monetary gain.

Although he also used the *attack accuser* strategy in phase two, it was not as prominent as in phase one. His primary use of the strategy was to accuse Kate of working too hard and spending very little time with their children. He also threatened to file for sole custody, but did not follow through. The strategy partially succeeded because articles that were sympathetic toward him framed Kate as harsh and demanding, referring to episodes in which Jon took abuse from her. They played up the idea she did not allow him to see the twins on their birthday, and that he was not doing anything wrong. They also emphasized that he wanted to recapture some of his lost youth and enjoy a fresh, new romance with a carefree woman. However, the media rarely used this frame in its coverage.

5. Evaluation and implications

After five seasons of *Jon and Kate Plus 8*, viewers saw Kate as demanding and controlling, and journalists might have chosen to focus on this when covering her personal crisis. However, Kate toned down her abrasive personality after her impending divorce became public and used several image repair strategies. As a result, very few *People* magazine articles focused on her harsh personality or speculated that she drove Jon away. Both celebrities used different strategies in phases one and two, perhaps based on media coverage and feedback from fans. In the end, both enjoyed varying levels of success with the media based on their image improvement tactics.

Jon was less successful than Kate in transferring his desired attributes to the media in phase one while Kate was less successful in phase two. In phase one, Kate provided an example of how image repair strategies can help a celebrity in crisis. She behaved within the cultural norms of a distraught, lonely single mother. She was not photographed out on dates or at social events. Instead, she appeared to stay home with the couple's children. On the other hand, Jon was less successful in his image repair. Although he used several strategies in phase one, he did not use the most appropriate one in this case, mortification, until a year later.

In the end, coverage of Kate was often sympathetic, while coverage of Jon was generally condemning, alluding to the idea that media outlets are less sympathetic when celebrities do not act in accordance with the societal social behavioral norms that their situation would suggest. Kate, it appears, realized this fact and capitalized on her situation. She gained a good deal of public sympathy as a result. Her effort to play a victim role worked and the public tended to grieve and sympathize with her. Media outlets responded favorably to her readiness to establish her role as a doting mother and woman scorned.

Therefore, the first implication of this study is the importance of understanding one's audience. It is apparent that Kate perhaps played to her audience, projecting the role of a woman scorned. She was able to get even more sympathy because the couple had eight children. Benoit (1997) discussed identification of the relevant audiences as being of primary importance. Kate did this well by using different strategies in phases one and two. At first, she informed the public that Jon left her no choice but to divorce him because of his actions, which implied the divorce was in response to her husband's alleged extramarital affair. She also emphasized that her children were her primary concern and she planned to work hard to support them. In phase two, she shifted gears and began to focus less on attacking Jon and more on defending herself against media attacks on her parenting skills. Reports often portrayed her as self-centered and focused on her career. In response to these allegations, she reduced the offensiveness of her actions by playing the socially acceptable role of a single mother who had to work hard to support her children. In the end, Kate was successful in gaining sympathy, which helped viewers forget her once domineering personality. Her once shrewish personality morphed into a more desirable, gentle nature during the couple's messy divorce.

On the other hand, Jon was less successful in appealing to his audience. Although many people sympathized with him because of Kate's behavior, when media alleged he had an affair with a younger woman, the public focused on this. Jon's almost immediate dating escapades cost him the positive rapport that he previously shared with viewers who sympathized with him throughout the couple's tense moments on *Jon and Kate Plus 8*. His much-publicized philandering did little to win him public support. Realizing this and working on his media representations, his image improved in 2010. He apologized for his earlier actions, posted many positive messages on his Twitter account and appeared to have learned his lesson.

The second implication is that timing is everything. Kate was always the first of the two to release a personal statement. She exhibited the image repair tactics necessary to succeed in each situation. By the time Jon apologized, it may have been too late for him to recover completely from the damage done in 2009. Ultimately, Kate better controlled and influenced media coverage through her actions and the topics and emotions she chose to discuss. Kate took advantage of her notoriety by selling books, speaking around the country and starring in *Dancing with the Stars* and numerous talk shows, alluding to the idea that she was successful in her crisis management strategies.

The third implication of this study is that celebrities should use both social media and traditional media outlets with discretion. Social media outlets allow celebrities to publish information fast and efficiently without a gatekeeper; however, celebrities must still follow traditional crisis management strategies to retain credibility. For example, early efforts by Jon to use Twitter proved unsuccessful, as he did not apologize for negative behavior. Celebrities in crisis must put careful thought and consideration into using social media such as Twitter. Jon appeared informal and unprofessional by repeatedly misspelling words and publishing careless Twitter posts. The media can take a careless Tweet out of context and use it against the person who posts it. Jon's Tweets were often the focus in many negative articles about him. However, he switched gears a year after their divorce, and his posts became more positive and apologetic and correctly spelled, which helped his image.

On the other hand, while Kate might have used Twitter to disseminate positive messages in 2009, one might argue that she may have improved her image by posting an occasional well-planned tweet about family outings. Posts about her everyday activities and interactions with her children may have helped her appear more approachable and might have reassured her fans that she was spending quality time with her children instead of dating or working nonstop. Such posts would have enhanced her statements and helped viewers document how she really spent her time.

6. Conclusion

Celebrities in crisis may glean some advice from this analysis. There is some support for incorporating social media into their plan of action. It is popular, pervasive and easy to control messages. Twitter, for example, revealed in April 2010 that it has 105,779,710 registered users with 60% of those from outside the United States (Chacksfield, 2010). Within minutes of posting an announcement, hundreds of people have access to the information (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010). Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) add that blogs, for example, seem ideally suited for crisis communication situations because the blog writing style lends itself to frequent publishing, shorter statements and a personal/human voice.

These study findings were enlightening and provide a powerful springboard for future studies on image-repair, social media and framing. They might include a comparison of several blogs maintained by celebrities in crisis. Another important question that demands exploration is how audiences respond via social media in crises. Such a study might look at comments in response to blog posts to assess the effectiveness of changing public opinion via social media.

No doubt, the media and public often judge individuals based on how they act and respond to a scandal. Therefore, celebrities in crisis would be wise to develop extensive and effective public relations media plans that include traditional and new media outlets to foster positive framing. In this case, both parties, but especially Jon Gosselin, could have used stronger crisis communication and public relations plans. This study may serve as a tool to help public relations and crisis communications practitioners understand the important role social media can play in image repair.

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