Guilty by association: An analysis of Shaunie O'Neal's online/on-air image restoration tactics

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"He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas."
—Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*

Abstract

The growing use of social media as a source of networking has spurred a growing interest in using the medium as a tool for image repair. Broadening the application of Benoit's image repair theory, this case study looks at the image repair tactics of Shaunie O'Neal who became a celebrity during her marriage to former NBA basketball player Shaquille O'Neal, their subsequent divorce, and the creation of her VH1 show, *Basketball Wives (BBW)*. Throughout the four seasons of *BBW*, O'Neal's cast members perpetuated negative stereotypes of Black women such as "the angry Black woman," "the Jezebel" and "the tragic mulatto." While O'Neal did not exhibit these characteristics on the show, she became guilty by association. To repair her tarnished image, the reality TV actress used her Facebook and Twitter feeds and episodes of Season 4 of *BBW* to implement various image repair tactics. Study findings indicate episodes of a reality TV show and social media may provide a viable platform for a celebrity to repair his or her tarnished image; however, tactics must be authentic and consistent. Demonstrating the dual nature of social media uses, O'Neal utilized her social media to explain and minimize her actions, while viewers used the same outlets to discuss her perceived lack of control and the show's negative stereotyping of women of color. By the end of Season 4, it was apparent that while O'Neal successfully used on-air and online platforms to disseminate positive messages, viewers did not always find her image repair tactics convincing.

Keywords

Shaunie O'Neal, VH1, Viacom Basketball Wives, case study, critical theory, image restoration, apologia, blog, Twitter, personal crisis management, image repair, social media, framing of political races, gender

VH1's *Basketball Wives (BBW)* revolves around the lives of several women with current and former ties to NBA players or teams. The show has garnered attention for the antics of its stars and its reinforcement of negative stereotypes of women of color proliferated by the show's multiracial cast. Catfights, backstabbing, obscenities, and gossip abound in each episode as fans view an "inside" glimpse of the cast members' lives. Shaunie O'Neal, who divorced Shaquille O'Neal in 2009, has

come under heavy fire from disappointed viewers for her participation and apparent approval of the aforementioned behavior by cast members. During Season 4 of the show in 2012, viewers used the VH1 *BBW* blog, O'Neal's Facebook page and Twitter feed to criticize episodes of the show, *BBW* cast members in general, and O'Neal in particular.

Illustrating the widespread animosity toward the show, more than 29,000 viewers signed a petition in 2012 to "Boycott Basketball Wives & Evelyn Lozada." *The petition stated,* "Evelyn Lozada is a bully. The violence on 'Basketball Wives' is horrible and disgraceful. Physical assaults, threats, verbal abuse, and harassment. VH1 is rewarding this behavior by giving Evelyn a spinoff. Don't reward negative behavior" ("Boycott 'Basketball Wives' & 'Evelyn Lozada,'" 2012). Taking ownership for her role in disseminating negative portrayals of women of color as the show's producer and a friend of the raucous cast, O'Neal began to project a more positive image on Season 4 of *BBW*.

This study is noteworthy as previous image repair theory (IRT) studies have mostly concentrated on corporations, political figures, athletes, high-profile actors and other types of celebrities (e.g., Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2011; Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004; Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011; Kaylor, 2010; Oles, 2010; Moody, 2011). Scholars have also examined self-presentation from many perspectives, including personal websites, social media, and online dating (e.g., Dominick, 1999; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Moody, 2011). However, few IRT studies and self-presentation analyses have examined celebrity use of both social media and reality television as a platform for image repair. To address this void in the literature, this study utilizes a critical approach to analyze image repair tactics that emerged in O'Neal's social media

and episodes of the fourth season of *BBW*.

Likewise, scholars have studied many aspects of reality television including genre, stereotypes, and uses and gratifications (e.g., Tyree, 2011; Couldry, 2004; Krakowiak, Kleck, & Tsay, 2006; Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2009). However, studies in this area have often looked at traditional media outlets; therefore, generalizations are impossible to make in new media settings. O'Neal's use of online media provided a good opportunity for exploration of IRT within the realm of social media and reality TV. The changing dynamics of the celebrity-audience communication process warrants additional research, as building on existing media studies is the most efficient way to account for emerging trends.

This study is important for several other reasons. Most notably, reality television and social media have changed how fans view and interact with celebrities (Trammell, 2005; Moody & Dates, 2013; Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). Traditionally, audiences observed celebrities' personal lives via two settings: made-for-television red carpet events and publicity events such as interviews (Trammell, 2005). Today's social networks encourage collaborative communication and enable celebrities to interact with viewers and vice versa. Using social media, celebrities may practice damage control, spotlight their accomplishments and highlight their positive traits to their key publics.

Self-presentation allows public figures to disseminate information with little or no intervention from editors, publishers, and other third parties. Social media platforms have changed the speed of mass media messages offering individuals an increased ability to control their self-presentation (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). Now, scholars may measure the audience's response in real time through comments posted on blogs, Face-

book, and Twitter feeds. Likewise, reality television gives scholars the opportunity to view a closer representation of a celebrity's true personality than might be exhibited in movies and traditional TV shows.

Secondly, this study offers a new perspective to IRT by adding a critical lens to contextualize the stereotypical behaviors of the *BBW* cast. Identifying stereotypes in texts is important because the documentation of such content illuminates the manifestation and continuation of such beliefs in modern society (Mathis, 2007). Building on a review of the literature, we analyzed the stereotypes and archetypes BBW cast members exhibited on the show, which served to tarnish O'Neal's image as the creator and executive producer of the show. Specifically, we address a case in which a person is guilty by association because of the stereotypical behaviors of her friends, which scholars have not explored in IRT literature.

Thirdly, media provide historical content that scholars may use to analyze trends in the portrayals of gender and race. Consequently, it is essential to continually analyze and address perceptions of race and gender to offer insight and solutions to students, educators, and media/content producers who have the power to change representations in the future. Study findings may also prove useful for not only celebrities, but also average citizens who desire guidance with image repair and crisis management strategies. With the popularity of user-generated content, it is common for individuals to post embarrassing content that might necessitate the use of online image repair tactics.

Literature Review

Generally, scholars define image 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). To explore the literature on social media, image repair and uses and gratifications, we looked to three streams of knowledge in the literature: (1) medium theory, (2) image repair strategies, and (3) stereotypes and archetypes.

Medium Theory

Social media outlets allow celebrities to practice damage control while spotlighting their accomplishments and positive traits. This change in the communication process warrants updated research as well as the testing of traditional theories in a new media environment. Such studies are particularly noteworthy because the changing gatekeeper-audience dynamic cultivated in social media platforms has raised questions about the medium's value in image repair planning and execution (Pfister & Soliz, 2011; Roy, 2012; Moody, 2011). Building on previous research is the most efficient way to account for emerging trends. O'Neal's use of online media during the fourth season of *BBW* offered a good opportunity to explore medium and image repair theories in a new context.

Image Repair Strategies

Image repair theory conceives that "human beings engage in recurrent patterns of communicative behavior designed to reduce, redress, or avoid damage to their reputation from perceived wrong doing" (Burns & Bruner, 2000, p. 27-39). The literature indicates that individuals take different approaches to presenting a positive image,

including *denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action,* and *mortification.*

All image repair strategies have the potential to succeed, to an extent; however, studies show that the usage of a proactive strategy is more effective in generating positive media coverage (Brazeal, 2008). For instance, Hugh Grant, whom paparazzi spotted with a prostitute in the 1990s, experienced great success after using mortification immediately (Benoit, 1997). 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. He repaired his image and salvaged his acting career.

In another example, Kennedy (2010) found that Kobe Bryant's quick admission of adultery and proclamations of legal innocence were more believable than Barry Bonds's 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 to admit it rather than try to deny it. Likewise, Oles (2010) concluded Oprah Winfrey succeeded in repairing her image by responding quickly and demonstrating sincerity in her image repair strategies. Winfrey's crisis occurred in 1996 following an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, during which she discussed "Mad Cow Disease" and said, "It has just stopped me cold from eating another hamburger!" (Oles, 2010). Because of her influence over the public, cattle futures plummeted and the Texas Beef Group in Amarillo, Texas, sued Winfrey for libel. Winfrey moved her show to Amarillo during the four-week trial, and in the end, successfully repaired her image by handling the case directly, openly and honestly.

Moody (2011) concluded that reality TV couple Jon and Kate Gosselin handled their public divorce with varying degrees of success using social media. Kate did not use social media in the early stages of the divorce, which allowed media outlets to shape public perceptions of the actress. However, she was able to connect with the public more effectively through personal stories, photographs and short stories after she began to use social media, particularly blogs.

> Blogs can win over publics and improve relationships employing the conversational human voice factor and the responsiveness/customer service factor… [T]his may be that establishing and regularly updating a blog gives the impression that an organization is not shying away from discussion of the incident in question. (Sweetser, 2007, p. 342)

Jon, on the other hand, used social media immediately. However, instead of using his Twitter account to express remorse for the downfall of his family, he used it to place blame on other people, such as Kate and the producers of their reality television show. Eventually, Jon realized that when he focused on his children, the public was much more receptive to forgiving him. The couple's case study illustrates that taking responsibility via social media can have a positive influence on image repair.

Such studies foreshadow the promise that social media platforms offer celebrities—and other individuals—who use them effectively to repair their image. However, as the various types of social media continue to transform, it is crucial for scholars to continue to study their effectiveness.

Frames, Cultural Narratives, and Stereotypes

Communications literature examines issues of self-presentation and implica-

tions of new media formats that offer users greater agency (e.g., Trammell, 2005; Moody, 2011; Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001) however, many of these studies are not from a critical perspective. At stake in this case is the promotion of gender and race stereotypes of women. The manner in which O'Neal and cast members presented themselves on-air inevitably had the potential to influence public perception of women in general and Black women in particular. Feminist theorists agree that mass media often serve as an instrument to transmit stereotypical, patriarchal, and hegemonic values about women, which, in turn, make hierarchical and distorted sex-role stereotypes appear normal (e.g. Carter and Steiner, 2004; Hartmann, 1981; Vavrus, 2009). Van Zoonen (1994) summarized this transmission model as a media reflection on society's dominant social values that symbolically belittle women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles (p. 17).

In her landmark study, Kanter (1977) identified four common archetypes of professional women: "sex object," "mother," "pet," and "iron maiden." "Sex object" stereotypes refer to both sexuality and often include references to clothing, appearance, behaving, and speaking in "feminine" ways. Conversely, the "mother" archetype can be caring and understanding or scolding, nagging and shrewish. The ideal "good mother" offers care and protection to her children, is gentle, kind and selfless. She is a model for other mothers (Lule, 2000). Focusing more on a traditional parenting role rather than leadership, Ruddick (1989) adds that the good mother ideal hinges on maternal work, or the work that she carries out while raising a child. Three facets of maternal work are "caring for the child physically, nurturing the child emotionally, cognitively and spiritual-

ly, and training the child socially" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 19).

The "pet" or "child" stereotype depicts women as mascots or cheerleaders (Wood, 1994, p. 264-265). Accordingly, women are too weak, naïve, and unprepared to handle difficult tasks without a man's help. Hence, men treat them like children, which diminishes their capacity to fill leadership positions. Conversely, the "iron maiden" is excessively strong and overpowering. Mass media images depict her as her too powerful and pushy to be an effective leader (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009).

Another archetype that is relevant to this study is the "victim" (Lule, 2002). The idea that the victim represents society and its individuals is an important component in cultural narratives. The "victim" archetype embodies the idea of "just ordinary people." According to Lule (2002), audiences see and cast themselves in the part of the victim. They can relate.

Narrow Representations of Black Women

Studies have shown that while media and societal structures are unjust to both Black and White women, they marginalize Black women to a greater extent (e.g., Wallace, 1979; Collins, 2004; Benedict, 1997; hooks, 1992; Squires, 2009). Cultural narratives include a separate set of stereotypes to depict Black women. Historically, dichotomous representations have depicted Black women as unintelligent, extremely educated, ambitious or listless, attractive, or ugly (Boylorn, 2008; Collins, 2004). In some instances, even positive representations have negative undertones. The "independent Black woman" archetype is overachieving and financially successful on one hand; and narcissistic and overbearing on the other. As a result, media often portray her as emasculating Black males. Another common stereotype is that

of the "tragic mulatto," which highlights the idea that mixed-race individuals are unhappy (Comas-Díaz & Greene, 1994). Mass media also present mixed-raced persons as "wild half-castes," sexually destructive "tragic mulattos," who are unable to control the instinctive urges of their non-white heritage (Moody & Dates, 2013).

Collins (2004) discusses class-based controlling images for Black women that range from bitches and bad Black mothers to modern mammies and Black ladies. Perhaps the most popular archetype is that of the "angry Black woman," whom media depict as upset and irate, consequently she is often deemed a "bitch" (Collins, 2004, p. 123; Childs, 2005, Springer, 2007). The controlling image of the "bitch," Collins (2004) states, "constitutes one representation that depicts Black women as aggressive, loud, rude, and pushy" (p. 123). This negative character is a spinoff of Sapphire, a historical character who is an undesirable depiction in which Black women berate Black males in their lives with nasty confrontations and ex-aggerated body language. Media often show the wisecracking character with her hands on her hips and her head thrown back as she lets everyone know she is in charge (Yarborough & Bennett, 2000).

One common thread in all of these stereotypes is the idea that Black women have problems forming positive relationships with men. The task is daunting, because either she is too educated and independent to need or want a man or she is desperate and lost without him, incapable of going on, and willing to do anything to get or keep him (Boylorn, 2008). As such, portrayals pit her against women of other races in the battle to maintain a healthy relationship with a man (Childs, 2005).

Reality Television

Tyree (2011) defines "reality television" as any show purported to be unscripted that captures "non-actors" as they encounter actual events or staged situations. Conversely, Couldry (2004) defines reality TV as "an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by a fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real" (p. 2). Scholars have documented reality TV in literature as a genre that places non-actors in dramatic situations with unpredictable outcomes. Subgenres of reality TV include makeover, dating, court, law enforcement, talent, game, sitcoms, and docudramas (e.g., Tyree, 2011; Couldry, 2004; Krakowiak, Kleck & Tsay, 2006; Nabi et al., 2009).

Tyree (2011) asserts that reality television shows, like *BBW*, often include heroes and villains that build on societal stereotypes and cultural narratives and help propel storylines. Stereotypes and archetypes are of interest in this study as television messages have a significant influence on viewers' perceptions when firsthand information is lacking (Fujioka, 1999; Darling, 2004). Such portrayals provide a basis for how non-African Americans might view African Americans. As Hall (1997) noted, social practices, including watching television, "take place within representation and are saturated with meanings and values which contribute to our sense of who we are—our culturally constructed identities" (p. 339). Mass media often rely on symbols, cultural narratives, and stereotypes as a shorthand way of communicating the diversity of people to diverse audiences. As such, the manner in which O'Neal and cast members present themselves on *Basketball Wives* might potentially influence public perceptions of Black women in general.

We guided our analysis of Season 4 of the *Basketball Wives* using the following research questions:

RQ$_1$: What cultural narratives and stereotypes emerged in Season 4 of *Basketball Wives?*

RQ$_2$: How does O'Neal address these stereotypes in her social media and episodes of Season 4 of the *BBW*?

RQ$_3$: How did viewers respond to O'Neal's on-air and online image repair tactics?

Methods

To identify stereotypes and cultural narratives of African American women as identified in the review of the literature, we textually analyzed Season 4 of *BBW* (selected because that is when O'Neal's image repair tactics occurred). To assess O'Neal's on-air and online image repair tactics, we looked at Facebook posts, tweets, blog entries/comments and Season 4 episodes. The sample included 180 VH1 blog comments, a random sampling of comments from 34 of her timeline Facebook posts from April 1, 2012 (two months before the reunion), through August 1, 2012 (two months after the reunion). On Twitter, we analyzed one of every five posts for 90 tweets during the same period.

This study used a codebook as an instrument to investigate the themes that emerged in this sample. A pilot study helped refine the coding instrument. Nine graduate students identified categories and the best methods for identifying themes. They analyzed the content of these posts and the tone, as well as how many retweets and favorites accompanied each. Next, each artifact was examined for recurring themes. After refining themes for the codebook, the primary investigator and two graduate students watched the episodes and read the celebrity's Twitter

and Facebook content multiple times to get a sense of underling themes. Two determine intercoder reliability; two trained graduate students coded 10% of the texts. The intercoder reliability was greater than 95%. This approach allowed for a sense of how the reality TV actress handled her personal image repair during Season 4 and the months following it.

We present the findings in three segments. The first section provides an overview of historical stereotypes of Black women. The second section explores IRT exhibited on *Basketball Wives* and O'Neal's social media, followed by the third section, which provides an exploration of audience response based on comments to O'Neal's Facebook and Twitter feeds.

Findings and Discussion

BBW chronicles the lives of the cast members who producers rank in importance based on their closeness to O'Neal, physical attractiveness, social connections, and the perceived importance of their former or present spouse or boyfriend (Figure 1). The show's introduction displays their rank in the hierarchy, starting with the newest cast members. The lineup ends with O'Neal, who is show's leader. Season 4 also featured Evelyn Lozada, the ex-wife of NFL player Chad Ochocinco; Jennifer Williams, the ex-wife of Eric Williams; Tami Rowan, the ex of Kenny Anderson; and Suzie Ketcham, the ex of Michael Olowokondi. Season 4 also included Royce Reed and Kesha Nichols, former cheerleaders for NBA teams, and newcomer Kenya Bell, the wife of retired player Charlie Bell. We refer to O'Neal's fellow cast members by their first names in subsequent references as that is how *BBW* fans and viewers identify them.

Figure 1
VH1 2012 Publicity Photo:
Cast members are (left to right)
Royce, Kenya, Jennifer, Tami,
Shaunie, Evelyn, Suzie,
and Kesha

The Perpetuation of Cultural Stereotypes

Using the lives of several women of color as a plotline, *BBW* perpetuates many historical stereotypes and cultural archetypes of women, Black women in particular. The most prevalent stereotypes and archetypes that emerged during Season 4 were "tragic mulatto," "angry Black woman," "the victim," and "the good mother." Most of the cast members exhibited characteristics in line with what Tyree (2012) describes as the "angry Black woman" stereotype. These traits include exaggerated facial expressions, hand gestures, neck movement, verbal threats, bad tempers, and a tendency toward starting fights. These reinforcements of stereotypes of Black women have the potential to damage the audience, according to Tyree (2011), who asserts that although viewers intuitively question the reality present in reality television, they still locate and analyze authentic moments in episodes and identify with characters.

Tami is often the instigator of arguments and physical fights; however, almost every person on the show has engaged in some form of physical or verbal exchange—except O'Neal, who is only guilty by her association with the group of women. Kenya and Kesha auditioned for a place in O'Neal's clique during Season 4, and Tami instantly clashed with them both. In one episode, she asked Kesha, "So what color are you…?" while glaring at the mixed-race reality actress who has light skin and a Southern twang. This conflict based on colorism escalated during the *BBW* "Girl Trip" to Tahiti and exploded with Tami's constant arguing with Kesha.

Likewise, Tami disliked Kenya because she believed the aspiring singer was responsible for fostering hostility and drama between the women on the show. During the trip, part of the group decided to hide dead fish in Kenya's room. This particular prank never escalated into anything larger; however, on another episode, the two women had a fistfight at a nightclub, perpetuating the stereotype of the "angry black woman" outlined in the review of the literature (Childs, 2005; Tyree, 2012; Boylorn, 2008).

The Tragic Mulatto

Building on the tragic mulatto cultural narrative, the inadequacy theme is a common representation of the show's three mixed race cast members—Evelyn, Suzie, and Kesha. According to Comas-Díaz and Greene (1994), mixed-race people may try extremely hard to be good or to be exemplary citizens in order to combat overt or covert negative evaluations of their parents' interracial union or their multiracial heritage. However, in the end, they often fail because they set impossible standards. Evelyn has exemplified this stereotype, often conjuring up the image of a "tragic mulatto." In Season 4, Evelyn struggles with the relationship that she had with her father when she was younger. To promote healing and closure, he visits Evelyn; however, the effort is seemingly futile as the father and daughter's meeting ends in a teary exchange due to a language barrier and other factors.

Suzie, the only mixed-race Asian/White main character on the show, often embodied both the Jezebel and "tragic mulatto" stereotype during Season 4. She constantly stirred up trouble with the show's two camps: O'Neal's clique and other cast members who have been kicked out of the group or desire to be a part of it. As Suzie plays the chameleon to fit into any situation, she tells cast members what other people say about them behind their backs. Episodes characterize her as having "diarrhea of the mouth" for spreading rumors about cast members and sharing other people's secrets. Throughout the season, her friends increasingly grow weary of listening to her discuss her sexual escapades and prowess in bed.

In Season 4, Evelyn and Jen feuded constantly after Jen made disapproving comments about her friend's relationship with Chad Ochocinco, a pro-football player whom the Miami Dolphins cut during the pre-season camp. Throughout the early part of Season 4, Evelyn struggled to choose between her long-time friendship with Jen and her love for Ochocinco. In the end, Evelyn chose Ochocinco, and they spend much of Season 4 in a whirlwind romance—he sweeps her off her feet with expensive gifts, trips, and dinner dates.

The dating habits and failed marriages/relationships of other characters are also discussed. Jennifer, who went through a divorce on Season 4, enters the dating scene, which hints at the difficulty of a black woman finding and sustaining a successful relationship. On one hand, Jennifer is characterized as having a lot of friends and valuable connections in the business world. On the other hand, she is depicted as lonely, selfish, materialistic, and egotistical. While on the Tahiti trip, she retreats to her room and does not talk to anyone. Throughout the rest of the season, Jen does not participate in any of O'Neal's social gatherings or the antics of her cast mates.

As foreshadowed by previous episodes, Ochocinco and Evelyn's relationship abruptly ends after a few months of marriage because of physical violence. By the end of Season 4, it is evident that Evelyn, the show's character who has everything including, a successful business, beauty and brains, is unhappy because of failed relationships with her best friend, father, and other people in her life. This characterization feeds into the "tragic mulatto" stereotype.

Guilty by Association: O'Neal's Image Repair Tactics

O'Neal and her cast members are highly intelligent, independent woman who have successful careers, families, physical beauty

and material wealth; however, their positive attributes are not a focal point on *BBW* episodes. Episodes focus on their never-ending fights, failed relationships, and mean-spirited gossiping and backstabbing. By the beginning of Season 4, the stereotypes and negative portrayals of cast members had created the need for O'Neal to repair her image as the

show's producer. In our sample, O'Neal endured the brunt of complaints from viewers who wanted her to take a proactive role in presenting positive portrayals of women of color and cleaning up the acts of her cast members.

Angry Black Woman

O'Neal furtively began her image repair to counteract the "angry Black woman" stereotype with corrective actions in Episode 3 of Season 4 (Table 1). In this episode, Tami, who most notably perpetuated the angry Black woman stereotype, began anger management sessions with a counselor. Subsequent episodes included additional clips of Tami visiting the counselor as she progressed in therapy. During these segments of the show, Tami confessed to deep-seated anger toward her mother. Tami attempted to heal and grow from the neglect that she felt as a child. Tami also spends quality time with her children on show. It also is evident that she enjoys helping other cast members work though their problems.

These IRT tactics carried out on the show also hint at differentiation in which O'Neal, as the show's creator and producer, distinguishes herself from Tami, who is the impetus for most fights and arguments on the show. By sending Tami to a therapist, O'Neal indicates that she is not responsible for the cast member's actions. She also expresses that Tami is not representative

of the show. Likewise, in her social media, O'Neal included statements regarding her displeasure with fighting.

The Good Mother

Two ways to *reduce the offensiveness* of an act are *bolstering* and *transcendence*. The *bolstering* tactic involves emphasizing the good relationship that a person has with peers and his or her good deeds. Several patterns emerged in O'Neal's use of image repair tactics across both mediums in which she utilized the good mother archetype. The most common tactic was bolstering in which she played up positive aspects of her personality and established herself as a "good mother" (Table 1). For instance, on the April 12, 2012 episode, the actress dubbed herself "Mom of the Year" after she arranged for the well-known band Mindless Behavior to appear at her daughter's 10th birthday party. In another episode, she states, "My kids come first." It's important to show what our lives are really about." Similarly, on Episode 15, which aired on May 28, 2012, O'Neal spotlighted her home life with her children. During this episode, the actress took time to pray before eating dinner and enjoyed herself serving in the capacity of a caregiver to her family.

Another way of *reducing offensiveness* is *transcendence*, which attempts to place the person in a more favorable context. O'Neal illustrated *transcendence* in the April 30, 2012, episode during which Tami and Evelyn went to the doctor for a mammogram to help raise breast cancer awareness. This act showed that the cast members were capable of empathizing with one another in a time of crisis. *Transcendence* also occurred in Part one of the reunion episodes, during which O'Neal preached, "Let's get some balance." She also advocated for more positive con-

Table 1

O'Neal's Image Repair Strategies

Strategy/Key Characteristics	Pre-reunion	Reunion Episode
Denial Simple denial: did not perform act Shift the blame: act performed by another		**Part 1** (aired 6/4/12) **Shifting Blame**: Reunion Part 1 (aired 6/4/12) Shaunie: "…how things have gone are ridiculous…law suits" (referring to cast member Jen); Shaunie: "I feel that all these ladies take responsibility…"
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	**Defeasibility** Episode 9 (aired 4/16/12) Shaunie doesn't understand what she did to provoke a letter from Jen's lawyers	**Part 1** **Good Intentions**: Shaunie: "…we wanna see each other grow;" thought show might help repair Jen and Eve's friendship which had begun to disintegrate before filming **Part 2** (aired 6/11/12) **Defeasibility**: Shaunie: "I know these women, they're not bullies"
Reducing Offensiveness of Event Bolstering: stress good traits Minimization: act not serious Differentiation: act less offensive Transcendence: more important considerations	**Bolstering** Episode 7 (aired 4/2/12) Shaunie arranges for daughter's favorite boy band to appear at her birthday party/invite her to be their guest later same day at their show Episode 15 (aired 5/28/12) Shaunie segment of home life w/ kids, praying at dinner **Transcendence** Episode 11 (aired 4/30/12) segment featuring Tami and Evelyn going for mammograms (raising breast cancer awareness)	**Part 1** **Bolstering**: Shaunie: says the ladies take responsibility **Transcendence**: Part 1 Shaunie has been preaching "let's get some balance;" more positive content in future seasons; it "hurts my heart" that friendships are being ruined **Part 2** **Bolstering**: "Mom of the Year" with her daughter's 10th birthday and Mindless Behavior's appearance at her party; "my kids come first" — it's important to show what our lives are really about **Transcendence**: Shaunie: "We have been through too much for things to get to this point"; used the platform to raise awareness of breast cancer, particularly in African American women **Reducing Offensiveness**: (referring to viewers' negativity online) "I want to lash out and yell, 'this is not who we are…it's a freakin' few minutes, it's TV, it's entertainment…" **Minimizing**: Shaunie: "I don't want to see anyone go to jail for making a mistake *where nobody died*…" (emphasis added)
Attack Accuser Reduce credibility of accuser Compensation: reimburse victim		**Part 2** Shaunie: "Viewers take all of this so personal and they don't know us like that," "[Y]ou don't know 100% of my life or their lives and that's hard;" John Salley: "[T]he ones who are going on and writing negativity on the blogs after watching the show have way too much time on their hands, Shaunie: I agree"
Corrective Action Plan to solve or prevent problem	Episodes 3 (aired 3/5/12), 9 (4/16/12), 12 (5/7/12) Tami segments of anger management therapy and confessions of deep-seated anger w/ her mom (attempts to heal and grow); Episodes 14 (aired 5/21/12) & 15 (5/28/12) Shaunie attempts to act as peacemaker	
Mortification Apologize for act	Episode 15 (aired 5/28/12) Shaunie visits pastor; says she feels horrible and frustrated, has considered leaving show she can't defend or stand by, concerned about what others think (particularly in business meetings).	**Part 2** Shaunie: feels horrible about a 14-year friendship that's been ruined; "I've felt a lot of guilt…I felt a little responsible…"

tent in future seasons. "It hurts my heart that friendships are being ruined."

O'Neal illustrated *transcendence* on the reunion show following the fourth season, when she reacted to criticism and promised more balance going forward. She stated, "I feel that all these ladies take responsibility for what their actions are…and after seeing ourselves this season, it definitely was a lot more bad than good." She continued, "I've really tried to preach the whole 'Let's get some balance' and now I think my voice is resonating." In this statement, the reality show celebrity hints at mortification, while also shifting blame (noting that "All these ladies take responsibility") and excluding herself. O'Neal also attempts to bolster her image here by indicating that she has been pushing for balance, and has only recently been listened to by the producers and directors of the show.

O'Neal used similar tactics on her Facebook account, which she used on a regular basis to communicate with fans and viewers of *Basketball Wives*. She kept communication light-hearted, seemingly to spark conversation with frequent questions such as "How is everyone's day going?" Most of her posts during the period of study consisted of brief updates of what she was doing on a particular day or weekend, periodic mentions of her children and exhortations for her audience to have a "blessed" or a "fabulous" day. A sprinkling of famous, inspirational quotes round out the extent of her Facebook timeline content.

Twitter Content

Much like her Facebook account, O'Neal used her Twitter account regularly to communicate with fans, viewers and friends (Table 2). Out of the 90-tweet sample, a range of content themes became decipherable. Many of the tweets contained more than

one theme. The most highly utilized theme was the simple retweet, in which Shaunie resends another user's message to her followers, with or without adding personal input. Within the 90 analyzed tweets, 42.2% were retweets, or the reposting of another person's comment. Shaunie mentioned personal information in 24.44% of the tweets and self-promoted herself through mentions of events, projects, interviews in 23.33% of tweets. In 22.22% of her tweets, O'Neal tweeted about new episodes of *Basketball Wives* and the reunion shows.

Although only 10% of her tweets in this period mentioned *Basketball Wives*, those tweets, along with the quotations, were the most highly reweeted and favorited (see Figure 2). The majority of the tweets were happy or upbeat in tone. O'Neal also added a sprinkling of quotations of conventional wisdom and used her account to link people to her Pinterest and Instagram sites as well as to plug various projects and events connected to her name. Mirroring her television

Table 2

O'Neal's Themes Found on Twitter

Themes	Frequency	% of 90 tweets
RT or Reply	38	42.22%
Personal Info	22	24.44%
Self Promotion	21	23.33%
To Followers	20	22.22%
To Friend	15	16.67%
Family	9	10%
BBW	8	8.89%
Inspirational	8	8.89%
Sports	7	7.78%
Quotation	6	6.67%
Religious/Spiritual	4	4.44%

N=90

Figure 2
Examples of O'Neal's
Twitter posts

presence, O'Neal used her social media to cast herself as a real person as she did in Season 4 by talking with her pastor. Shaunie tweeted about religious and spiritual matters and told her followers to have a "blessed day." These tactics portray Shaunie as religious and spiritual and remove her from the negative image she garnered on the show.

Much like the show, where she often sat back during a fight, Shaunie claimed on Twitter, in a subtweet (where the subject is not mentioned specifically), that she did not condone violence; she was pulling for the repair the longtime friendship of Evelyn and Jennifer. Shaunie has also used her Twitter page to show herself as a loving mother and daughter, often mentioning all of her children and her own mother. Shaunie's tweets helped reinforce the belief that she is a real person.

In sum, her tweets helped to secure her image as a businesswoman and regular mother who loved her family. She used to

platform to boost the *BBW* brand, and to emphasize that she is not only the producer of *BBW*, but also involved in many other joint ventures, charities and special projects.

The Victim

O'Neal and the cast members also emphasized the victim theme and the idea that they are just ordinary people. Referring to viewers' negativity online, O'Neal stated, "I want to lash out and yell, this is not who we are…it's a freakin' few minutes, it's TV, it's entertainment." In Part 2, O'Neal stated, "Viewers take all of this so personal and they don't know us like that. …[Y]ou don't know 100% of my life or their lives and that's hard." Reunion show host John Salley supported this stance with the response; "[T]he ones who are going on and writing negativity on the blogs after watching the show have way too much time on their hands."

O'Neal demonstrated the *shifting blame* tactic on Part 1 of the reunion episode,

which aired on June 4, 2012. O'Neal stated: "[H]ow things have gone is ridiculous… law suits" (referring to cast member Jennifer). O'Neal also stated: "I feel that all these ladies take responsibility." During this same episode, O'Neal demonstrated good intentions by stating: "[W]e wanna see each other grow." She also stated "I thought the show might help repair Jen and Eve's friendship, which had begun to disintegrate before filming."

Mortification

Mortification, which aims to restore an image by asking forgiveness, is one of the best image restoration tactics. O'Neal openly and definitively demonstrated *mortification* in Episode 15, which aired on May 28, 2012. She visited her pastor and declared that she felt horrible and frustrated and had considered leaving the show. She added that she could not defend or stand by concerned about what others think, particularly in business meetings. O'Neal demonstrated mortification again in Part 2 of the reunion show. During this episode, she stated that she felt horrible about a 14-year friendship that the show has ruined (referring to Jen and Evelyn). "I've felt a lot of guilt…I felt a little responsible," she added.

Audience Feedback: Social Media Response from BBW Viewers

To assess the viewers' response to O'Neal's image repair tactics, the VH1 *Basketball Wives* comments posted in response to O'Neal's Twitter/Facebook feeds, and the VH1 blog provided ample content. Findings indicate viewers frequently used the VH1.com blog and O'Neal's Facebook page and Twitter feed to leave criticisms for the individual cast members, the show as a whole,

Table 3

VH1 Blog posts included in sample

1. The Reunion Interview: Shaunie O'Neal Seeks Some Balance

2. Girl Talk, Makeup, and Cocktails: The Best Backstage Photos From The Basketball Wives Reunion

3. Shaunie O'Neal Has "No Problem Walking Away" From Basketball Wives, Hints That There Are Three Ladies She Wouldn't Keep Around.

4. Over One Million Customers Served! The Basketball Wives Facebook Fan Page Reaches a Milestone.

5. Shaunie O'Neal Tells Us About Evelyn's Wedding Wardrobe Changes And Reveals Her Role as Future Godmother [updated].

6. Pic of the Day: Tami Roman Posts a Hilarious Outtake from the Basketball Wives Promo Shoot.

and most especially O'Neal, the show's creator and executive producer.

The VH1 *Basketball Wives* blog, maintained by blogger Elizabeth Black, contains information about cast members as well details of the show's plotline (Table 3). In the comments on these pages, readers express opinions and feelings about *Basketball Wives*, Shaunie, VH1, and the rest of the wives.

In May and June, the months leading up to the Season 4 reunion, comments were highly negative. Many fans expressed anger at O'Neal's constant lack of involvement or intervention, which viewers often perceived as reinforcing negative stereotypes. People expressed their anger and disappointment for cast members who seemingly have everything, but complain about minor issues.

Audience members who commented on social media platforms wanted to set the record straight and to let people know that they do not agree with the show's premise. They framed O'Neal as the leader of a "mean girl" clique, who is phony and guilty of instigating much of the show's negative

actions. These frames differed from online audiences' depictions of cast members in general who they characterize as bullies, gossips poor mothers and gold-diggers.

Angry Black Women versus Good Mother

Table 4 presents the top themes commenters discussed in response to O'Neal's Facebook posts before and after the reunion episode. According to the table, the most popular themes before the reunion episode fall into the "angry Black woman" stereotype. These included class, fighting and bulling. References to class made up 19% of responses and referred to the cast members lack of refinement in various situations. They used terms such as "ghetto" and "unprofessional" to describe members of the cast. The fighting theme, which occurred in 13% of comments, focused on the show's inclusion of several fights throughout the season. Bullying, which occurred in 9% of the comments, also referred to fighting and how the women teamed up against cast members in various situations.

There was an increase in May of negative sentiment towards O'Neal that coincided with the *BBW* "Girl Trip" to Tahiti, during which a few of the cast members, reportedly bored and unable to think of anything else to do, decided to play a prank on one of the other women. O'Neal witnessed both the planning and execution of the prank but took no active part. Nevertheless, her presence and subsequent consent sparked heated disapproval among her viewers.

Another incident garnering much negative attention was the growing animosity between Tami and Kesha, which finally erupted with Tami's insistence upon a wild-eyed, aggressive confrontation. Kesha, fearing for her safety, retreated and inadvertently abandoned her purse containing travel doc-

Table 4

Facebook Commenter Topics Pre- and Post-Reunion Episode

Themes	Pre-reunion		Post-Reunion	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Class	16	19	5	15
Fighting	11	13	9	28
Husband/mate	9	10	1	3
Bullying	8	9	3	9
Maternal ability	7	8	5	15
Stereotypes	5	6	1	3
Throwing things	5	6	1	3
Physical appearance	5	6	3	9
Money	4	5	3	9
Backstabbing	3	3	0	0
Mean girls	3	3	0	0
Real people	2	2	0	0
Total	90		94	

uments and a cell phone. Tami confiscated the items until Kesha would give in to her demands. During this incident, O'Neal, seemingly concerned for Kesha' safety and peace of mind, attempted a more active role as peacemaker.

Despite the spike in negative comments surrounding certain shows, the vast majority of comments were neutral in tone. Most users who leave comments on her Facebook page are fans who simply wished to connect with the creator of *Basketball Wives* and to enter into a global conversation with the celebrity. Similarly, the most popular themes after the reunion episode were fighting (28%), class (15%), mother (15%), and bullying (9%). With the exception of the mother theme, which did not appear in the top four categories before the reunion episode, the topics were very similar before and after the reunion episode. The mother theme included the idea that some of the women were mothers consumed with petty bickering, fighting, materialism, and insig-

nificant matters rather than the welfare of their children. Worth noting is that several themes such as gossiping, back-stabbing and stealing were prevalent before the reunion episode, but were not as common after its airing perhaps because the network was no longer airing new episodes.

Viewers utilized social media to interact with the show's cast members, often treating them as friends. In many instances, comments referred to an episode of the show to make a point or disparage the direction of the show and to encouraged the women to change. In most instances, comments were vague; however, they frequently referred to an episode of the show to make a point or to bolster their arguments. Dominant stereotypes depicted the women as ghetto, bullies and poor mother figures.

Researchers also assessed comments that specifically focused on Shaunie in her role as a cast member and producer of her show. Table 5 displays the breakdown of the various character traits Facebook commenters used to describe O'Neal's character before and after the reunion episode. Phoniness was the most common theme mentioned in the Facebook posts before and after the reunion episode with 25% and

Table 5

Shaunie O'Neal's Character Traits Mentioned in Facebook Comments before and after the Reunion Episode

Traits	Pre-Reunion		Post-Reunion	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Phony	9	25	5	24
Acts Innocent	2	6	1	5
Ugly	1	3	1	5
Out Of Control	1	3	0	0
Rude	1	3	0	0
Other (negative)	16	46	8	37
Other (positive)	5	14	6	29

24% of comments, respectively, falling into this category. Worth noting is 21% of comments fell into the "other" category with 46% including a negative undertone and 14% including a positive undertone before the reunion episode. The number of positive comments rose following the reunion episode with 29% falling into this category after it aired.

Few commenters mentioned the various image repair tactics O'Neal employed on BBW toward the end of Season 4. However, the few who did were not impressed with her efforts. The audience perceived the "speaking with pastor" tactic as an attempt to illustrate O'Neal's good qualities and "religiousness." In addition, worth noting is many fans expressed anger at O'Neal's constant lack of involvement or intervention. Viewers perceived her lack of involvement as reinforcing negative stereotypes.

In sum, audience responses on O'Neal's Facebook and Twitter pages focused on the show as a whole, the individual cast members, most especially O'Neal, the show's creator and executive producer. Although many users commented on O'Neal's image, few moved further to her attempts at image repair. For instance, in May, one viewer mentioned *denial*, and in June, five commenters mentioned that she had gone to her pastor as a last ditch effort to clean up her image. Shortly thereafter, in November, there were no mentions of O'Neal's image repair tactics.

Worth noting is that even with the negativity and stereotypes that predominate the show, apparently viewers returned week after week to find out what was going on with the O'Neal camp and then shared their viewpoints on social media. It is evident that viewers bonded with members of the cast and shared in their joys and pain. They implore the cast to change their on-air be-

haviors. Viewers indicated they would sincerely like to see more conflict resolution and healing in the show's storylines. O'Neal might take heed and play a more active role in facilitating healthy activities by highlighting positive content such as her charitable endeavors and business ventures rather than the bickering of cast members.

Implications and Solutions

Study findings extend IRT development from a critical lens and offer practical suggestions. Several implications arose. First, it appears that reality TV and online media provide viable platforms for a person wanting to repair his or her image; however, they must follow traditional image repair tactics in their use of the two mediums. In both her reality television show and her social media platforms, O'Neal used several of Benoit's image repair tactics, including *bolstering, transcendence, reducing offensiveness, minimizing, attacking accusers, compensation, corrective action,*

and *mortification* (Table 6). *BBW* television episodes, Twitter and Facebook eliminated the middleman and allowed O'Neal to communicate directly with her followers. This advancement in image repair theory implies social media and reality TV offer public figures viable image repair tools.

Secondly, social media outlets allow celebrities to publish information fast and efficiently without a gatekeeper; however, celebrities must still follow traditional crisis management strategies—such as honesty and transparency—to retain credibility (Moody, 2011). For instance, while O'Neal's visit to her pastor and positive posts depicted her in a positive light, comments from audiences indicated they did not find these attempts at image repair believable. Many fans expressed anger at O'Neal's constant lack of involvement or intervention, which viewers often perceived as reinforcing negative stereotypes. The constant fighting on the show created the need for O'Neal to utilize image repair techniques.

Table 6

O'Neal's Image Restoration Strategies via TV and Social Media

Tactic	Social Media	BBW Episodes
Reducing Offensiveness Bolstering/Transcendence	Religious posts Inspirational quotes Discussions of her children and her mother	Mom of the year and breast cancer episodes Pushed for balance from producers and executives "This is our real life"
Corrective Action	Statements regarding displeasure with fighting	Sent Tami to a counselor Spoke to her pastor Played peacemaker during Tahiti episode
Evading of Responsibility		Discussed pending lawsuit Separated herself from the violent actions of cast members
Mortification	Pushed for a reconciliation between Jen and Evelyn	Expressed sadness about broken friendships Sorry the show had more bad than good episodes

Finally, while celebrities have the opportunity to use an assortment of image repair tactics to improve their reputations; they must be believable to viewers. O'Neal used several image repair tactics in the show's episodes. She *reduced the offensiveness* of her actions by having a cast member attend anger management classes. She also visited her pastor and discussed the guilt and embarrassment she feels because of the fighting and backbiting on the show. Similarly, O'Neal's Facebook and Twitter posts were charismatic, religious, and well written. However, audience members did find these tactics believable.

Facebook and Twitter commenters did not notice her preferred themes; instead, viewers focused on the negative, stereotypical aspects of the show such as the "angry Black woman," phoniness and a lack of class. Viewers also honed in on O'Neal's inconsistencies in how she presented herself, and suggested that she cared more about ratings than *BBW*'s content. While O'Neal stated that she felt bad about the women fighting and broken friendships, her cast members continued to fight and devise strategies to bully other cast mates. These sentiments confused viewers, leaving them to question O'Neal's sincerity.

Producer Suggestions

Findings are important as perceptions and stereotypes often become the dominant viewpoint whether they are accurate or not. Members of the cast are successful businesswomen, mothers, and independent women. However, an emphasis on materialism, sex, stereotypes, and inadequacies often overshadowed positive messages. Reality television producers should include more episodes in which the women reveal their positive qualities as entrepreneurs, philanthropists and active mothers rather than dwelling on their weaknesses.

One of the major criticisms of reality TV is whether the content that makes it to the television screen is true. Although many producers claim that contestants forget about the cameras so reality comes out anyway, Couldry (2004) finds the editing policies for reality TV problematic because the production staff ends up choosing what to emphasize. Mathis (2007) adds that the editing policies may perpetuate differences of interpretation and emphasize content that was insignificant to cast members. Particularly when the cast is mostly Black and female, it is important for the show's writers and producers to examine their unconscious or conscious decisions to select segments that depict cast members in a negative and stereotypical manner.

Producers and television executives must infuse positive messages into their content that downplay materialism, sexism, and stereotypes. Without alternate perspectives, negative stereotypes targeting women retain their accepted place in American culture. Squires (2009) encourages critical communication scholars to identify and promote counter-frames and stereotypes to intervene and counteract stereotypical portrayals in popular culture. She argues that this becomes necessary especially as old discourses of colorblindness morph into celebrations of a "Postracial" millennium.

Limitations and future research

This research is not without limitations. It looked at a sample of Facebook, Twitter, and blog posts and television shows, which limits the generalizablity of this study. The extent to which scholars can extend what happens in regards to conversation and community to other social media is limited.

Future studies that build on this research might focus on how young women personally identify with the characters on the show.

An analysis of episodes of the show may help them to model positive and negative characteristics about the women. Such studies might focus on how women and girls respond to online to messages they receive in television programing using a focus group format in which participants discuss uses and gratifications for responding to blog entries and Facebook posts about such shows. Using this information as a springboard, educators must create literacy programs in which students learn that beauty; materialism and unrealistic domestic standards are not necessarily a part of "womanhood." Each woman should create her own standards of "womanhood" based on personal circumstances such as family life and cultural surroundings and live accordingly. Such portrayals foster sexist and negative cultural narratives of Black women that are hard to erase.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Study findings and implications provide needed inquiry into an emerging area of scholarship. This study offers a new perspective to IRT by adding a critical lens to help contextualize stereotypical behaviors of the *Basketball Wives*' cast, which served to help tarnish O'Neal's previously clean-cut image. Media provide historical content that researchers may use to analyze trends in the reporting of gender. Therefore, it is essential to continually analyze and address perceptions of race and gender to offer insight and solutions.

While mass media have documented many profound changes in our culture and the representations of women in the last 30 or so years, many of these advancements do not transfer to episodes of *Basketball Wives,* which features many historical stereotypes about Black women. Such portrayals fos-

ter sexist and negative cultural narratives of Black women that are hard to erase. Alternative portrayals can help change such misconceptions.

Study findings and implications are important as perceptions and stereotypes often become the dominant viewpoint. While censorship is undesirable, worth considering is creating literacy programs that encourage adolescents to identify and seek positive, accurate messages. It is hoped that this study provides a stepping-stone for future research, possibly leading to literacy programs. We implore producers and television executives to take responsibility for the content of such shows. They must think of creative tactics to infuse positive messages in their content that downplay materialism, sexism, and colorism and promote unity, intellect, and healing. While not as controversial, such portrayals might go a long way in helping uplift women, in general, and Black women in particular.

Social Media and Reality TV IRT

Study findings indicate reality television and social media provide a viable platform for celebrities to repair a tarnished image even when a person is guilty by association. The fighting of the women on the show and O'Neal's constant lack of involvement or intervention into the fights caused people to see the show as reinforcing negative stereotypes. It also gave O'Neal the image of someone acting innocent but as the producer, ultimately responsible for the show's content. Readers responded wholeheartedly. Viewers wrote comments as if they were personal acquaintances of the women. Many of the posts disparaged the direction of the show and encouraged the women to change.

During Season 4, O'Neal took responsibility for the show's negative portrayals and

became proactive in cleaning up her image and those of her cast members. O'Neal's image repair methods are unique in that she did not display the stereotypes displayed on the show; however, she became connected to them because of her cast members. Study findings indicate O'Neal used bolstering, transcendence, reducing offensiveness, minimizing, attacking accusers, compensation, corrective action and mortification. Shaunie's image repair is different from that of the subjects of past image repair studies because for the most part her tactics were used on her own safe platforms (the show, the reunion, Twitter, and Facebook) and were openly accessible to those who watch the show.

From the results, it seems that the social media outlets of Twitter and Facebook were crucial in Shaunie getting her message out to her fans and viewers. They helped to eliminate the middleman and allowed her to communicate directly with her followers. Study findings indicate episodes of a reality TV show and social media may provide viable platforms for a celebrity to repair his or her tarnished image; however, tactics must be authentic and consistent. Demonstrating the dual nature of social media uses, O'Neal utilized her social media to explain and minimize her actions, while viewers used the same platforms to discuss her perceived lack of control and the show's negative stereotyping of women of color. By the end of Season 4, it was apparent that while O'Neal successfully used on-air and online platforms to disseminate positive messages, viewers did not always find her image repair tactics convincing. This is a critical advancement in image repair and no doubt public figures, celebrities, and even average citizens can use social media in instances where image repair is needed. ∎

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