

# Jewish *Antapologia* in Response to Mel Gibson's Multiple Attempts at Absolution



*Kevin A. Stein*

*Assistant Professor of Communication  
Southern Utah University  
stein@suu.edu*

When individuals are forced to account for harmful behaviors, they typically seek absolution from their offensive actions by attempting to lessen their own level of responsibility or by lessening the significance of the harm caused. These strategies are illustrated in a number of academic studies highlighting the role of rhetoric in repairing damage to image. However, few studies attempt to draw distinctions between different types of wrongful behaviors and the likelihood that the success of an account is ultimately dependant on the significance of the damage done. This essay explores the possibility that hate speech may require a unique combination of strategies that might be ineffective for other kinds of harmful acts. Although it is difficult to make comparisons between negative behaviors, many people find racist or discriminatory acts to be more offensive than acts that do not denigrate the character of others, even when such behaviors may be illegal. Is it possible that hateful utterances are so reprehensible that any strategies utilized to counteract their effects are rendered meaningless?

Benoit and Drew<sup>1</sup> measured perceptions of the effectiveness of various image repair strategies and argued that mortification (“I am responsible”) and corrective action (“I will take steps to fix this”) are viewed as the most appropriate strategies in responding to an attack and that barring any potential legal problems that may result, these strategies are consistently effective in varying contexts. However, rarely are discussions of the effectiveness of Benoit’s strategies situated within the context of hate speech, which may create harm too significant to repair with any rhetorical approach.



In order to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of *apologia* designed to counteract hateful utterances, this essay examines the Jewish community’s response to Mel Gibson’s racist comments directed at police officers in Malibu, California. This incident serves as a useful case study for analyzing discourse in response to *apologia*. Typically, scholars will critically examine the persuasive strategies used during the stages of the attack and the persuasive defense following the attack.<sup>2</sup> I would

argue that a better method of assessing the effectiveness of *apologia* is to critically examine the rhetoric in response to the image repair. Halford Ryan<sup>3</sup> argues that self-defense discourse involves a speech set of *kategoria* and *apologia* (attack and defense) and that any critical examination of the *apologia* discourse requires exploration of the attack preceding it. Stein<sup>4</sup> argues that Ryan ignores a third element which he calls *antapologia* (response to *apologia*). The term *antapologia* comes from the term “antapology,” which has been used in English literature to reflect a response to an apology. However, because the term apology is often used to reflect mortification strategies rather than the broader range of *apologia* strategies, the new term better reflects a response to a variety of image repair strategies.

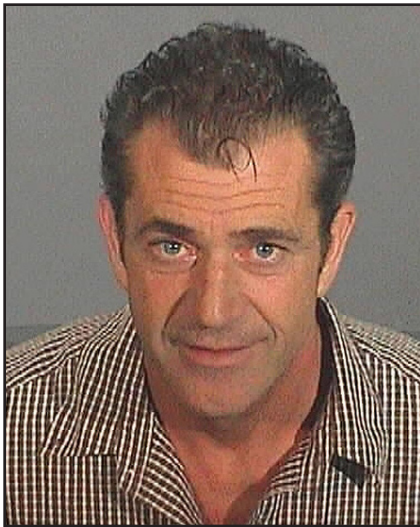
*Antapologia* is an important feature of the speech set because the speaker may choose to construct the initial image repair strategy based on what he or she perceives to be the likely response by the victim. Just as the specific arguments outlined in the attack are likely to provoke specific strategies in the apology, the arguments in the apology are likely to provoke certain types of responses. Ryan encouraged rhetorical critics to consider the two parts of the speech set together. In order to extend the speech set, while staying consistent with Ryan’s suggestion to analyze the components of the set together, this paper examines the *apologia* and *antapologia* together. What distinguishes *antapologia* from simply a follow-up instance of *kategoria* is the fact that the former is designed to be a response to the apology and the latter is designed to be a response to the initial harmful act perpetrated by the accused individual. When the discourse addresses the wrongdoer’s explanation or account of the act, it constitutes an instance of *antapologia*.



Although scholars have recognized the importance of responses to *apologia*, they merely utilize such responses as external evidence to support their assessments of the effectiveness of image repair strategies. For example, polling data and newspaper commentary are common tools for supporting a rhetorical critic's internal or subjective evaluation of image repair strategies. This essay, however, offers a critical evaluation of the *antapologia* strategies utilized by the Jewish community in response to Gibson's *apologia*. It does not utilize the Jewish voices as mere support of any assessments of Gibson's effectiveness, but argues that the Jewish discursive responses are by themselves worthy of critical analysis. The hope is that a greater critical focus on the Jewish *antapologia* will shed some light on which *apologia* strategies are most effective in repairing damage inflicted through hate speech. The structure of the essay is as follows: First, a narrative of the events leading up to Gibson's anti-Semitic remarks will be provided along with brief illustrations of the *apologia* strategies. Second, a brief summary of the literature on *apologia*, *antapologia*, and hate speech will be provided. Third, Stein's typology of *antapologia* strategies will be explained with specific illustrations. Fourth, the principle *antapologia* strategies used by the Jewish community will be described. And last, the effectiveness of the Jewish response to Gibson's attempts at absolution will be evaluated and its role in illuminating the ideal strategies, if any, to be used in accounts following communicative acts of hatred.

### Mel Gibson's Attack on the Jews

On July 28, 2006 at 3:10 a.m. famed celebrity actor Mel Gibson was pulled over for speeding along the Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu, California. Gibson was traveling at 80 miles per hour, 35 miles per hour over the legal speed limit. The police gave Gibson an alcohol breath test and a field sobriety test. They discovered that his blood alcohol level was .12, far exceeding the state's legal limit. Deputy James Mee, one of the responding officers, claimed that Gibson was irate, saying "My life is f\*\*\*\*d." The deputy then instructed Gibson that he would not use his cuffs if Gibson would cooperate. Gibson responded: "I'm not going to get in your car" and proceeded to make a mad dash toward his own car. The officers subdued Gibson, cuffed him, and placed him in the back of the police car. Gibson became even more irate and issued a series of inflammatory comments to the police. He is reported to have told the officers: "F\*\*\*\*\*g Jews. The Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world." Gibson then asked one of the officers, "Are you a Jew?" He then said to Deputy Mee, "I own Malibu" and "I will spend all of my money to get even with you." A female sergeant approached Gibson and he said to her: "What do you think you're looking at sugar tits?" Gibson was booked into the Lost Hills Sheriff's station at 4:06 a.m. He spent a few hours in lockup before being released on \$5,000 bail at 9:45 a.m. After Gibson's release, Deputy Mee claimed that his superiors in the police department asked him to submit a sanitized version of the report—one that omits the more inflammatory comments—because they felt that it would "incite Jewish hatred."



Following Mel Gibson's arrest, the fallout from his remarks was widespread. Media commentary seemed to compare the controversy surrounding Gibson's recent racial tirade with the accusations of anti-Semitism following Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*. For example, Beznican<sup>5</sup> wrote: "Accusations of an anti-Semitic rant are particularly damaging because the actor/director's blockbuster 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ* was criticized by Jewish leaders as subtly placing blame on Jews for the Crucifixion, criticism that Gibson denied." Media statements such as these did not imply one way or another whether there was merit to accusations that Gibson was "truly" anti-Semitic, but they did carry a tone that perhaps it was fairly inane for Gibson to make such remarks so soon after weathering the last firestorm of criticism. It could be argued that an attack did not need to be overtly stated within the media in order for Gibson to feel compelled to apologize. The coverage itself, which often included direct quotations from the incident, was likely enough to trigger the need for image repair.

In addition to media commentary on Gibson's arrest, ABC network canceled a development deal with Gibson for the creation of a miniseries on the Holocaust. Network executives felt that Gibson's ideologies on the Jewish people might negatively impair his ability to thoughtfully produce a documentary on the Holocaust. Surprisingly,



very few members of the Jewish community spoke out immediately following the incident. One exception is Jewish Actor Rob Schneider who attacked Gibson saying: “Even if *Apocalypto* is a gigantic smash and Mr. Gibson is quietly forgiven by Hollywood’s Power Brokers, and I was offered a lead role opposite Mel Gibson’s father (the Mad Max of Holocaust deniers), I, like Bernie Brillstein would likely have to say no.”<sup>6</sup>

Once Gibson’s antics became front page news, the actor felt compelled to issue a series of apologies. First, Gibson issued a statement to the media through his publicist. It reads in part:

I acted like a person completely out of control when I was arrested, and said things that I do not believe to be true and which are despicable. I am deeply ashamed of everything I said. Also, I take this opportunity to apologize to the deputies involved for my belligerent behavior. They have always been there for me in my community and indeed probably saved me from myself. I disgraced myself and my family with my behavior and for that I am truly sorry. I have battled with the disease of alcoholism for all of my adult life and profoundly regret my horrific relapse. I apologize for any behavior unbecoming of me in my inebriated state and have already taken necessary steps to ensure my return to health.<sup>7</sup>



Gibson used a variety of *apologia* strategies in this statement. First he used defeasibility by arguing that he was “out of control” and “inebriated.” He also used mortification by taking responsibility and arguing that he was “deeply ashamed” of his actions. Another of Gibson’s strategies was differentiation, in which he argued that although he uttered the offensive words, he does not espouse anti-Semitic beliefs.

Gibson issued another statement a few days after the first, this time directly to the Jewish community. He argued: “There is no excuse, nor should there be any tolerance, for anyone who thinks or expresses any kind of anti-Semitic remark. I want to apologize specifically to everyone in the Jewish community for the vitriolic and harmful words that I said to a law enforcement officer the night I was arrested on a DUI charge.”<sup>8</sup> In this segment, Gibson again takes responsibility for his actions. However, in other parts of his statement, he reiterates the argument that he was out of control and that he does not believe the things he said to the police. In addition to defeasibility, mortification, and



differentiation, Gibson also utilized the strategy of corrective action, by claiming he would seek the input of Jewish leaders in how to perpetuate a process of healing: “I am in the process of understanding where those vicious words came from during that drunken display, and I am asking the Jewish community, whom I have personally offended, to help me on my journey through recovery. Again, I am reaching out to the Jewish community for its help.”<sup>9</sup> This strategy differs slightly from other examples of corrective action in the literature because Gibson does not attempt to fix the damage that was done. He merely wants to create a dialogue that would spur the healing process.

After issuing the above statements, Gibson did not offer another formal apology for nearly 2 ½ months, when he would appear on Good Morning America. Diane Sawyer asked Gibson a series of questions about the incident, to which Gibson stayed with his initial strategies. He again argued that he was “a little overwrought,” under “too much pressure,” and “impaired” due to the alcohol. Gibson continued to argue that he was “ashamed” of what he had said and “I’m not that. That’s not who I am.”<sup>10</sup> Gibson’s strategies were consistent throughout his various media appearances [Refer to Table 1]. He would appear on the *Tonight Show*, but only discussed the incident in a humorous way. For example, Jay Leno asked Gibson why he was wearing a suit, to which Gibson replied “These are my defendant clothes.” At this point, the actor was merely making his rounds to plug his latest film *Apocalypto* and not so much to comment on his other troubles.



Table 1: Table 1: Gibson's *Apologia* (image repair) strategies\*

Strategy	Key Characteristic	Gibson's <i>Apologia</i>
Defeasibility	Accused claims a lack of information/control	1) I acted like a person completely out of control. 2) I was in an inebriated state.
Differentiation	Accused claims the act was less offensive than similar acts	I used offensive words, but I do not espouse anti-Semitism.
Mortification	Accused expresses regret or sorrow for the wrongful act	1) I feel ashamed. 2) I am deeply sorry.
Corrective Action	Accused takes steps to prevent recurrence of the problem	1) I have taken steps to ensure my own health. 2) I will meet with members of the Jewish community for healing.

\*Portions of this table can be found in Blaney & Benoit<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish community's response to Gibson's multiple apologies was one of guarded acceptance. The specific comments made by the primary Jewish organizations will not be reviewed in detail here because the analysis section of the essay will seek to critically examine these responses utilizing a structured typology of *antapologia* strategies (discursive responses to *apologia*).

## Previous Research on Hate Speech and *Antapologia*

There is an extensive amount of literature on hate speech and *apologia*, but far fewer studies on the use of *antapologia* because the development of this area is in its theoretical infancy. The following review will very briefly describe the key areas of related literature.

### *Hate Speech Literature*

To begin, much of the research on hate speech seems to focus on three areas: 1) Literature that seeks to establish the definitional parameters of hate speech by identifying what constitutes this type of communication; 2) Literature that examines possible solutions to the problems posed by regulating hate speech; 3) Research that explores the overall physiological and psychological harms caused by hate speech.

Much of the literature establishing the definitional parameters of hate speech is found in books published by academic presses. For example, many of these publications argue broadly that hate speech consists of racial epithets, slurs, or other prejudicial remarks.<sup>11</sup> Tedford and Herbeck<sup>12</sup> provide more specific parameters. They argue that for language to be considered "hate speech," it must contain the following elements: first, the message must express the idea that one race is inferior to another race; second, the statements must be directed toward a group of people who are "historically oppressed;" third, the language must be "persecutorial, hateful, and degrading." Typically, the purpose of establishing specific definitions of hate speech is generally to provide guidelines for the courts to regulate it. If they cannot identify it, they will have difficulty controlling it. Although research establishing a definition of hate speech seems to dominate much of the research, several studies focus on other elements of hate speech such as the regulation of hate speech<sup>13</sup> and the physiological and psychological of effects experiences by persons victimized by hate speech.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, the literature on hate speech is somewhat limited in its ability to illuminate important rhetorical features of the Jewish response to Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic rant. Certainly, the literature is effective in establishing the harms created by hate speech and the need for further dialogue regarding the regulation of hate speech. However, it does little to explain what makes hate speech such a difficult act to account for. Perhaps, the fact that people will generally attribute the motives behind such rhetoric as enduring and not situational would prevent the offender from

utilizing many of the most common *apologia* strategies. Additionally, racial slurs may carry a much greater context by comparison than many other offensive acts, calling for a much deeper and far reaching apology than would be needed for more spontaneous and externally caused offenses.

## Antapologia

The literature on *antapologia* (response to *apologia*) is somewhat limited because the typology of discursive responses to *apologia* has only been applied in a few contexts. The typology was initially developed by Stein,<sup>15</sup> who created the framework using grounded theory, specifically the method of constant comparison offered by Glaser and Strauss. The typology was used initially to explain the discursive responses of the Soviet Union in reaction to U.S. *apologia* for the crash of a U-2 surveillance plane that ventured deep into sovereign Russian territory.<sup>16</sup> Stein, Larson, and Grady<sup>17</sup> also utilized the typology of *antapologia* strategies as they sought to critically examine the newspapers' responses to President Bush's *apologia* following the Hurricane Katrina disaster.<sup>18</sup> And more recently, Turman, Stein, and Barton<sup>19</sup> examined the *antapologia* strategies utilized by bloggers (web loggers) in response to French soccer player Zinedine Zidane's *apologia* following his headbutt to the chest of Italian player Marco Materazzi during the 2006 World Cup tournament.<sup>20</sup> Many of the same *antapologia* strategies are used in these three cases, attesting to the possibility that a new genre of criticism could emerge from continued exploration of *antapologia* discourse in new and unique contexts.



Table 2: *Antapologia* Strategies

Strategy	Key Characteristic	Example
<i>Strengthening the kategoria</i>		
Identify concessions	Shows what the <i>apologia</i> admits to	The man admitted the gun used in the robbery was his
Refine the attack	Modifies attack to make it stronger	You didn't just damage my windshield, as I initially said, but also the headlights
<i>Weakening the apologia</i>		
<i>Apologia</i> is untrue	Part of the account is untrue	He denied that he was in the room at the time, but video surveillance proves otherwise
Contradicted previous <i>apologia</i> strategies	Current strategies are not consistent with previous strategies	He denied that he punched the man, but later argued he was provoked
<i>Apologia</i> does not take adequate responsibility	<i>Apologia</i> does not meet the accuser's demands	We will accept nothing short of an apology, yet they continue to evade responsibility
<i>Apologia</i> reflects character flaws of the accused	<i>Apologia</i> highlights negative personal traits of the accused	Only a man devoid of morals would try to blame the victim's family
Defense against attacks made in the <i>apologia</i>	Accuser responds to attacks made in the <i>apologia</i> (attack the accuser)	She says the attack is motivated by greed, but I'm simply looking for justice
Harm will come from <i>apologia</i> itself	The discourse itself causes harm in addition to the initial act	His insincere apology sets a bad example to the junior senators
Arguing motive behind the <i>apologia</i>	Accuser argues that there are negative motivations behind the <i>apologia</i>	You are only admitting responsibility because you're staff told you to say this.
Arguing that the <i>apologia</i> mirrors earlier speeches and/or events	The accuser says that the <i>apologia</i> is comparable to earlier accounts.	You always say you're on a trip whenever you plan to meet up with your girlfriend.

## Method

As stated previously, Stein<sup>21</sup> explored the characteristics of the *antapologia* in the 1960 U-2 incident and developed a list of strategies using grounded (emergent) theory, specifically the method of constant comparison. This method is designed to build categories inductively through a process of open coding rather than approaching a rhetorical artifact deductively or with a preconceived notion of what will be found. From his analysis, several categories emerged. According to the author, there are two primary functions of *antapologia* discourse—one strengthens the initial attack and the other weakens the *apologia* offered by the accused. The specific strategies utilized to enhance these two functions can be found in Table 2, which contains an expanded typology of all of the *antapologia* strategies.

## Texts used in the Analysis

In doing this analysis, I looked at statements from the primary national Jewish organizations. Responses were issued by the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Defense League, and the Anti-Defamation League. Statements were not made by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Jewish Women International, and the National Council of Jewish Women. The American Jewish Committee issued its only comments on August 1, 2006, the day after Gibson provided his first apology. The Jewish Defense League posted to its web site an open letter to Gibson on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Anti-Defamation League issued more statements than any other Jewish organization. The ADL National Director, Abraham H. Foxman, issued a statement on August 1<sup>st</sup>, another on August 4<sup>th</sup>, and a third on October 12<sup>th</sup>, following Gibson's televised interview with *Good Morning America's* Diane Sawyer. It was fairly easy to find *antapologia* discourse in this case study because the Jewish community remained relatively quiet prior to Gibson's apology. Therefore, most of the Jewish rhetoric involving the incident was a direct reply to the actor's attempts at absolution.

### Jewish *Antapologia* in Response to Gibson's *Apologia*

The texts from the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Defense League, and the Anti-Defamation League reveal a variety of *antapologia* strategies in responding to Mel Gibson's *apologia*. Some of the strategies are present in the original typology and others are unique to the events surrounding Gibson's tirade. This attests to some extent that the typology may be useful in examining *antapologia* discourse in contexts of differing characteristics. The initial typology suggests that there are two functions of *antapologia*. One is to strengthen the attack and the other is to weaken the *apologia*. These primary functions differed slightly in this study because the Jewish community did not outwardly attack Gibson following his anti-Semitic remarks. In the previous analyses of *antapologia* in the Soviet and Chinese spy plane incidents and the Hurricane Katrina disaster, the parties primarily responsible for issuing the attack were also typically the ones involved in responding to the *apologia*. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the rhetoric of *kategoria* (attack), *apologia* (defense), and *antapologia* (response to *apologia*) may all take place within different groups or individuals, depending on the specific context in focus. In response to Gibson's *apologia*, the Jewish community utilized one strategy to strengthen the attack (although they did not levy the initial attack), choosing to point out concessions made in Gibson's apology. Jewish organizations used three strategies to weaken Gibson's *apologia*. They argued that the *apologia* was incomplete, that harm would come from the *apologia* itself, that there existed clear motive behind the *apologia*.



#### *Pointing Out Concessions in the Apologia*

In several cases, the member of Jewish organizations highlighted parts of Gibson's *apologia* that made particular concessions. Abraham H. Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, argued in his August 1<sup>st</sup> statement: "This is the apology we sought and requested. We are glad that Mel Gibson has finally owned up to the fact that he made anti-Semitic remarks, and his apology sounds sincere. We welcome his efforts to repair the damage he has caused, to reach out to the Jewish community, and to seek help."<sup>22</sup> In this statement, Foxman seems to be satisfied with Gibson's initial release to the press and is clear in pointing out that Gibson's initial rhetorical strategy was to use mortification, taking full responsibility for his racist remarks. Foxman backpedals a bit in his August 2<sup>nd</sup> statement arguing: "I'm a little skeptical—we've been used as a P.R. tool before. But at this stage, we'll take the high road and accept Mel Gibson's apology at face value."<sup>23</sup> The ADL director again reiterates the point that Gibson had in fact apologized for his anti-Semitic words. Pointing out concessions in the *apologia* serves to strengthen the initial



attack, even though the Jewish community was not responsible for levying the attack. With the media frenzy following Gibson's run-in with the police, it is difficult to determine who offered the most vehement criticisms of the actor. However, the negative publicity alone likely compelled Gibson's attempt at image repair.

### *Arguing the Apologia is Incomplete*

Several strategies were used by Jewish organizations to weaken Gibson's overall *apologia*. One of these strategies was to argue that the actor's words were insufficient to absolve him of guilt. For example, the American Jewish Committee issued the following statement on August 1<sup>st</sup>:

The American Jewish Committee welcomes Mel Gibson's apology to the Jewish community, but true contrition must stand the test of time. In the Jewish tradition, we are very receptive of repentance, but complete repentance is measured by actions, not just words, over time. Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic tirade when arrested for DUI last weekend was both outrageous and hurtful. While we appreciate his statement of apology, more importantly, we look forward in the months and years ahead to Gibson matching his contrition with his own deeds.<sup>24</sup>

The AJC statement indicates that although they appreciate Gibson's willingness to apologize, words alone cannot repair his image. His deeds that follow must match the sincerity of his words. The Jewish Defense League also argued Gibson's *apologia* was incomplete in an open letter to the actor on its web site. The August 2<sup>nd</sup> response was somewhat more inflammatory than the responses of other Jewish organizations: "The Jewish Defense League suggests two courses of action for you. If you wish to be a Jew-hater, come out and forthrightly articulate your true beliefs. There is no need to conceal these beliefs from Hollywood for fear of offending Hollywood Jews, since you've thoroughly ruined your reputation among them anyway."<sup>25</sup> In this passage, the JDL claims that Gibson did not go far enough in admitting the espousal of anti-Semitic beliefs. The organization's attitude is that statements of shame and remorse are not enough to separate Gibson from the hateful ideologies expressed in his comments to the Malibu police. Arguments that Gibson's *apologia* was insufficient were also a recurring theme in the three statements by the Anti-Defamation League. In its August 1<sup>st</sup> release, Foxman argued: "Once he [Gibson] completes his rehabilitation for alcohol abuse, we will be ready and willing to help him with his second rehabilitation to combat this disease of prejudice."<sup>26</sup> The ADL implies that rehabilitation for alcohol abuse is only a partial corrective action and that true rehabilitation will require a focus on alleviating his prejudicial attitudes toward the Jewish people. In the ADL's August 2<sup>nd</sup> statement, Foxman again argued the apology was incomplete:

I'm still skeptical because these are still words from his handlers—the same people who brought you the first statement that didn't acknowledge his anti-Semitism. I'd like to hear from the man himself. These words are still from his handlers—Mel Gibson's words in the police blotter, we know those are from him.<sup>27</sup>

This statement differs slightly from Foxman's statement the day before. This time, he does not simply argue Gibson corrective actions are insufficient, but that the entire *apologia* is incomplete because it does not represent Gibson's words, but rather his public relations staff. Following the actor's appearance on *Good Morning America*, the ADL made its final argument about the incompleteness of Gibson's apology: "While there is an element of denial in his comments when he attributes anti-Semitic outburst to the alcohol, Gibson seems remorseful and ashamed of what he said during his arrest. He's asking the right questions of himself, which is a first step on the road to recovery from prejudice."<sup>28</sup> In claiming that Gibson has taken his "first steps," the organization is



implying that there are certainly many more steps to take before Gibson can fully repair the damage he has done. The ADL also points out that the sincerity of Gibson's apology is incomplete because he inserts subtle denials about his alcohol-induced state of mind having some impact on the anti-Semitic words he uttered to police. Arguments about the insufficiency of the *apologia* weaken it by illustrating specific ways in which the offender failed to completely account for the harmful act.

### ***Attributing Motive to the Apologia***

Another strategy for weakening the *apologia* is to attribute motive for it. Typically, those utilizing *antapologia*



strategies will claim that there are negative motivations driving the image repair efforts. It seems possible that individuals responding to a given *apologia* could attribute positive motives to an accused person's account of his or her behavior, but this has yet to happen in any of the contexts examined thus far. This strategy was not represented too frequently in the Jewish responses to Gibson's *apologia*, although the strategy was present in several of the statements. For example, the Jewish Defense League argued: "Since that embarrassing slip-up [Gibson's anti-Semitic remarks to Malibu police], you've issued two apologies, the second of which addresses the Jewish people directly. Your handlers obviously made you issue the second apology."<sup>29</sup> This statement claims that Gibson did not have an altruistic motive for directly apologizing to the Jewish people, but rather he was instructed to do

so by "handlers" interested in giving the fiasco a more positive spin.

### ***Arguing that Harm will Come from the Apologia Itself***

Other instances of *antapologia* argued that the *apologia* itself causes harm. This is an interesting strategy because it elevates the impact of communication and argues that rhetoric in defense of a harmful act can be just as damaging, if not more damaging, than the harmful act itself. Only one instance of this strategy occurred in the Jewish *antapologia*, although the strategy has been used frequently in other contexts. Following Mel Gibson's *apologia*, the Jewish Defense League provided the following statement:

The big problem is, Mel, your apologies are not convincing. They simply do not ring true. And in our eyes, all the false apologies and vehement denials of your true beliefs do a greater disservice to the Jewish community than if you were to simply confess proudly to those reprehensible views. Indeed, we would have greater respect for you if you were honest about hating us.<sup>30</sup>

What makes the above statement particularly interesting is that the JDL implies that Gibson's denials of his "true beliefs" are actually more offensive and/or harmful to the Jewish community than the blatant admission of anti-Semitic views. This strategy functions to weaken Gibson's *apologia* by arguing that not only does it fail to absolve him of guilt, but is actually counterproductive to the goal of the *apologia*, which is image repair.

## **Discussion**

Now that the primary *antapologia* strategies used by the Jewish community have been described, it is important

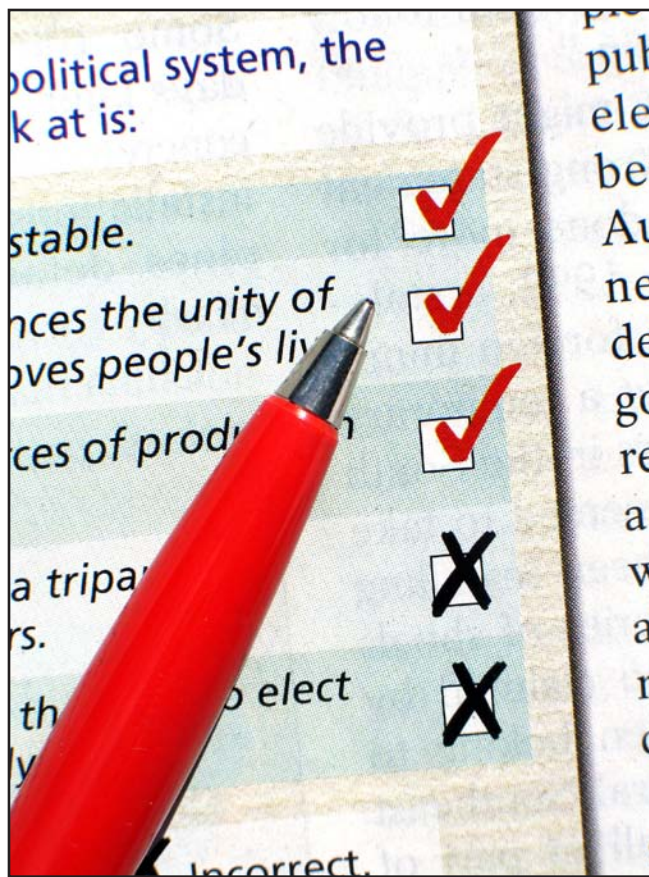
to assess the effectiveness of the strategies and to determine the potential theoretical contributions of the study. First, I will evaluate the effectiveness of the specific *antapologia* strategies utilizing primarily internal (textual) evidence to support the arguments. Second, I will briefly assess the effectiveness of Gibson's *apologia* as manifest in the *antapologia* discourse by utilizing public opinion polls as external evidence to support the arguments. Third, I will explore the connection between hate speech, *apologia*, and *antapologia* and attempt to determine how the nature of hate speech offenses may impact the types of strategies utilized in the *apologia* and *antapologia*. And last, I will identify some of the possible theoretical contributions of the study.

To begin, I would argue that the *antapologia* strategies utilized by the Jewish organizations in response to Gibson's multiple attempts at absolution were plausible and consistent, however, the effects of the discourse on the public may be less certain. By pointing out concessions in the actor's *apologia*, the Jewish groups drew attention to Gibson's admission of a highly offensive act. Once the concession was out there, it would have been difficult for Gibson to backtrack and attempt other contradictory *apologia* strategies, such as denial and shifting blame. This option was probably not available to him anyway because of the highly publicized nature of the incident, but it was still an effective strategy for the Jewish community to identify the admissions of guilt that were solicited. Another sound *antapologia* strategy was to argue that the *apologia* was incomplete. The Jewish organizations argued that they appreciated Gibson's admissions, but were unwilling to concede that the actor was finished in repairing his standing with the Jewish community. The use of this strategy would make it difficult for Gibson to fix the damage in merely a few press releases and a single televised interview. He would have to provide years of good behavior in order to show that his antecedent behaviors matched the sincerity of his apologetic statements. It was also a well-conceived strategy for the Jewish organizations to argue that harm itself would come from the *apologia*. This strategy may have weakened Gibson's *apologia* by showing that an accused person reaching for the most appropriate strategies could actually make the damage worse than it was prior to the *apologia*. This certainly attests to the power of language to not only be able to repair damage to image, but to also worsen the initial damage. The last strategy of attributing motive to the *apologia* was an effective *antapologia* strategy because it called into question Gibson's general level of sincerity, but it also expressed skepticism that the actor had ownership over his own words. The literature reveals that mortification is generally perceived to be an effective image repair strategy. Obviously, this assumes that a person sincerely takes responsibility for an offense. If there is language in the account that detracts from that sincerity, the strategy could fail to repair the damage. Additionally, an accused individual may not be perceived as taking responsibility if the discourse of the apology was created by a surrogate or if the overall *apologia* strategies were orchestrated by someone other than the offender.

The effectiveness of the Jewish community's *antapologia* cannot be evaluated using external evidence. Often, this kind of evidence is available in the form of public opinion polls and/or newspaper commentary and is used to evaluate the effectiveness of *apologia*, but newspapers generally do not comment on the quality of discourse in response to an apology. We are left to make assumptions about the quality of the *antapologia* based on our internal and sometimes subjective evaluations of the discourse itself. The term "internal evidence" does imply, however, that the process is not wholly subjective, but rather there exists textual evidence to support pragmatic claims about the effectiveness of the *antapologia*. It is one thing to determine whether the strategies carried the potential to strengthen the attack or to weaken the *apologia*, however, it is difficult to argue that the *apologia* was rendered ineffective because the Jewish community identified weakness in Gibson's account of his behavior. There are several factors that could have contributed to a successful or failed *apologia* attempt. For one, the nature of Gibson's offense may have been so reprehensible that no accounting strategy could have absolved him of guilt. Additionally, even though Gibson directed his apology to the Jewish community, he had several audiences that could influence his future livelihood—i.e. the Hollywood players who would negotiate future film deals with him and the audiences who would decide whether or not to see his movies. And lastly, the general soundness of Gibson's image repair strategies could affect the outcome of his *apologia* attempts.

Despite the Jewish community's somewhat skeptical response to Gibson's *apologia*, the public generally had a favorable attitude toward the actor following his public apologies. In a public opinion poll taken five days after Gibson's first statement, participants were asked if they thought Mel Gibson was anti-Semitic or prejudiced against





Jews. The majority (52%) felt that Gibson was not anti-Semitic, whereas 24 % had no opinion and 23% felt the actor was anti-Semitic.<sup>31</sup> In a public opinion poll conducted on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 11 days after Gibson's first press release, participants were asked which part of the Mel Gibson incident they thought was the most offensive. The majority (50%) felt that the drunk driving was the worst part of the incident, while only 16% thought that Gibson's comments about the Jews were the worst part.<sup>32</sup> This may be a better indication of the public's general attitudes about anti-Semitism and not necessarily a reflection of how successful was Gibson's *apologia*. Combined, these polls may reveal that either Gibson was successful in his image repair attempts or that the public does not care if he is anti-Semitic. Again, however, this only accounts for one audience (the public) and does not reflect the success of his image repair with Jewish organizations, whose *antapologia* discourse reveals a different attitude toward Gibson's *apologia*. In terms of Gibson's success with fellow Hollywood players, it is more difficult to determine. There is no discourse to suggest whether Gibson's *apologia* was effective in repairing his image with Hollywood or that it was even threatened to begin with. The only evidence to suggest things may not be smooth with other actors, producers, and directors was Gibson's near shutout from many of the potential academy award nominations for his film *Apocalypto*. The film was honored in a couple of

technical categories, but was excluded from all of the acting races, the best director category, and the best picture category. Perhaps it was a reflection of Gibson's current popularity in Hollywood or perhaps the movie simply was not as artistically well-received as he had hoped. Even if the *antapologia* offered by the Jewish community was not successful in discrediting Gibson's *apologia* in the eyes of the general public, it is still reasonable to argue that the *antapologia* strategies were effective simply because they represented well-constructed arguments. The Jewish community's discourse was pragmatic and functioned to illuminate portions of Gibson's *apologia* that were particularly weak. In some ways, this rhetoric should be judged as sound despite certain ineffectual outcomes of the *apologia* that may result from public apathy toward anti-Semitism or drunk driving.

So, how does the nature of hate speech influence the kinds of *apologia* and *antapologia* strategies that follow? Much of the literature examines a variety of other kinds of behaviors such as violence (Tonya Harding), sexual affairs (Gary Hart), and deception (Bill Clinton). Hate speech accounts illustrate that language can have powerfully harmful effects that may be comparable to other negative behaviors. The hate speech literature suggests that hate speech can evoke a trauma similar to those experienced by victims of rape, domestic violence, assault, and robbery. The cliché that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is obviously categorically false. Hate speech can not only inflict irreparable harm, but individuals publicly spotlighted for such behavior must utilize effective image repair strategies to reestablish a positive face. Although definitions of hate speech may be too ambiguous at this point for legal regulation to take place, current definitions might give us an idea of the types of hate speech that necessitate accounting behavior. Characteristics of hate speech such as the targeting of immutable or unchanging characteristics and the placing of hate in the larger context of prejudice may be precisely those features of hate speech that make it offensive enough to warrant *apologia* strategies.



I am hopeful that this study adds to the previous studies examining discursive responses to *apologia* and begins to establish *antapologia* as an important component of the three-part speech set. Ryan<sup>33</sup> claimed that there are essentially two parts of *apologia* discourse (*kategoria* and *apologia*). Ryan is correct in his claim that a rhetorical critic has to explore elements of the attack and defense, but he does not extend the speech set far enough to include discursive responses to *apologia*. *Antapologia* is as integrally connected to the *apologia* as the *apologia* is linked to the *kategoria*. This study further establishes the value of critically examining *antapologia* discourse. Future studies should examine this type of discourse in various contexts in order to determine whether a future genre of criticism is emerging.



The Supreme Court, in cases such as *R.A.V. v. St. Paul*, have ruled against content-discrimination—meaning laws cannot prevent people from speaking out on topics such as race, color, and religion. However, one thing we can learn from this incident is that even though hate speech is currently legally protected and not well regulated, it is certainly not a freedom available to people seeking to preserve a positive image. Hate speech can cost a person significant image damage and create the conditions for strategic *apologia*. Whether the harmful behavior will generate public outrage or apathy depends on the specific context, degree of fame or perhaps how many crowd-pleasing movies the accused has made.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>William L. Benoit and Shirley Drew, "Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Image Restoration Strategies," *Communication Reports* 45 (1997): 153-163.
- <sup>2</sup>William L. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).
- <sup>3</sup>Halford Ross Ryan, "Kategoria and Apologia: On their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 256-261.
- <sup>4</sup>Kevin A. Stein, "Apologia, Antapologia and the 1960 Soviet U-2 Incident," *Communication Studies* 59 (2008): 19-34.
- <sup>5</sup>Anthony Beznican, "Gibson Apologizes for Despicable Acts," *USA Today*, p. 1D, April 1, 2006.
- <sup>6</sup>Rob Schneider's open letter to the Hollywood community, "Defamer," <http://defamer.gawker.com/191949/rob-schneider-takes-on-mel-gibson-to-plug-new-movie-in-variety> (January 3, 2007).
- <sup>7</sup>Gibson's anti-Semitic tirade—alleged cover-up, "TMZ," <http://www.tMZ.com/2006/07/28/gibsons-anti-semitic-tirade-alleged-cover-up/> (January 3, 2007).
- <sup>8</sup>Mel Gibson's apology to the Jewish community, "Anti-Defamation League," [http://www.adl.org/main\\_Anti\\_Semitism\\_Domestic/gibson\\_apology\\_20060801.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Anti_Semitism_Domestic/gibson_apology_20060801.htm) (January 3, 2007).
- <sup>9</sup>Mel Gibson's apology to the Jewish community, "Anti-Defamation League," [http://www.adl.org/main\\_Anti\\_Semitism\\_Domestic/gibson\\_apology\\_20060801.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Anti_Semitism_Domestic/gibson_apology_20060801.htm) (January 3, 2007).
- <sup>10</sup>Diane Sawyer interviews Mel Gibson on *Good Morning America*, "ABC transcripts" 13 October 2006 (Lexis-Nexis Academic).
- <sup>11</sup>Douglas M. Fraleigh and Joseph F. Tuman, *Freedom of Speech in the Marketplace of Ideas* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997).
- <sup>12</sup>Thomas L. Tedford and Dale A. Herbeck, *Freedom of Speech in the United States* (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2001).
- <sup>13</sup>Irene Nemes that first amendment principles often preclude the censorship of hate speech, particularly speech contain on the internet. However, the author also identifies arguments asserting that hate speech silences the voices of minorities which should be protected under international human rights laws. Essentially, the article establishes the polarity on this issue and claims that a consensus on appropriate regulation of hate on the internet is likely very elusive ("Regulating Hate Speech in Cyberspace: Issues of Desirability and Efficacy," *Information and Communication Technology Law* 11, 2002, 193-220). Jennifer L. Lambe wanted to determine in her 2004 article, "Who wants to censor pornography and hate speech," if certain demographic characteristics would influence people's general attitudes toward the regulation of hate speech. She found that younger people, women, and lower educated individuals were all more willing to censor hate speech than their counterparts.
- <sup>14</sup>Other studies examine the perceptions of individuals victimized by hate speech. Leets wanted to determine victims' perceptions and responses to anti-Semitism and anti-gay speech. She found that victims of hate speech experience the same level of physiological and psychological trauma present in other horrible experiences such as rape, burglary, domestic violence, assault, robbery. She also discovered that victims of hate speech felt that the motives behind the attacks were enduring and not situational and would typically respond very passively to overt act of hate ("Experiencing hate speech," *Journal of Social Issues* 58, 2002, 341-361). Additional literature also supports the negative effects of hate speech. Laura Beth Nielson claims that hate speech can have a variety of subtle affects such as anger and fear ("Subtle, pervasive, harmful: Racist and sexist remarks in public as hate speech," *Journal of Social Issues* 58, 2002, 265-281). Douglas M. Fraleigh and Joseph F. Tuman highlight more substantial effects. They argue that hate speech is harmful because it targets immutable characteristics of the victim, it triggers self-hatred, it spurs physiological problems such as high blood pressure from either fear or the restraint of anger, and it often occurs in the broader context of prejudice. One cannot burn a cross on someone's lawn without forcing a recall of the historical events that give the symbolic act meaning (*Freedom of Speech in the Marketplace of Ideas*, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997).
- <sup>15</sup>Kevin A. Stein, "Apologia, Antapologia and the 1960 Soviet U-2 Incident," *Communication Studies* 59 (2008): 19-34.
- <sup>16</sup>Stein identified several *antapologia* strategies used by the Soviets—some of them were designed to strengthen their original attack and others were designed to weaken U.S. *apologia*. The key arguments included statements questioning the accuracy of the U.S. account that a "weather plane" had accidentally strayed 2,000 kilometers into Soviet territory and assertions that the deceptive *apologia* had done more harm to bilateral relations between the two nations than the physical violation of the state sovereignty of the U.S.S.R.
- <sup>17</sup>Kevin A. Stein, Suzanne Larson, and Lionel Arthur Grady, "Antapologia Arguments During the Hurricane Katrina Disaster," *Published in the Conference Proceedings of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation* (2008).
- <sup>18</sup>The authors argued that many journalists questioned the overall sincerity of Bush's apology, identified moments when Bush had admitted responsibility, and made comparisons between the Bush's post-Katrina and post-9/11 speeches.
- <sup>19</sup>Paul D. Turman, Kevin A. Stein, and Matthew H. Barton, "The Voice of the Fan: *Apologia, Antapologia*, and the 2006 World Cup Controversy," in *Sports Mania: Essays on Fandom and the Media in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Lawrence W. Hugenberg, Paul M. Haridakis, and Adam C. Earnhardt (Oxford University Press, 2008).
- <sup>20</sup>In response to Zidane's explanation that he had been "provoked" by comments about his mother and sister, bloggers argued that a real role



model would have taken responsibility, that Zidane was coached to offer a specific explanation, and that his indications of “regret” were not sufficient to absolve him of guilt.

<sup>21</sup>Kevin A. Stein, “*Apologia, Antapologia* and the 1960 Soviet U-2 Incident,” *Communication Studies* 59 (2008): 19-34.

<sup>22</sup>ADL welcomes Mel Gibson’s apology to the Jewish community, “Anti-Defamation League,” [http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS\\_12/4862\\_12.htm](http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS_12/4862_12.htm) (January 3, 2007).

<sup>23</sup>Mel Gibson’s apology to the Jewish community, “Anti-Defamation League,” [http://www.adl.org/main\\_Anti\\_Semitism\\_Domestic/gibson\\_apology\\_20060801.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Anti_Semitism_Domestic/gibson_apology_20060801.htm) (January 3, 2007).

<sup>24</sup>AJC comments on Mel Gibson apology, “Anti-Defamation League,” Mel Gibson’s apology to the Jewish community, “Anti-Defamation League,” [http://www.adl.org/main\\_Anti\\_Semitism\\_Domestic/gibson\\_apology\\_20060801.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Anti_Semitism_Domestic/gibson_apology_20060801.htm) (January 3, 2007).

<sup>25</sup>Rob Schneider’s open letter to the Hollywood community, “Defamer,” <http://defamer.gawker.com/191949/rob-schneider-takes-on-mel-gibson-to-plug-new-movie-in-variety> (January 3, 2007).

<sup>26</sup>ADL welcomes Mel Gibson’s apology to the Jewish community, “Anti-Defamation League,” [http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS\\_12/4862\\_12.htm](http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS_12/4862_12.htm) (January 3, 2007).

<sup>27</sup>Mel Gibson’s apology to the Jewish community, “Anti-Defamation League,” [http://www.adl.org/main\\_Anti\\_Semitism\\_Domestic/gibson\\_apology\\_20060801.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Anti_Semitism_Domestic/gibson_apology_20060801.htm) (January 3, 2007).

<sup>28</sup>Mel Gibson Takes, 2006

<sup>29</sup>Rob Schneider’s open letter to the Hollywood community, “Defamer,” <http://defamer.gawker.com/191949/rob-schneider-takes-on-mel-gibson-to-plug-new-movie-in-variety> (January 3, 2007).

<sup>30</sup>Rob Schneider’s open letter to the Hollywood community, “Defamer,” <http://defamer.gawker.com/191949/rob-schneider-takes-on-mel-gibson-to-plug-new-movie-in-variety> (January 3, 2007).

<sup>31</sup>The Polling Report (CNN Poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, August, 2-3, 2006) <http://www.pollingreport.com/hollywoo.htm> (January 3, 2007)

<sup>32</sup>Fox New/Opinion Dynamics Poll (Polls Conducted August 8-9 2006, [http://www.foxnews.com/projects/pdf/FOX\\_230\\_release\\_web.pdf](http://www.foxnews.com/projects/pdf/FOX_230_release_web.pdf) (January 3, 2007)

<sup>33</sup>Halford Ross Ryan, “*Kategoria* and *Apologia*: On their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 256-261.